

# People seeking asylum – 'Final departure' Bridging E Visa



Information sheet – October 2017

For health and other service providers, including GPs, nurses, community health and hospital services

## Department of Immigration and Border Protection announcements

The Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection have decided to issue people who have been transferred to Australia from Nauru and Papua New Guinea (PNG) for medical care, including psychiatric care, and who have been living in community detention, with a ['final departure' Bridging E Visa](#)<sup>1</sup>. As of 29 August 2017 approximately 70 people had been notified that they would be issued with a 'final departure' Bridging E Visa.

These measures may affect a larger cohort of around 400 people nationally, including children and families<sup>2</sup>. In Victoria, there were 193 adults and children in Community Detention at the end of June 2017, and our understanding is that most have been transferred from Nauru or PNG for medical and/or psychiatric care. The Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection has advised that people in these circumstances may be granted this 'final departure' Bridging E Visa and 'are required to make arrangements to depart Australia' once their medical treatment has been completed<sup>3</sup>. The BVE allows people to live lawfully in the community. Under Australian laws these visas do not require the visa holder to leave Australia at the end of the visa period<sup>4</sup>. See [Refugee Legal Fact Sheet](#) for more information.

This 6-month visa will entail immediate cessation of income support payments, and withdrawal of housing and Status Resolution Support Services (SRSS) after three weeks. This visa carries work rights, Medicare access and education access for children. The Australian Government Department of Human Services does not issue health care cards for people on a Bridging E visa, even if they have no income.

## Impact on people affected by these announcements

The changes to welfare and support arrangements place people at risk of destitution, homelessness, and being unable to pay for medical care that is not covered by Medicare, including pharmaceuticals and other health related costs such as pathology and radiology.

There is the potential for adverse mental health impacts for people affected by the measure.

## Current response in Victoria

The Victorian Government has announced a package of support<sup>5</sup>, including:

- A Housing Fund to cover accommodation costs, and where possible, keep people in their current accommodation
- Funding to cover necessities such as food, clothes, myki cards and medicines
- Case workers for those who need additional support, and where possible, maintain existing relationships with case workers and community organisations.

<sup>1</sup> Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2017, 'Information about the final departure Bridging E Visa', [http://refugeelegal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Fact\\_sheet\\_-\\_Final\\_departure\\_Bridging\\_Visa\\_E-1.pdf](http://refugeelegal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Fact_sheet_-_Final_departure_Bridging_Visa_E-1.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR 2017, 'Statement by United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Regional Representation in Canberra', <http://www.unhcr.org/en-au/news/press/2017/8/59a558104/australia-coerce-vulnerable-people-return-harm.html>

<sup>3</sup> Department of Immigration and Border Protection, 2017, 'Information about the final departure Bridging E Visa', [http://refugeelegal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Fact\\_sheet\\_-\\_Final\\_departure\\_Bridging\\_Visa\\_E-1.pdf](http://refugeelegal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Fact_sheet_-_Final_departure_Bridging_Visa_E-1.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Refugee Legal, 2017, 'Important information about changes for asylum seekers and refugees transferred to Australia from Nauru and PNG', <http://refugeelegal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/RL-Fact-Sheet-Departure-BV-E-grants-for-RPC-clients.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Victorian Government, 2017, 'We won't let them starve: support for asylum seekers', <http://www.premier.vic.gov.au/we-wont-let-them-starve-support-for-asylum-seekers/>

Victorian SRSS providers (Red Cross, AMES Australia and Life Without Barriers) and other service providers have been making contact with their clients to check on their welfare and determine their immediate and ongoing needs.

Victorian health services, including Monash Health, Asylum Seeker Resource Centre, Cabrini Asylum Seeker and Refugee Health Hub, Royal Children's Hospital, cohealth, EACH and Your Community Health will continue to see these clients for medical services. People seeking asylum have fee free access to Victorian Government funded health services as outlined in the [Guide to asylum seeker access to health and community services in Victoria](#)<sup>6</sup>. The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (Foundation House) will continue to see people for torture and trauma counselling.

## Key messages for supporting your clients

### Ensure your clients have legal representation and that they been in recent contact with their lawyer.

- Identify vulnerability and risk for affected clients.
- Facilitate referrals to:
  - Legal
    - [Refugee Legal](http://refugeelegal.org.au/) <http://refugeelegal.org.au/>
    - [Asylum Seeker Resource Centre](https://www.asrc.org.au/home/our-services/how-we-help/justice/human-rights-law-program/) <https://www.asrc.org.au/home/our-services/how-we-help/justice/human-rights-law-program/>
  - [Housing](#)
  - [Material aid](#)
  - [Community health services](#)
  - [GP services](#)
  - [Counselling and mental health services](#)
- Ensure that front of house and other staff in Victorian public health services are aware of the Department of Health and Human Services [Guide to asylum seeker access to health and community services in Victoria](#). This includes access to full medical care in public hospitals, ambulance services in emergency situations, fee waivers and priority access in community health services and public dental services and a range of other entitlements.
- Contact IHMS providers for [discharge summaries and health information](#) for clients who are new to your service. IHMS Community Detention Assistance Desk (CDAD) is also available 24 hours a day 1800 689 295.
- Consider affordability of pharmaceuticals, pathology and radiology. Refer to [services with pharmacy access](#) for registered clients.

The concerns for this group is the focus of this information sheet, and has received substantial media coverage, however it is important to note that there are many people seeking asylum in Victoria who have now been living with uncertainty on bridging visas with limited entitlements for several years. As at March 2017 there were 9616 people living on Bridging Visas who arrived without a valid visa<sup>7</sup>.

## Other Resources

Key health services: <http://refugeehealthnetwork.org.au/refer/asylum-seeker/>

Quicklinks for supporting people seeking asylum: <http://refugeehealthnetwork.org.au/learn/asylum-seekers/>

The Victorian Refugee Health Network is monitoring the impacts of policy changes on the health of people seeking asylum and health service systems. If you have case studies you would like to share to help inform our work please contact Samantha Furneaux on 03 9389 8915 or [furneaux@foundationhouse.org.au](mailto:furneaux@foundationhouse.org.au).

**Disclaimer:** This information has been compiled by the Victorian Refugee Health Network for health and other service providers working with people who are affected by the 'Final Departure' Bridging E Visa based on information from the Victorian Department of Health & Human Services and the Australian Government Department of Immigration and Border Protection. Every effort has been made to confirm the accuracy of the information (October 2017). Please contact [info@refugeehealthnetwork.org.au](mailto:info@refugeehealthnetwork.org.au) or the Victorian Refugee Health Network, 03 9388 0022 if any amendments are required.

<sup>6</sup> Victorian Government Department of Health and Human Services, 2011, 'Guide to asylum seeker access to health and community services in Victoria', <https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/about/populations/refugee-asylum-seeker-health>

<sup>7</sup> Australian Border Force, 2017, 'Illegal Maritime Arrivals on Bridging Visa E', <https://www.border.gov.au/ReportsandPublications/Documents/statistics/ima-bve-mar-17.pdf>