

MEDIA RELEASE

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Leave Medevac Laws Alone

The St Vincent de Paul Society National Council is disappointed by the Senate Committee's recommendation to pass the Migration Amendment (Repairing Medical Transfers) Bill 2019 [Provisions].

National Council CEO, Toby oConnor, said the recommendation belies the extensive evidence submitted to the Committee by independent and professional health and legal experts.

'The Medevac laws are operating as intended – they enable the timely transfer of patients with established clinical need and put medical treatment in the hands of doctors, not bureaucrats,' Mr oConnor said.

'The Department's pre-existing system was inadequate, with lawyers regularly needing to intervene to secure treatment recommended by doctors.

'Before the Medevac laws, twelve people died, and people waited, on average, two years before being transferred, he said

The Medevac laws only apply to people who are already in Papua New Guinea and Nauru. People transferred to Australia for medical treatment are detained while they are onshore, and the Minister determines whether this is in the community or in a detention centre.

'Scaremongering has been used by politicians to cloud the debate on this important and life-saving legislation.

'The sky has not fallen in. The boats have not resumed. Hospitals are not being inundated and there has been no increase in episodes of self-harm.

'The Minister retains the power to refuse transfer for medical treatment on national security or character grounds. None of the 154 applications received up to July 2019 have been refused on these grounds.

'We also believe there are sufficient provisions in the Act to enable transferees to be returned to regional processing countries following treatment in Australia and support the Law Council of Australia's position that any ambiguity could be removed by making minor amendments to the Act, rather than repealing the medical transfer provisions.

'The Society thanks the many committed medical and legal professionals who have given their time and worked tirelessly to help those detained in offshore detention.

'Provisions should be made to remunerate the Independent Health Advice Panel,' Mr oConnor said

The Society of St Vincent de Paul consists of 60,000 members and volunteers who operate on the ground through over 1,000 Conferences located in individual parishes across Australia.