

Why is the Australian government detaining men in a hotel in Kangaroo Point?



There are about 110 men in the Kangaroo Point hotel at 721 Main Street. They come from a range of countries such as Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Sudan, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Burma and more. The majority have been found to be genuine refugees and owed protection; others are asylum seekers, some of them have not even had refugee assessments after seven years. They were processed under the law of Nauru or PNG where they were formerly detained.

The men have been transferred to Australia for complex medical reasons that health services on Nauru and PNG could not handle such as; diabetes, asthma, kidney and heart conditions. Many also have severe mental health problems brought on by previous trauma and six years of detention on Nauru and PNG. What treatment they are receiving in Australia for these conditions is very rudimentary. It is impossible to treat mental health problems in detention. In 2010 one of Australia's leading mental health experts, Professor Patrick McGorry, described Australia's immigration detention centres as "factories for producing mental illness and mental disorder."

The Australian government says it will not allow them to settle in Australia because they arrived by boat after 19 July 2013 and were sent offshore to Nauru or Manus Island (PNG). If found to be a refugee they are meant to find a third country to be settled in. The Australian government vows it will 'never' allow them to be settled in Australia. New Zealand has offered to settle 150 a year but Australia rejects this saying it will be a 'backdoor' into Australia. The only third country to take significant numbers is the USA. But even if the USA quota of 1250 refugees is ever filled, hundreds of refugees will be left living in limbo.

Once medical evacuees from PNG and Nauru are transferred to Australia legal action prevents them from being sent back. This is why the government has fought so hard to prevent medical transfers. In 2014 Hamid Khazaei died from septicemia after an immigration official overruled a doctor's recommendation that he be "urgently" evacuated to Australia. Kerryn Phelps' Medevac Bill supported by the Labor Party and the Greens for a short time put the decisions about medical evacuations into the hands of doctors, but the re-elected Morrison government immediately scrapped this bill in 2019.

Until about a year ago medical evacuees would have been allowed to live in the community in what they call 'community detention'. There are now about 1200 medical evacuees who once lived on Nauru or PNG living in Australia in 'community detention'. All the children who once lived on Nauru who didn't go to the USA are living in the community in 'community detention' with their families. One man being detained in the Kangaroo Point hotel who was on Nauru, has a wife and son living nearby in 'community detention'. They were medically evacuated from Nauru earlier.

People living in 'community detention' have no work rights, must live in a house provided by the government and are given a small allowance. If you have children, they are allowed to attend school but not tertiary institutions. There are plenty of problems with 'community detention' but it is better than closed detention in a hotel or a detention centre.

So why aren't these men in 'community detention'?

About a year ago, as the government aggressively campaigned to repeal the Medevac Bill, they stopped moving medical evacuees into 'community detention'. It was a vindictive policy by Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton to punish refugees. Instead of 'community detention' the medical evacuees were warehoused in hotels and detention centres across Australia. There are now about 200 being held - 110 in the Kangaroo Point hotel, 60 in the Mantra hotel in Melbourne and rest in detention centres, mostly in Brisbane and Melbourne.

Some have been detained in the Kangaroo Point hotel for a year or more. They used to be allowed visitors or to use the gym at the Brisbane detention centre but this stopped with the covid-19 crisis. Inside the hotel it is impossible to safely socially distance and over a thousand doctors signed a letter saying detainees should be released into the community.

Many people complain about being quarantined in a hotel for two weeks because of covid-19, imagine escaping persecution and war, being separated from families, being detained in offshore detention hellholes for six years and then in a hotel for a year or more and not knowing when this torture will end? Will they be detained for another seven years?

They should never have been sent to Manus and Nauru. The Refugee Action Collective is calling for their immediate release. Refugee lives matter.

Mark Gillespie for the Refugee Action Collective



To stay up to date with planned actions join the Refugee Action Collective mailing list at: www.rac-qld.org

Or like our facebook page 'Refugee Action Collective Queensland' and regularly check 'events'.

You can support the blockade of the hotel at www.letthemhug.com

Sign the petition opposing the government taking away their mobile phones at: https://www.change.org/o/national_justice_project_2

For more information call Mark on 0439561196 or email: rac.qld.events@gmail.com