



Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara
Women's Council (Aboriginal Corporation)

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Real people - not just goners. Renal disaster needs leadership and action.



Nura Ward, Alice Springs Hospital Mrs. Ward, aged 71, with heart problems, diabetes and kidney disease, has been told she must either move to Adelaide, 1400 kms. from her community, for renal dialysis, or go home to Ernabella on the APY Lands in SA for palliative care.

Media Release

NPY Women's Council says the Federal Government must intervene immediately with South Australia and the NT to sort the disastrous situation of renal dialysis treatment in the Central Australian region.

“Let's be very clear:

- this is a regional, tri-state issue and the lives of people with renal disease are difficult in the extreme, but they are not worthless and should not be mucked about with on the basis of state and territory borders;
- additional renal facilities and accommodation need to be made available immediately in Alice Springs for Nura and for other APY Lands dialysis patients;
- SA and the NT have to date shown themselves unable or unwilling to resolve the matter in a sensible and compassionate way,” said NPY's acting co-ordinator Andrea Mason.

“Warren Snowdon is the Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health and Regional Services Delivery. Aboriginal health is funded by the Commonwealth. Warren needs to get in there with his boss Nicola Roxon, NT Chief Minister Paul Henderson and SA Premier Mike Rann and fix this now, for Nura Ward and others from the APY Lands.

There are already 5 or 6 renal patients from SA in Adelaide, and 20 or more on the way. What is the financial as well as emotional cost compared to accommodating them in Alice? Do governments think that because these people have end-stage renal failure they are goners anyway, to be shunted quietly off to isolation from family and country, loneliness, confusion and despair in a big city?"

The SA Government's so-called 'commitment' to a dialysis unit on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands in the State's far north-west is a mere distraction from the immediate crisis¹.

The SA Government has already shown major incompetence in the operation of a (capital Commonwealth-funded \$2M) substance misuse facility at Amata that it has not been able to staff properly, and which is grossly under-used with no residential program, despite shocking levels of cannabis and grog use in the area. Now it might just turn it into a renal unit. Pigs might fly and Paris Hilton might grow a brain too, but don't hold your breath. It's a long way off and it may never happen. Where will the specialist staff come from? NT Health already struggles to recruit them in major centres.

As for the agreement said to be in progress between SA and the NT - where is it and what's in it? Will it be like the one between WA and the NT, announced this week? That deal excludes renal patients from Warburton, the largest community on the Ngaanyatjarra Lands and everything to its west, thus imposing yet another border and forcing those kidney failure patients to go to Perth or Kalgoorlie².

"At least the SA Liberal Opposition has a policy to negotiate an agreement with the NT to allow people from the APY Lands to have renal dialysis in Alice Springs, and not be forced to move to Adelaide or Port Augusta.

So we've got the NT Health Minister Kon Vatskalis flatly refusing to take any more SA patients; and the SA Government - about to go to an election it may well lose - stalling on an agreement with the NT and making vague murmurings about a renal unit out bush.

This needs leadership and Commonwealth and SA and NT co-operation, forced if necessary, and fast. These are real people, sick people - they are not just faceless health statistics.

"Rann, Henderson, Snowdon and Roxon need to get on the job now."

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Note: Ernabella is 1397 kms. or more than twenty hours from Adelaide by road, but much closer - 480 kms. - to Alice Springs.

¹ www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/02/24/2828504.htm.

² www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2010/02/23/2827812.htm.