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Media Release

Long-term health costs of extended mandatory detention of asylum seekers.

A new report urges Australians to consider the long-term consequences of asylum policies.

Many of the submissions to the recent national taxation summit emphasised the importance of careful long-term costings of policies.

Heeding this advice, this report estimates the *Long-term health costs of extended mandatory detention of asylum seekers*. For the first time in Australia, it does so by applying innovative costing approaches developed in the Netherlands.

It is now well established that lengthy periods in detention cause significant mental health problems for asylum seekers. The Howard Government recognised this in 2005, when it agreed that 25 of the 27 detainees then remaining on Nauru should be brought to Australia. This was after doctors had diagnosed serious mental health conditions.

More generally, a study of detained asylum seekers in Australia found that more than one third of those detained for more than two years had new mental health problems in 2006-07. This was ten times the rate of mental health problems for those detained for less than three months.

There is good evidence that such trauma causes long-term mental health problems. The new report estimates the lifetime health costs of such trauma. On conservative estimates – that trauma sufferers will have lifetime mental health costs 50% more than the average – the report shows this will cost an additional \$25,000 per person.

In recent years, more than 80% of detained asylum seekers have eventually been successful in settling in Australia. This means that such additional health costs have to be met by the Australian health system, and Australian taxpayers have to pick up the tab.

The Australian immigration system already has extensive health checks for migrants seeking to come to this country. One of the key reasons is to protect public expenditure on health and community services. It is ironic that another element in current immigration policy – mandatory detention – has the direct effect of increasing public expenditure on health and community services.

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ONLINE COPY OF FULL REPORT: available at www.yarrainstitute.org.au



Good Shepherd
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