

Victorian Government package for people seeking asylum

December 2017

Recent policy changes

The Commonwealth Government recently announced that some people who were transferred to Community Detention arrangements on mainland Australia from Nauru and Manus Island for medical treatment will no longer be eligible for Commonwealth-funded income support, accommodation, casework support, and torture and trauma counselling.

This may affect up to 400 people nationally, including up to approximately 150 people who currently reside in Victoria. This policy has already come into effect and has impacted a small number of people so far. They have been issued with a six month Bridging Visa E, that carries work rights, Medicare access and early childhood education centre or school access for children under 18 years old. There is no access to living allowance on this visa which could put people at risk of homelessness and destitution with limited ability to meet their basic humanitarian needs.

Urgent Victorian support package

In light of these policy changes, the Victorian Premier recently [announced](#) a \$600,000 Package of Urgent Support for this group, including:

- A Housing Fund to cover accommodation costs, including utilities
- Funding to cover costs of basic humanitarian needs such as food, medications, public transport, schooling costs for children, and other material aid
- Some additional support for direct service delivery for those who need it.

The purpose of this funding package is to support the humanitarian needs of people seeking asylum, who are currently residing here in Victoria to promote continuity of current supports and promote independence within the community. This funding package is until 30 June 2018.

How services will be provided

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is the Victorian Government agency administering the funding, with support and contributions from Department of Premier and Cabinet, and Department of Education and Training. A working group of collaborating agencies has been established to meet the needs of this group of people.

Red Cross has entered into a contractual agreement with the DHHS on behalf of this working group, to distribute and monitor use of funds to most effectively address basic humanitarian needs.

The humanitarian needs that the working group will seek to collectively address include housing, pharmacy, schooling, transport, food, casework support and basic material aid. The level of assistance required will vary across clients depending on their family composition, their health and medical needs, and their access to community resources.

In general, Red Cross, AMES Australia or the Asylum Seeker Resource Centre will take on a primary casework role to address basic needs, while Baptcare, Uniting Lentara and Brigidine Asylum Seekers' Project will provide housing support. Life Without Barriers will also be participating in the working group to ensure a smooth transition from previous supports.

Where children are attending early childhood education centres or schools, humanitarian casework services will include liaising with the centres and schools to facilitate the best education outcomes.

The general support approach of the working group will be in the best interest of clients. All agencies are contributing time and other resources in kind to ensure these funds can have greatest impact.

Broader health and wellbeing will continue to be supported through Medicare and through existing [state access policies and fee waivers](#) for people seeking asylum using health and human services in Victoria.

While this package supports a specific cohort of clients, it is important to note that there are a significant number of other people in Victoria currently seeking asylum on Bridging Visas with variable eligibility for work rights and Medicare. Identifying clients and correctly applying eligibility policies and fee waivers will be critical to ensure equitable access to health and human services.

The Victorian Government will continue working with the asylum seeker support sector and funded service partners to facilitate access to state-funded services for people seeking asylum in Victoria.

Useful resources

- Victorian Refugee Health Network: [Information Sheet](#) on 'Final departure' Bridging E Visa
- Department of Immigration and Border Protection: [Information about the final departure Bridging Visa E](#)
- Refugee Legal: [Fact Sheet](#) on final departure Bridging Visa E

For further information or support

If you are concerned about someone who has become ineligible for income support or may become ineligible in future, please contact their caseworker through general enquiries at:

Red Cross

North Melbourne – 03 8346 8334

Dandenong – 03 8327 7370

Shepparton – 03 5835 6719

Asylum Seeker Resource Centre

03 9326 6066

AMES

13 26 37

Life Without Barriers

Epping – 03 8405 4400

Dandenong – 03 8752 8500

Sunshine – 03 9313 2400

If you would like more information about eligibility entitlements, the state government support package, or would like to contribute to the sector response you can contact any of the following:

Red Cross Victoria

Kim van den Nouwelant, Migrant Support Program Manager, Red Cross, 8327 7700 or kvandenNouwelant@redcross.org.au

Victorian Refugee Health Network

Philippa Duell-Piening, Coordinator, Victorian Refugee Health Network, 03 9389 8909 or duell-pieningp@foundationhouse.org.au

Victorian State Government

For any enquiries about State Government services including health, human services, education and other supports, please contact the Department of Health and Human Services in the first instance. Any requests regarding education or early childhood supports will be forwarded on to the Department of Education and Training.

Department of Health and Human Services

Crystal Russell, Senior Policy Adviser, Diversity Unit, Department of Health and Human Services, 03 9096 1009 or crystal.russell@dhhs.vic.gov.au