

#WeCanDoBetter

A guide for discussing refugees and people seeking asylum with your MP

You've scheduled a meeting with your local federal MP about the way Australia is treating people seeking asylum. Below are a few tips on what you should talk about in the meeting and some of the specific areas where change is needed.

What should you say?

- Speak about what concerns you about the current situation.
- Tell a brief story from your life that demonstrates why you care about people seeking asylum. This could be a time you met someone with lived experience, saw a film or read an article. Or you could talk about a value that you uphold in your life that relates to this issue - for example: justice, opportunity, welcome, kindness, hospitality.
- Speak about how you'd prefer things to be different - what are the tangible changes you'd like the government to make?
- Speak about some of the key areas for change. To make the most out of your meetings, it's best to focus on issues that will have the most impact and are most achievable. The issues below have been identified by people seeking asylum as key areas of concern for them.

Key issues

A fairer process for people seeking asylum

- The current 'fast-track' process for assessing people's claims for protection deliberately discriminates against people who came to Australia by boat. It's created a complex system that's incredibly difficult for people seeking asylum in the community to navigate.
- Since 2014, people who arrive by boat and don't have a valid visa have no right to meaningful, independent review of their case. This means these people have a limited right of appeal and no opportunity for a second interview – including the chance to introduce new evidence or information about their case or why they face danger if they returned to their home country.
- Other challenges for this group and others who apply for protection in Australia include short timeframes and arbitrary deadlines for people to fill out long and complex application forms as well as catastrophic legal funding cuts, limiting people's access to essential legal advice and support.
- As a result of this process, many more people seeking asylum are being denied protection and face a greater risk of being sent back to danger.
- In addition, a number of people waiting in the community for their claim to be processed have recently had their key support services partially or completely cut, leaving individuals and families at risk of homelessness and destitution. The Status Resolution Support Service (SRSS) provides modest financial assistance, access to trauma and torture counselling and casework support to people seeking asylum. Partial and full cuts to access to these support services have left people unable to pay for housing, health care and food.
- There are currently over 15,000 people, including children, in the community waiting for their claims to be processed under 'fast track' or having the outcome for their claim reviewed. There are also others, who arrived by other means who are seeking safety here and are affected by these harsh policies.

#WeCanDoBetter by:

- Repealing the fast track process and restoring a fair and transparent Refugee Status Determination process for all people seeking asylum, with full access to an independent review by the Refugee Review Tribunal (RRT).

- Restoring government funding to provide access to legal assistance for all people seeking asylum. This will improve the timeliness and quality of the application and review process.
- Ensuring that all people seeking asylum have access to a decent level of income support, adequate health care, opportunity to study and work rights - regardless of how they arrived.

Permanent rather than temporary protection

- After August 2012, all people seeking asylum who arrived to Australia by boat were placed on Bridging Visas and, ever since, have gradually had their claims assessed. Even if found to be refugees, these people were told they'd never receive permanent protection in Australia.
- Those found to be refugees were placed on Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) for 3 years or Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEV) for 5 years. Under the current system, they must reapply for their visas every 3 or 5 years for the rest of their lives.
- Those on a TPV or SHEV live in a state of limbo – they don't have the same access to family reunion, services, support, education and employment as those with a Permanent Protection Visa.
- There's widespread awareness of the great harm caused by temporary protection visas:
 - Those on temporary visas are denied the right to re-unite with their families. Some have partners and children who they've not seen in years or parents who remain in danger in their home country.
 - Despite being found to be genuine refugees, these people must go through the process of reapplying again and again – leaving them in an indefinite state of limbo. Each time their temporary visa expires, they must prove their claim for protection or face the possibility of rejection and deportation back to the country they fled.
 - It's impossible for people to heal, begin to rebuild their lives and contribute to society when they don't have permanent safety and their futures are so uncertain. They're unable to find reliable work, start businesses, study or become part of a community or have their children settle into school and plan for their futures.
 - As a result of this, people on temporary protection visas suffer higher rates of mental illness and experience higher levels of stress, anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder than those with permanent protection.

#WeCanDoBetter by:

- Abolishing Temporary Protection and Safe Haven Enterprise Visas and re-introducing permanent protection. Only this will provide the stability and security people need to heal, settle safely and rebuild their lives here.

A larger and more responsive humanitarian refugee program

- At the end of 2017, there were 65.6 million forcibly displaced people worldwide, including 22.5 million refugees. Many just want to return to their homes but, due to well-founded fears of persecution, some are unable to do so.
- Australia has a very well regarded refugee settlement program and, because of our relative isolation, receives far fewer people seeking asylum on our shores than other countries.
- As a wealthy and compassionate nation we can afford to be more generous and expand our humanitarian program as part of our contribution to this global need and in response to the global refugee crisis.

#WeCanDoBetter by:

- Significantly increasing the Refugee and Humanitarian Program (RHP) in size, initially to 20,000 places annually and then progressively to 27-30,000 places.
- Enhancing public support of and participation in the Refugee Program by creating new means of private sponsorship, including via broad-based community networks. This would enable the community to contribute directly to an expanded humanitarian intake.
- Establishing an emergency response quota to provide additional capacity to respond to urgent humanitarian crises such as those in Syria, and Myanmar (for the Rohingya refugees).

We also ask that leaders proactively look at safe solutions for people seeking asylum detained on Manus Island and Nauru, and develop a meaningful plan for this as soon as possible.