

MEDIA RELEASE

AMA supports NT Paediatricians and their Healthcare Concerns

The AMA wishes to express support for the letter written by 45 paediatric doctors in the NT calling for safe medical care for children in detention.

These paediatricians, experts in the health and wellbeing of children, wrote to the Chief Minister earlier this week with concerns around the care children are receiving in detention. Specifically, they have called for:

1. A reinstatement of the ban on spit hoods, putting us back in line with every other State and Territory in Australia;
2. Ensure early neurodevelopmental assessment and appropriate access to health and education in detention; and
3. Prioritising therapeutic, community-based, diversionary alternatives

In Question Time this week, the Chief Minister responded to the Member for Nightcliff by telling these paediatricians that they "wasted their time writing to her" and that they should "look after sick children".

AMA NT President Dr. John Zorbas said "Chief Minister, this is what looking after sick children looks like. These paediatricians reached out to you with serious concerns they had around the health and wellbeing of Territory children. They did not cancel clinics to write this letter; they gave up their precious and very limited free time. They need to be taken seriously if the Government wants to provide quality healthcare to children in the NT."

The Northern Territory is objectively the hardest place in Australia to be a paediatrician. We have the highest rates of diseases of disadvantage such as chronic ear infections, respiratory problems, anaemia, malnutrition and skin infections. We have the highest rates of complex births with preterm births as high as 20% in some areas of the NT. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders are up to twenty times more likely to die from rheumatic heart disease, a preventable condition that begins with infection in childhood.

On the issue of spit hoods, they have been proven to not reduce transmission of infectious disease and are more likely to cause asphyxiation, seizures, death and long-standing psychiatric trauma. They do not reduce crime.

On the issue of occupational violence, we wholeheartedly agree that nobody in the Northern Territory should be subject to assault at work, or in any setting. However, spit hoods have not prevented this anywhere in Australia and are not routinely used in any other industry or setting.

Minister, you also said your job is to "run the Northern Territory" and that paediatric wait times are too long. In that spirit, we ask that you support our paediatricians by:

1. Addressing the healthcare concerns they have raised with you;
2. Fixing the \$400m systemic underfunding of the NT health system, which is the direct result of Federal underfunding and a lack of effective, local, long-term strategy;
3. Supporting and resourcing the recruitment and retention of a sustainable and adequately skilled medical workforce in the NT;
4. Supporting our paediatric service in providing viable outreach services to a vast regional and remote service area; and
5. Reducing bureaucratic barriers and red-tape around the delivery of paediatric care in the NT by meeting with front-line clinical staff and enabling front-line solutions.

Territory children deserve the best medical care in Australia. We will not achieve this by ignoring the concerns of our paediatric doctors.

Media Contact:

Fiona Crombie

0419 827 350

fcrombie@amant.com.au