

Refugee Legal: 30 years defending the rights of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants.

19 March 2020

In these extremely challenging and uncertain times for us all, it's critical to remember that the COVID-19 pandemic poses even greater risks for people seeking asylum, refugees and vulnerable migrants.

These risks are not just to their health, well-being and ability to support themselves, but also to their legal rights and ability to obtain justice.

For many of these people, isolation and uncertainty are already part of daily life. This pandemic risks making life even more difficult – and creating further barriers to accessing basic supports. These risks are even more acute for people who are detained.

Amidst all the uncertainty of this crisis, one thing remains certain: at Refugee Legal we are continuing to do all that we can to promote and protect the rights of vulnerable people in need of our help.

These three principles underpin our strategy:

- **Continuity** – of our services;
- **Protection** – of client rights; and of the safety, health and well-being of clients, staff, volunteers, and other members of the community; and
- **Core work** – honing essential front-line client services, and operational functions.

Our office remains open at present, with modifications to safeguard the health and well-being of clients, staff, volunteers and others. We've also taken significant steps – including infrastructure and technology changes - to ensure that we can continue to provide assistance to people needing our help even if we need to close our office. We are working closely with our pro bono partners to devise ways to provide critical legal help in new and different ways.

We're enhancing emergency frontline advice services so that people can still get the assistance they need – whether in-person, by phone or video-conference. At the same time, we're working with key partners to identify potentially serious implications of COVID-19 on the ability of people we help to engage with the legal system.

And, with our key partners, we continue to play a central role in advocating for people held in offshore detention in PNG and on Nauru – and those evacuated to Australia for medical treatment.

The COVID-19 pandemic has struck globally at a time of a global humanitarian crisis with unprecedented numbers forced to flee their homes in fear, countries closing their borders, and an escalation of people being forced into inhumane, dangerous and now even more life-threatening conditions. We stand with refugees, asylum seekers and vulnerable migrants - and our many international partners - in calling for global action by States – including our own governments - and members of the community to recognise their particular vulnerability and act urgently to meet their needs.

In all of this, a fundamental conviction drives what we do: ‘That the true measure of a society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members.’

Together, let’s continue to do all that we can to defend the rights and lives of people seeking asylum, refugees, and vulnerable migrants at this time of crisis.

Yours sincerely,

David Manne

Executive Director & Principal Solicitor
Refugee Legal