

Media Release
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Calvary and St Vincent's offer medical support to asylum seekers applying for church sanctuary

Two of Australia's largest Catholic healthcare organisations have offered to provide medical support to any of the 267 asylum seekers applying for church sanctuary to avoid their forced removal to Nauru and are encouraging other hospital groups to do the same.

St Vincent's Health Australia – which has hospitals in NSW, Queensland and Victoria – and Calvary Health Care – which has hospitals in NSW, Tasmania, South Australia, Victoria and the ACT – said their decision to offer medical support to those seeking church sanctuary reflected their 'sacred duty' as healing organisations.

"Our hospitals have sacred duties of care – that we support people who need healing; that we help prevent people falling into ill health or harm," said Jack de Groot, Head of Mission at St Vincent's Health Australia.

"The group of 267 asylum seekers affected by Wednesday's High Court decision are all in Australia either receiving or having received medical attention. They are vulnerable. They are at risk.

"We've been in touch with the Australian Churches Refugee Taskforce which is coordinating this action and offered our support."

"If any of these individuals pursue the invitation of churches to seek sanctuary in the cities where our organisations have hospitals and healthcare teams, we'll do whatever we can to make sure they receive the medical attention they need," said John Watkins, Chair of Calvary.

"Let's be clear: Nauru and the conditions in which these people were detained either caused or exacerbated their ill health. Many of this group are still wrestling with their illnesses or are traumatised at the prospect of their return and need medical attention

"Sending them back to Nauru will only make them sicker and put them at risk of disease, violence and mental illness. We can't stand by and watch that happen – we have to become involved."

Both Jack de Groot and John Watkins are available for interview.