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Across Australia, home hosts say “beds are ready” for refugees

Offers have been made from people across Australia ready and willing to open their homes as a viable alternative to keeping refugees in indefinite immigration detention.

“We have offers from home hosts in diverse parts of the country - Tasmania, Blue Mountains, Echuca and Queensland – in regions as well as capital cities,” said Pamela Curr, spokesperson for RAN (Refugee Advocacy Network) and the **@HomeSafeWithUs** coalition of support groups.

People from all states have responded to the **@HomeSafeWithUs** call-out for home hosts by offering 160 beds which are ready right now for refugees detained unnecessarily. More offers are expected in coming weeks, and there are also community agencies ‘at the ready’ to assist.

John Egan, one of dozens of willing home hosts in Victoria, said he worried about the Covid-19 outbreak risk. “I think that it is totally inappropriate to keep people in detention and at risk of infection at this time. I am pleased to be able to offer them accommodation to get them out of detention,” he said.

The **@HomeSafeWithUs** initiative proposes placement in the community as the sensible and viable alternative to mandatory and indefinite detention of people seeking asylum. The Federal Government is responding to concerns about the risk of Covid-19 infection in detention centres by proposing to move people around the detention network.

“There is no good reason to continue depriving refugees of their freedom,” Ms Curr said.

“These are not convicted people serving a court-ordered sentence. They are victims of the arbitrary policy of indefinite detention and the refusal to recognise the refugee status of anyone who arrived by boat seeking asylum after the 19 July 2013. This policy contravenes our obligations under the UN Refugee Convention.

“More than seven years later, with the country gripped by the Covid-19 pandemic, the Federal Government should accept this offer from communities across the country as the timely and viable alternative to endless detention,” Ms Curr continued.

This community initiative follows the re-opening of Christmas Island as a detention facility for people who have served prison sentences and who are in line for deportation but unable to travel under global pandemic restrictions. There are concerns that refugees currently held in hotels and other immigration detention centres in the eastern states will be transferred ‘out of sight’ to Yongah Hill in WA.

“They have begun moving detainees around like pawns on a chess board. It is so costly and unnecessary, when there are warm, safe beds and people waiting to welcome refugees into their homes,” Ms Curr said.

“Hundreds of refugees have been supported in home host arrangements over many years right across Australia, and this is absolutely the best option now,” she added.

The **@HomeSafeWithUs** coalition of 19 refugee support groups includes the Brigidine Asylum Seeker Project, Grandmothers for Refugees, Rural Australians for Refugees and Refugee Advocacy Network.

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Home hosts in Tasmania, NSW, Victoria and Qld are also available for media interview.