



Australian Government
Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs

SECRETARY

9 November 2006

Prof. John McMillan
Immigration Ombudsman
GPO Box 442
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Prof. McMillan

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your draft report into the *Referred Immigration Cases: Mental Health and Incapacity*. I have taken careful notice of the matters you raise, and I agree with your recommendations. My response to the recommendations is attached.

Your report reinforces the importance of my department continuing in its extensive process of reform and addresses the challenges my department faces when dealing with clients who are experiencing a mental illness. Your report is a reminder of the importance of sensitively accommodating clients with mental health needs.

My department's commitment to improving its management of the health needs of clients who come to the attention of the department, and those clients held in immigration detention, is reflected in initiatives such as:

- enhanced College of Immigration training for staff in the identification and management of clients with mental health problems
- the establishment of the Detention Health Branch and an independent expert *Detention Health Advisory Group* to monitor and ensure proper standards of health care for DIMA clients, upon which your office has representation
- the establishment of an enhanced mental health service, an integrated mental health screening model and the adoption of standardised mental health screening tools in Immigration Detention Facilities
- the development of a new integrated client information system - *Systems for People* - to ensure that officers can readily access comprehensive guidance and reliable information about clients' identity and immigration status to make accurate decisions
- the development of processes for referral of clients by DIMA to other health providers
- the development of Memoranda of Understanding between DIMA and State/Territory based health departments for the provision of specified health services.

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6 Chan Street Belconnen ACT 2617

PO Box 25 BELCONNEN ACT 2616 • Telephone (02) 6264 1111 • Facsimile (02) 6264 4466 • Website: www.immi.gov.au

I am also aware of the circumstances in which clients with mental health needs are sometimes referred to my department. Consequently DIMA has been actively engaging State, Territory and Federal Police to develop closer working relationships, especially in relation to compliance activities. Information support is also being made available to police to assist them in the appropriate referral of persons they encounter who may possibly be unlawful non-citizens.

As I have expressed to you before, my department has laid solid foundations for change to ensure that our clients continue to be dealt with fairly, reasonably and respectfully, whatever their needs may be. Your report provides further impetus and direction for me and my colleagues to continue building on those foundations to achieve positive outcomes for our clients.

Yours sincerely

Signed by Andrew Metcalfe

(Andrew Metcalfe)