Addressing the issue of Suicide in the Immigration Detention Network

- new Ombudsman report reveals more needs to be done -

Australia, Tuesday 21 May 2013: Suicide Prevention Australia welcomes the Commonwealth and Immigration Ombudsman’s Report released today entitled: Suicide and Self-harm in the Immigration Detention Network.

4 of the 11 deaths that occurred within immigration detention were suicides. Two deaths were due to natural causes while the remaining causes of death have yet to be determined.

The report found that the closed detention environment, overcrowding and length of detention were potential contributors to these tragic deaths.

Dr Michael Dudley, Suicide Prevention Australia’s board co-chair said, “There is clear evidence that indicates that immigration detention in a closed environment for any longer than six months has a significant, negative impact on mental health and this was reflected by the increase in self harm that was recorded in line with a steady increase in length of detention.”

Suicide Prevention Australia calls on the Government to modify current policy and practice and only detain individuals for the minimum time required to conduct health, security and identity checks.

It is disappointing to hear that the department did not draw fully on the lessons gained when there were many incidences of self-harm in immigration detention in the early 2000s.

Back then, SPA recommended that the Department should ensure that refugee claims are processed as quickly as possible, with provision of access to appropriate supports and services (interpreters, translators and legal advice).

Disappointingly, the report shows that we still do not have a clear picture of the incidence of self-harm (including potential suicide attempts) among those in detention.

“Accurate data is needed to underpin all suicide prevention efforts including those in immigration detention centres,” said Dr Dudley.

Suicide Prevention Australia is organising a gathering of health professionals and community-minded people to address critical issues such as suicide in immigration detention networks and others issues facing suicide prevention at its National Conference for Suicide Prevention in Melbourne 24 July 2013.

“Our role as the peak body in suicide prevention is to bring together all the core groups so we can work together to reach a 50 percent reduction in suicide by 2023 for all communities,” said Sue Murray.

The Commonwealth Ombudsman Report can be viewed here.

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About Suicide Prevention Australia (SPA):
SPA is the peak body for the suicide prevention sector in Australia. SPA works collaboratively to develop a community that knows how to ask for help and how to give help. As the lead agency of the National Suicide Prevention Coalition, we build and facilitate partnerships to reduce the stigma around mental illness and suicide, and to assist the healing for people with lived experience of suicide attempts and suicide.