

s22

From: Refugee Health <refugeehealth@foundationhouse.org.au>
Sent: Thursday, 29 August 2024 12:10 PM
To: Minister Butler
Cc: s 47F
Subject: Call for health triage and settlement coordination for recently arrived Palestinians
Attachments: VRHN Letter to Commonwealth Government_Palestinian Arrivals_290824.pdf

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Dear Hon. Mark Butler,

The Victorian Refugee Health Network (the Network) facilitates coordination, collaboration and policy advocacy to improve service health system access and responsiveness for all people of refugee backgrounds, including those seeking asylum.

We are writing to express our deep concern about the lack of an appropriate health triage and settlement coordination response to address the complex health needs of recently arrived Palestinians fleeing the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

It is with the Commonwealth Government's ongoing leadership and continued commitment to humanitarian and health issues that we request consideration of key concerns and proposed actions outlined in the letter attached.

We would be pleased to meet with you and provide further information and advice about these matters.

Yours sincerely,

Victorian Refugee Health Network (VRHN)

www.refugeehealthnetwork.org.au

Foundation House, (Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture)

Foundation House switch 03 9389 8900

e info@refugeehealthnetwork.org.au

a 4 Gardiner Street BRUNSWICK Vic 3056

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29 August 2024

The Hon. Tony Burke MP
Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs
Via email: tony.burke.mp@aph.gov.au

The Hon. Matt Thistlethwaite MP
Assistant Minister for Immigration
Via email: Matt.Thistlethwaite.MP@aph.gov.au

The Hon. Mark Butler MP
Minister for Health and Aged Care
Via email: minister.butler@health.gov.au

Dear Ministers,

Re: Health triage and settlement coordination for recently arrived Palestinians

We are writing to express our deep concern about the lack of an appropriate health triage and coordination response to address the complex health needs of recently arrived individuals and families fleeing the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. We call on the government to fund and establish interim health coordination roles and/or initiatives until a permanent visa pathway for this group is finalized.

The Victorian Refugee Health Network (the Network) enhances health service access and responsiveness for refugees and asylum seekers through coordination, collaboration, and policy advocacy. In recent years, the Network has taken a lead coordination role in Victoria to ensure that people arriving directly from conflict affected regions such as Kabul, Afghanistan (2021) and Ukraine (2022) are well supported by the Commonwealth and State health systems and services.

Consistent with this remit to address the needs of people fleeing humanitarian crises, over the past eight months the Network has convened a series of meetings with the refugee and asylum seeker health sector to coordinate a response. These forums have helped the sector to understand specific cultural contexts, presenting complex health needs, situational demands and mobilization of health and community organizations. A key priority need presented has been health triage and coordination support for recently arrived Palestinians.

Since October 2023, over 1,300 Palestinians have arrived in Australia on Visitor visas (subclass 600), with approximately 36% of this cohort arriving in Victoria¹. Individuals and families arriving in Victoria have presented with a range of complex health needs, and the health triage needs have been time critical, complex and crucial.

Health issues that this cohort are presenting with include but are not limited to:

- Infected shrapnel and other war related wounds
- Compound (open) fractures
- Acute malnutrition and nutritional deficiencies, especially in children
- Hepatitis A and other viral and bacterial infections
- Acute somatic symptoms due to trauma including insomnia, incontinence and pain, especially in children
- Chronic health conditions requiring immediate monitoring and medication including dialysis, epilepsy, cardiovascular diseases and type 1 and type 2 diabetes
- Complex health conditions across the lifespan including developmental delays, cognitive disability and geriatric conditions such as dementia.

¹ Department of Home Affairs, Settlement Data

The Network has significant concerns that the Visitor visas offered to people fleeing the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the Occupied Palestinian Territories are not fit for purpose; that is, the visa does not allow eligibility for essential health and humanitarian support that addresses the complex needs of this group.

We welcome the news that the Albanese Government is exploring permanent visa options for people who have arrived from Gaza, in recognition that return to Gaza is not feasible.

We ask that the Australian Government offer a visa pathway that provides access to the Humanitarian Settlement Program (HSP) and Medicare, both of which are strong enablers of responsive health triage and settlement coordination, as well as access to Special Benefits and work rights.

In the absence of formalized Commonwealth Government support, health triage and settlement coordination activities in Victoria are currently provided by unfunded community organizations, including a core group of pro-bono GPs from the Australian Islamic Medical Association (AIMA). Since November 2023, these GPs, along with the extended families of the recently arrived, have been volunteering to assist over 200 recent arrivals from Gaza. Their support includes coordinating a group of over 100 pro-bono GPs, linking new arrivals to primary care, advocating for those without access to support, and organizing community volunteers to provide transport for medical appointments. The Victorian Government continues to support free access to other healthcare in line with existing asylum seeker and refugee health access policies².

Ten months into this community response, this pro-bono model of support is well beyond its capacity. With the increase in numbers and the cumulative coordination of arrivals, the Network is increasingly concerned about the sustainability of this response and the risk of burn out for this group of GPs.

We recognize the importance of community-led organisations and initiatives in the current health response for recently arrived Palestinians; while formal support is crucial, connections to informal supports and established communities are equally vital for long-term recovery and belonging. However, the Network believes that addressing health needs of humanitarian evacuees requires adequate resourcing for health triage and coordination and cannot solely be reliant on supportive communities.

We strongly encourage the Department of Home Affairs to have stronger linkage and coordination to community organisations and the Department of Health to respond collaboratively to this community's needs. This could include funded positions either embedded in, or with strong direct linkage to, health and community-based services currently providing support. These roles would have responsibility for overseeing and coordinating referral into existing state-based health services.

We note that there are existing platforms at a Commonwealth level to address the health needs of priority populations, such as the Primary Health Network's (PHNs) Multicultural Health Access initiatives. **It is with the Commonwealth Government's ongoing leadership and continued commitment to humanitarian and health issues that we urge you to consider a formalized visa pathway for this cohort that allows eligibility to critical humanitarian settlement and health support.**

We are available to discuss these matters or to help facilitate a meeting with key agencies if required.

Yours Sincerely,

s47F

s47F

s47F

s 47F

Co-Chair
Victorian Refugee Health
Network

s 47F

Co-Chair
Victorian Refugee Health
Network

s 47F

Program Coordinator
Victorian Refugee Health
Network

² <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/populations/refugee-and-asylum-seeker-health-and-wellbeing#free-public-health-care-in-victoria-for-people-fleeing-the-israel-palestine-conflict>

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From: Minister Butler <Minister.Butler@Health.gov.au>

Sent: Friday, August 30, 2024 11:13 AM

To: Minister.Butler.Meetings <s47E(d)@Health.gov.au>

Subject: FW: Call for health triage and settlement coordination for recently arrived Palestinians [SEC=OFFICIAL]

For consideration (also sent to Ministers Burke and Thistlethwaite)

Sent to dept as an FYI

Thanks,
s47F

From: Refugee Health <refugeehealth@foundationhouse.org.au>

Sent: Thursday, August 29, 2024 12:10 PM

To: Minister Butler <Minister.Butler@Health.gov.au>

Cc: s 47F s47F s 47F s47F s 47F

s47F

Subject: Call for health triage and settlement coordination for recently arrived Palestinians

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Dear Hon. Mark Butler,

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It is with the Commonwealth Government's ongoing leadership and continued commitment to humanitarian and health issues that we request consideration of key concerns and proposed actions outlined in the letter attached.

We would be pleased to meet with you and provide further information and advice about these matters.

Yours sincerely,

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e info@refugeehealthnetwork.org.au

a 4 Gardiner Street BRUNSWICK Vic 3056

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From: [Minister.Butler.Meetings](#)
To: s 47F
Cc: s 47F; s 47F
Subject: RE: Call for health triage and settlement coordination for recently arrived Palestinians [SEC=OFFICIAL]
Date: Tuesday, 1 October 2024 11:25:03 AM
Attachments: [image003.png](#)
[image005.png](#)
[image006.png](#)

Dear s 47F

I have followed this up for you and been advised that your correspondence has been referred to the Department of Health and Aged Care for consideration and response. They will be in contact directly.

Kind regards,

s47F

s47F

Office Manager

& Executive Assistant to Nick Martin, Chief of Staff

Office of the Hon Mark Butler MP
Minister for Health and Aged Care

P: s 47F | M: s47F | E: s47F [@health.gov.au](mailto:s47F@health.gov.au)

Suite s47F | PO Box 6022

Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

From: s 47F s47F
Sent: Wednesday, September 25, 2024 11:04 AM
To: Minister.Butler.Meetings <s47E(d)@Health.gov.au>
Cc: s 47F s47F; s 47F s47F
Subject: RE: Call for health triage and settlement coordination for recently arrived Palestinians [SEC=OFFICIAL]

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Dear s47F

Thank you for your email and for forwarding this matter to the Department of Health and Aged Care Officials for response.

We have yet to hear a response from the Department so hoping to have some clarity on what a reasonable expectation for response time would be. Alternatively, if you are able to provide an appropriate contact point to discuss matters raised in our letter we are happy to follow up.

I look forward to your response.

Kind regards, s 47F

s 47F

Program Coordinator

Victorian Refugee Health Network (VRHN)

s47F

| Mobile: s47F

Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursdayvictorian refugee
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4 Gardiner Street, Brunswick, VIC 3056

foundationhouse.org.au

The Victorian Refugee Health Network acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging leaders.

**From:** s47E(d) <s47E(d)@Health.gov.au>**Sent:** Wednesday, 4 September 2024 3:24 PM**To:** Refugee Health <refugeehealth@foundationhouse.org.au>**Cc:** s 47F; s47F; s 47F; s47F; s47F; s47F**Subject:** FW: Call for health triage and settlement coordination for recently arrived Palestinians
[SEC=OFFICIAL]

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Good afternoon,

Thank you for your request to meet with Minister Butler.

Unfortunately we are unable to accommodate a meeting due to diary constraints. However I have sent your correspondence to Department of Health and Aged Care officials for reponse.

We appreciate your understanding and thank you for taking the time to make contact with the Minister's office.

Kind regards,

s47F

s47F

Office Manager

& Executive Assistant to Nick Martin, Chief of Staff

Office of the Hon Mark Butler MP

Minister for Health and Aged Care

P: 02 6277 7220 | M: s47F | E: s47F@health.gov.au

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Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

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