



PALMER PROGRESS

DETENTION HEALTH SERVICES AND STRATEGY

Big steps have been taken to improve health services and the wellbeing of detainees at Australia's immigration detention facilities.



A Detention Health Advisory Group has been established to provide expert advice on detention health services. The group is made up of experts from psychiatry, psychology, public health, dentistry, nursing, general practice, refugee advocacy and the Ombudsman's office, which has observer status.

One of the biggest improvements has been in the way mental health care is provided, with mental health screening now provided for both new and existing detainees. All detainees who screen positive are referred to a multidisciplinary mental health team for diagnosis, the development of a specific mental health management plan and ongoing mental health care. Those who screen negative can be reassessed at their own request or at the request of the department or a relevant third party.

Under the newly-developed Detention Health Strategy, the provision of health and psychological services is to be removed from the existing detention facilities contracts, allowing the department to directly manage separate health services contracts for people in immigration detention. This arrangement will be in operation from October 2006.

The department has entered into a memorandum of understanding with the South Australian Department of Health that clarifies the roles, responsibilities and payment arrangements for the provision of health services for people in immigration detention in the state. Negotiations are currently being finalised with the Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australian governments to put in place similar agreements and arrangements. The aim is to have final arrangements in place with all states and territories by early 2007.

For more information go to www.immi.gov.au