



NEWSLETTER October 2020

Dear Grandmothers and Frogs,

This is Budget Week 2020-21 in a pandemic-induced recession so, friends, **we have to talk about money.**

Specifically, we are talking in this edition about the Federal Government **saving \$\$ by evicting hundreds of people** including children from community detention with no income support. Please read our detailed coverage and respond to our urgent CALL TO ACTION.

Also...the **'mobile phones Bill'** has been effectively defeated. See what Sen Jacqui Lambie has said about her decision to protect this critical lifeline for refugees in detention.

Electorate groups frustrated by the 'tin ear' of MPs to Grandmothers' repeated appeals for #justiceforrefugees are now turning to **influence the influencers.**

As a movement, we are backing a **campaign for a Charter of Human Rights.**

And... we introduce **the new Coordinating Committee** which has had its first meeting by Zoom.

As ever, we're interested in your feedback and any news from the grassroots which can be sent to info@grandmothersforrefugees.org.



BREAKING NEWS

Victoria bracing for evictions from community detention

The lifting of Covid-19 lockdown restrictions in metro Melbourne is expected to trigger a wave of evictions of people living in long-term community detention.

Over the past month, hundreds of people who have spent years in community detention in NSW, SA and QLD have been given 2-3 weeks' notice to 'get out of the house' and fend for themselves.

These people have been denied rights to work or study while in community detention. Now, without any opportunity to make themselves job-ready, and when unemployment is at a recession-built high, they are being told to find a job. At the same time, their subsistence payments from Centrelink are being cut.

There has been no announcement by Home Affairs about the purpose or timetable for evicting people into destitution during a global pandemic and a recession.

This report from Asylum Seekers Centre NSW:

Asylum Seekers Centre

People seeking asylum evicted by Home Affairs without support 2 Oct, 2020

More than 500 refugees and people seeking protection who have been living in community detention (also known as 'residence determination') have been evicted by the Department of Home Affairs without any support during a pandemic and a recession. (continued on next page)

Visit our website today www.grandmothersforrefugees.org

(continued from p1)

The **Asylum Seekers Centre (ASC), the House of Welcome, and Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) Australia** have been approached for assistance by an increasing number of people, including those with young families and people over the age of 80, who have been notified that they will be released from community detention without transitional support.

We applaud the release of refugees and people seeking asylum from community detention and the giving them the right to work. However, to do so without financial or transition support is cruel and will lead to poverty and homelessness.

There will be no option for people but to rely on the community and the charity sector for support, as they will have nowhere to live and no savings to fall back on. It is not possible to save for a bond in community detention. In NSW people on temporary visas are ineligible for longer term public housing and have little chance of securing short-term emergency accommodation.



All of the targeted people are in Australia having been transferred for medical assistance from offshore detention in PNG and Nauru. They have been given three weeks' notice to leave their homes at which time the small amount of financial support previously provided by the Federal Government will be stopped.

While in community detention, people are not permitted to work, access further education, or engage with the job market. Subsequently, on release, their likelihood of getting work is extremely low, particularly in the context of double-digit unemployment, no Australian work experience, language barriers, existing medical and mental health conditions, and no preparation to apply for jobs.

The more than 500 are predominantly from Iran, Iraq, Somalia or are stateless refugees from Myanmar. They sought refuge in Australia from persecution and many are still suffering from significant health issues, trauma and poor mental health. Amongst the group there are people being treated for cancer, chronic disease and heart conditions. Many are receiving psychiatric treatment.



Because people seeking asylum and living in our community are not eligible for the Federal Government's JobSeeker, JobKeeper or government support package during the COVID-19 pandemic, they must rely on charity.

WHAT CAN YOU DO? Grandmothers can contribute practical support through offers of accommodation under the @HomeSafeWithUs initiative IF and WHEN the evictions start in Victoria.



We do not fundraise or have the capacity to provide direct assistance to refugees and people seeking asylum. However, Grandmothers works closely with Sr Brigid Arthur the Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project. Any gifts to BASP are tax deductible and well distributed. Visit www.basp.org.au



Refugee Council
of Australia

24 September 2020

State Premiers warned to prepare to support 500 refugees being abandoned by Federal Government

The Refugee Council of Australia (RCOA) has written to all State Premiers on this sector-wide concern.

RCOA has also produced a **fact sheet explainer** about REMOVAL OF FEDERAL SUPPORT FROM REFUGEES MEDICALLY TRANSFERRED TO AUSTRALIA: WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED SO FAR. You can read or download the sample letter with the two-page Explainer for useful background information on this critical issue. Go to: <https://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/NSW-Premier-FDBV-20200923.pdf>

CALL TO ACTION>>> Please write to your Premier and ask them to raise this matter with the PM and State and Territory colleagues at the next National Cabinet meeting.

- Why is the Federal Government passing off this obligation to State governments, communities and charities during a pandemic?
- How are the Covid-19 infection risks being impacted by increasing the numbers of homeless and destitute people during a pandemic?
- As a viable alternative, will the Federal Government give permanent protection visas to the 30,000 refugees and people seeking asylum in Australia, to help economic recovery and compensate in part for the economic loss forecast due to the collapse in population growth caused by global pandemic travel restrictions?

CALL TO ACTION>>> Please make sure your Federal MP knows about this critical issue. In seeking information on the Federal Budget, you might well ask....

- What is the Home Affairs Budget for 2020-21, and what is the allocation for immigration detention contracts and services?
- What savings have been identified through reducing costs of community detention?
- What savings have been identified through cuts to Centrelink payments to people in community detention?
- Do you believe these savings justify casting thousands of people and families with children into destitution?

Remember to request that your concerns be sent also to Home Affairs Minister, Peter Dutton.

The People Win: Senator Jacqui Lambie announced last Friday that she'll be voting against depriving immigration detainees of contact with the outside world.

Set to be voted down in the Senate this week, the [Migration Amendment \(Prohibiting Items in Immigration Detention Facilities\) Bill 2020](#) was all about removing mobile phones from those in immigration detention, as well as expanding the search and seizure powers of officers. Read more: <https://www.sydneycriminallawyers.com.au/blog/the-people-win-dutton-wont-be-removing-refugee-detainees-phones/>

Visit our website today www.grandmothersforrefugees.org

Meet our new Coordinating Committee

Members are encouraged to contact their Coordinators / CC representative to connect with others in your electorate. (Contact us at info@grandmothersforrefugees.org to get an email address for your Coordinator). Don't be shy! Get involved as we increase local activities and emerge from post-Covid lockdown.

Electorate Rep

Bendigo



Di O'Neil

Electorate Rep

Flinders

Marg Darcy

Jaga Jaga



**Meg L'Estrange
Gillian Essex (Alt)**

Electorate Rep

Goldstein

**Hani Vodstrcil
Linda Sparrow (Alt)**

Higgins

Sue Cranage

Maribyrnong

**Marie Dobson
Pauline Haag (Alt)**

Casey



Virginia Schneiders

Kooyong



**Mary Williams
Jenni King (Alt)**

Melbourne



Clare Forbes

Cooper



**Janet Taylor
Fran McCabe (Alt)**

La Trobe

Gwyneth Jones

Macnamara

Maila Stivens

Wannon

Rosalind Byass

Wills



Helen Hill

UPCOMING EVENTS

>>>Friday Film Night
THIS FRIDAY 9 OCTOBER 7pm
FREE EVENT

<https://amnestyau.zoom.us/j/95067209328> Meeting
ID: 950 6720 9328
No password required Join us from 6.55pm



Island of the Hungry Ghosts

Friday 9 October
7 pm

1. Introduction
2. Film Screening (90 minutes)

followed by

3. Q & A session with
Christine Cummins
trauma counsellor who has worked on Christmas Island with refugees in immigration detention, and
Pamela Curr OAM
prominent refugee advocate.

Island of the Hungry Ghosts is an evocative film set on Christmas Island in 2018. The film is topical as the Australian Government is reopening the Christmas Island Detention Centre and is sending people there from mainland immigration detention centres.

Zoom link: <https://amnestyau.zoom.us/j/95067209328> Meeting ID: 950 6720 9328
Enquiries: email refugeefilmnight@gmail.com

"On a small island in the Indian Ocean, one of the planet's largest land migrations takes place. Forty million crabs make their way through dense jungle to the rugged coast and, finally, to sea. But Christmas Island's sublime beauty hides another, darker presence: The Australian government runs a high-security detention facility deep within the island's jungles." (Tribeca Film Festival).

If you would like to make donation, organisers suggest you go to <https://basp.org.au/you-can-help/> Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project relies on donations to support their important work in finding housing and employment for people who are seeking asylum.

>>>Refugee Alternatives Conference 2021 in partnership with the Whitlam Institute, will be held at **Western Sydney University, Parramatta South** in 2021. Dates will be released soon at the [Refugee Alternatives website](#).

INFLUENCING THE INFLUENCERS

Kooyong GfR has written to fifty 'Influencers', people whose advice Federal members of parliament seek.

We consider these Influencers can impact the people we are frustrated by. We hope they may influence decision makers to consider the plight of Australia's detained asylum seekers.

We snail mailed and where accessible have emailed as well, to key people in business, industry, agriculture and media, CEOs, producers and individuals, those who have influence on the direction Australia is heading.

Let's see the response. – *Davina*

Melbourne Grandmothers are also shifting their advocacy focus onto influential others. Concerned about the mental health of people in detention for so many years, they have reached out to Prof Pat McGorry, Professor of Youth Mental Health at the University of Melbourne.



Grandmothers for Refugees has joined the **campaign to create an Australian Charter of Human Rights** along with a wide range of community and not-for-profit organisations. Find out more https://charterofrights.org.au/?utm_campaign=impactpage&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=website

Visit our website today www.grandmothersforrefugees.org

Back to the Budget... Back in December 2019, before Covid-19 forced a rescheduling of the Federal Budget, Grandmothers lodged a Pre-Budget Submission. <https://treasury.gov.au/2020-21-pre-budget-submissions>



The Federal Budget 2020-21 was delivered on Tuesday night with “billions” being uttered more times than I could count. On the other hand, it was easy to count the number of times that the most vulnerable people in need of protection rated a mention in the spend-fest – zero! zip! none-at-all.

From the Budget Statements (Home Affairs) <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/reports-and-pubs/budgets/2020-21-home-affairs-pbs.pdf>

The portfolio will reinforce and continue to focus on the Government’s strong border protection strategies to address the risk of future illegal maritime ventures, including reinforcing border surveillance and patrols, supporting regional partners through the Regional Cooperation Arrangements in Indonesia measure and reopening the Christmas Island detention centre. The measure, COVID-19 Response Package—Christmas Island Immigration Detention Centre—reactivation will ensure unlawful non-citizens, including those released from prisons but unable to be deported due to COVID-19 international border restrictions, will be accommodated at North West Point on Christmas Island.

Another \$55.5m being spent on Christmas Island (not all people seeking asylum, some are 501 category people whose visas have been revoked and are to be deported).

Department of Home Affairs Budget Statements

Table 1.2: Entity 2020–21 Budget measures
Measures announced after the Economic and Fiscal Update July 2020 (continued)

	Program	2020–21 \$'000	2021–22 \$'000	2022–23 \$'000	2023–24 \$'000
Payment measures (continued)					
COVID-19 Response Package— Christmas Island Immigration Detention Centre—reactivation	1.3				
Administered payment		53,149	–	–	–
Departmental payment		2,413	–	–	–
Total		55,562	–	–	–

Reactions to the Budget from around the Refugee Support Sector



Asylum Seeker Resource Centre (ASRC)

42m · 🌐

Bitterly disappointing.

- Spending on financial support to people seeking asylum has been reduced to just \$19.6 million in 2020-21, a reduction of \$120.2 million in the yearly spend in just three years.
- The Federal Government will cut the Refugee and Humanitarian Program back to 13,750 places per year, saving \$911.3 million over the next four years.
- The Department of Home Affairs has allocated \$1.19 billion to spending on Australia's offshore processing regime in 2020-21, following a \$436 million (83%) blowout in expenditure in 2019-20.

[#Budget2020](#)



Paul Power
@1PaulPower

Shattering news in [#Budget2020](#): the Australian Govt is permanently cutting its [#Refugee](#) and Humanitarian Program by 5000 places p.a. The saving of \$958m over 4 years will be more than wiped out by a \$1.2 billion blowout in offshore processing costs this year and last year.

Paul Power, CEO Refugee Council of Australia

One last word....

NEW POSTERS

The Coordinating Committee has agreed that it is time to get fresh stocks of our vivid purple posters.

If electorates not yet represented on the CC want to place an order for up to 9 (free) A3 or smaller laminated posters, please contact us at info@grandmothersforrefugees.org asap as we will be lodging the order with our supplier on Oct 14.

A special 'thank you' to those who have made recent donations... they are always welcome. We are now able to have more



posters printed and distributed to all electorates. Donations may be made by direct funds transfer to our bank account:

Name: Grandmothers for Refugees
BSB: 083170
Account No: 83 813 3480

And that's all from us for now. Stay safe, everyone.



Jean



Margaret



Jane



Di

Visit our website today www.grandmothersforrefugees.org