



AUSTRALIAN CHURCHES
REFUGEE TASKFORCE



National Council of
Churches in Australia

Thursday, March 26, 2020

The Hon Alan Tudge MP

Acting Minister for Immigration, Citizenship,
Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs
PO Box 6022
House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister

On Monday 23 March, the Australian Federal Parliament passed omnibus legislation to increase income support and extend its coverage in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Many are being offered special assistance through social security payments and this is to be commended. However, one significant group who were not included, and are extremely vulnerable due to their near destitution within our communities, are asylum seekers.

We note that the omnibus legislation was amended to allow the Minister to extend coverage to any group via legislative instrument (which means Parliament will not need to convene for changes to be made). It is therefore possible to include other vulnerable people such as asylum seekers.

Many asylum seekers currently receive no income support and are dependent on various charities for rent, utilities, food and all necessities. Our charities trying to support them are more than stretched during this time.

The following are asylum seekers who get no income support. Those

- with no work rights
- with work rights but no job
- whose Bridging Visas have expired and just not renewed by the Department
- who had Status Resolution Support Services until that payment was not renewed or cut off
- waiting for a court hearing that is almost certainly years away
- those who want to return to their own country but can't because of travel restrictions
- are stateless.

We ask that

- the 30,000 women, men and children who are on bridging visas (which give no certainty about the future) or without a visa, be included in the income support measures announced by the Commonwealth government.
- all asylum seekers (at any stage of their application process) be given access to Medicare

- all asylum seekers who lose their jobs (usually these are low paid, part time or casual) have the same access to income support as others in the Australian community.

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We thank the Australian Government for the steps taken to support us all during the Coronavirus crisis.

We pass on our prayerful awareness of the hard work of Government leaders at this time and our hope that all those with poignant needs during this unprecedented crisis in our nation, such as asylum-seekers, will be provided with income support and access to Medicare.

Please include them in the compassionate way that you are seeking to look after everyone affected by Covid-19.

In the peace of Christ and with our continuing prayers,

Bishop Philip Huggins



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Matthew 25:40

"The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'"