

Seeking Asylum in Australia: Mental Health and the Policy Landscape

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Components of Australia's Humanitarian Program

- Offshore relates to refugees who are accepted to live in Australia after being referred by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees or sponsored by refugees living in Australia.
- Onshore relates to people who arrive by plane or boat, and then claim asylum.

Policies imposed on people seeking asylum who arrive by boat

Mandatory detention

- Enshrined in law since 1992.
- Onshore and offshore sites.
- We know the mental health impacts of long term and indefinite detention and yet it continues (eg Bosworth et al 2016; Coffey et al 2010).



The long road leading to the Curtin Immigration Detention Centre

Photo: Caroline Fleay

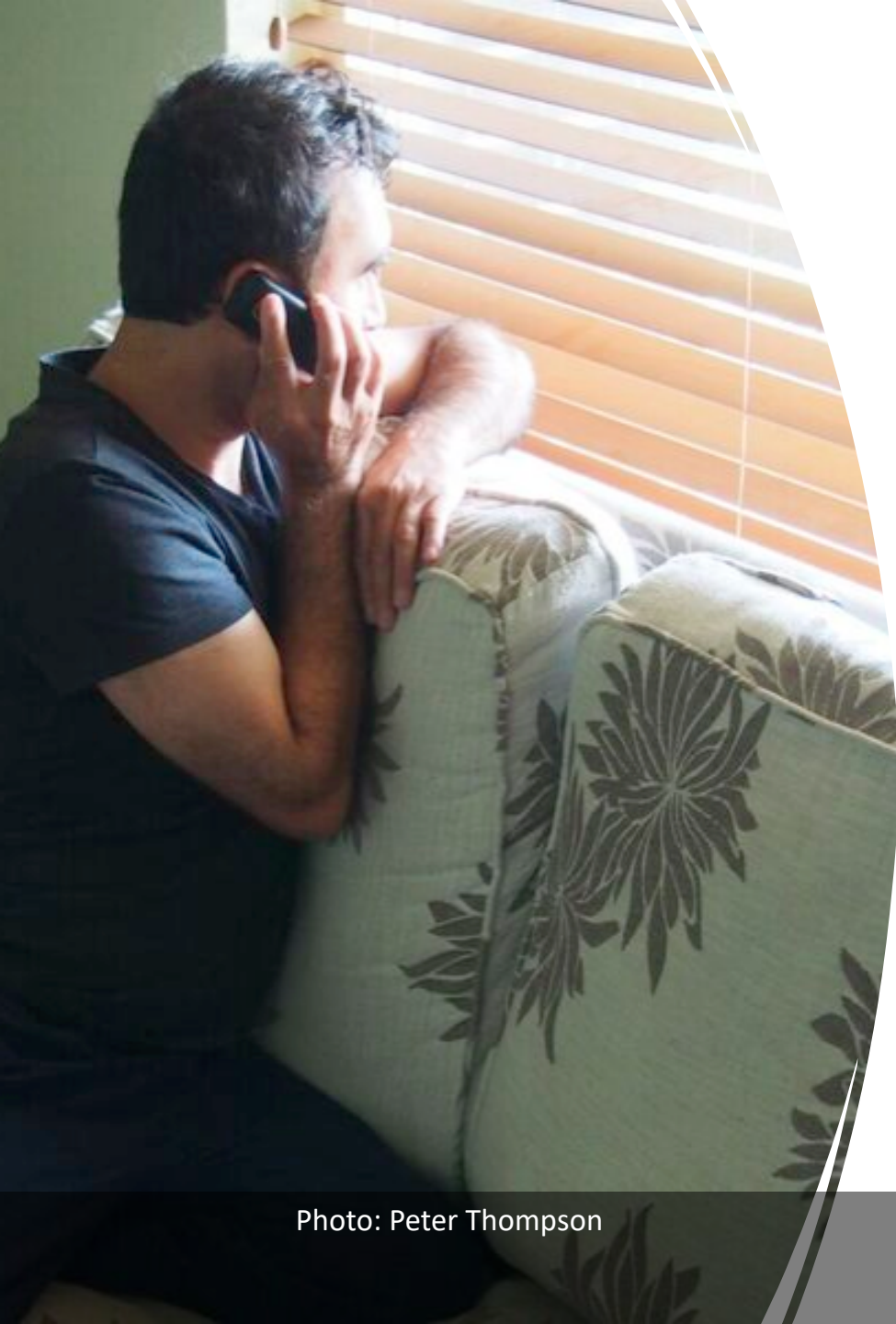


Photo: Peter Thompson

Policies imposed on people seeking asylum who arrive by boat

Temporary Visas

- 30,000 people in community waited years on a bridging visa for refugee claim to be finalised.
- Those recognised as refugees only granted a temporary protection visa.
- We know the mental health impacts of living on a temporary visa for years (Kenny et al 2022; Newnham et al 2019).
- Many live without their family.

A small green seedling with several leaves is growing out of a crack in a dark, textured surface, possibly asphalt or concrete. The background is a light, hazy gradient.

Living without your family


Being forced to remain on a temporary protection visa means living without your family. The emotional and psychological side of this story is not often shed light upon...

The past decade-long separation from our families has pushed us into a corner with unimaginable mental trauma, pain, and guilt. We feel responsible for our families who are stuck in war-torn countries. Yet, we cannot do anything to help them or get them to safety. We cannot even apply to get our partner and children to join us in Australia. Some people end up harming themselves out of sheer desperation, with the belief that this is the only way to put an end to this mental torture.

(Salem Askari in Askari & Fleay 2023)




Some good news


- Australian Government announced in February that all refugees on a temporary protection visa would be granted a permanent visa.
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But...

- Processing is slow.
 - Family reunion process remains complex, expensive, narrowly defined and lengthy.
 - After a decade or more, thousands still remain without any pathway to permanency.
 - Includes people who went through the unfair “fast track” protection process.
 - And people who were or remain in Nauru and Papua New Guinea.
 - And people who arrived by plane years ago waiting for their protection claim to be finalised.
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What needs to happen

- Refugees on permanent visas need to be able to reunite with their families as soon as possible. Family reunion processes need an urgent overhaul to be streamlined, inclusive, affordable and timely.
 - All people seeking asylum subjected to the “Fast Track” protection process, those who were or remain in Nauru and Papua New Guinea, and those who arrived by plane years ago, all need to access a meaningful pathway to permanency in Australia.
 - End mandatory detention.
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