

Call to free vulnerable from offshore detention

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(Medical Xpress)—High rates of self-harm and mental distress among asylum seekers in long-term detention has renewed calls for the review of Australia's offshore processing.

There continues to be concerns about the impact of detention on vulnerable groups, including torture and trauma survivors, and those with mental disorders, according to a leading psychiatrist.

In a report published in the [Medical Journal of Australia](#), Professor Louise Newman, Director of the Centre for Developmental Psychiatry and Psychology at Monash University, said current bipartisan support for offshore processing served only to relocate relatively few [asylum seekers](#) in an act of deterrence.

"Research has shown high levels of mental disorder in detainee populations, as well as an association between length of time in detention and [mental deterioration](#)," Professor Newman said.

"Offshore processing is a high-risk strategy. What is deeply concerning is the potential for long-term detention in remote locations to lead to mental breakdown, as witnessed a decade ago in the first version of the Australian government's Pacific Solution policy.

"We should question the use of offshore processing and support mainland community-based processing of asylum claims and end prolonged detention."

Professor Newman said the medical profession had a key role in advocating for a humane response to asylum seekers.

"In situations where government policy is potentially damaging to people, or violates human rights, we have a responsibility to raise objections," Professor Newman said.

"Many clinicians are troubled by becoming observers of mental deterioration, or contemplating the harm caused by long-term detention in offshore settings such as Nauru.

"The implications for long-term adaptation and recovery for released asylum seekers are significant, and psychiatrists, [mental health professionals](#) and community refugee health services are now in the position of supporting individuals who have experienced both pre-migration trauma and the trauma of immigration detention."

Provided by Monash University

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