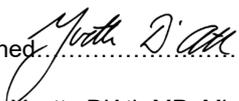


**SUBJECT: Temporary recognition of displaced Ukrainians as “asylum seekers” to enable access to public health services and waiving of Queensland Regional Accommodation Centre quarantine costs**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Approved <input type="checkbox"/> Not approved <input type="checkbox"/> Noted <input type="checkbox"/> Further information required (see comments)	Signed:  ..... Date: 17 / 03 / 2022 Hon Yvette D'Ath MP, Minister for Health and Ambulance Services, Leader of the House Comments:
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**ACTION REQUIRED BY** - 14 March 2022 due to escalating community risk

**RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended the Minister:

- **Approve** for Queensland Health to recognise displaced Ukrainian arrivals who relocate to Queensland as “asylum seekers” for the purpose of Health Service Directive QH-HSD-045, also retrospectively including those who have arrived since 1 December 2021. This will enable access by Ukrainian arrivals to Queensland Hospital and Health Services (HHSs) free of charge.
- **Note** that this recognition will be reviewed by 31 October 2022 to determine ongoing need and will be discontinued if the Commonwealth enables Medicare eligibility or access to healthcare for this cohort.
- **Approve** waiving of Queensland Regional Accommodation Centre (QRAC) quarantine fees for displaced Ukrainian arrivals, including costs incurred retrospectively for any Ukrainians who have arrived in Queensland since 1 December 2021.

**ISSUES**

1. There is an increased number of displaced people from Ukraine seeking temporary relocation to Queensland, with approximately 100 people expected to arrive within the next fortnight.
2. Arrivals are predominantly women, children and elderly with limited access to funds as foreign exchange withdrawals are suspended. Many families will have left male partners and family members in Ukraine to resist the Russian invasion. It is anticipated some arrivals will have mental health needs, pre-existing health conditions and require medications. The Department of Health has identified further specific health needs including:
  - 2.1. pregnant mothers requiring antenatal and maternity care;
  - 2.2. prevalence of multi-drug resistant tuberculosis in Ukraine;
  - 2.3. under-immunisation of children, with a recent outbreak of polio; and
  - 2.4. low COVID-19 vaccination rates - around 45 per cent double dosed.
3. Unlike the Afghan evacuation, Ukrainians will be arriving via privately funded arrangements on commercial flights and will seek to unite with family and friends in the community.
4. The Commonwealth Government has advised that the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has not yet set up a refugee response with Australia. Without this, there is no appropriate visa framework to offer protection to people seeking temporary asylum.
5. The Commonwealth Government has made six-month tourist visas available for Ukrainians seeking temporary relocation to Australia. Tourist visas do not provide eligibility for Medicare or public health services.
6. In Queensland, public health services are provided free of charge for people seeking asylum under Health Service Directive QH-HSD-045. People on tourist visas are excluded under the directive because they are not considered to be seeking asylum.
7. Initial healthcare assessments and care arrangements normally provided by Queensland Health to refugees arriving as part of the Commonwealth Government’s Humanitarian Settlement Program are not available for this cohort.
8. Some Ukrainian nationals left Ukraine when tensions were escalating on the Ukraine border late last year. Recognition of arrivals since 1 December 2021 ensures the directive is applied to those who have fled Ukraine amid increasing threats.
9. There is significant concern regarding the potential health needs of this cohort given the urgency of their arrival and the recent disruption to health services in Ukraine due to instability.
10. The application of the directive will enable arrival screening and the provision of health services to this cohort including general medical services, surgery, allied health services, mental health services, pathology, radiology, cardiology and maternity health services. GP services in some rural and regional areas are covered, where the GPs are employed through or by a HHS. Primary care is not in scope as it requires Medicare.
11. The Mater Refugee Complex Care Clinic is a specialist refugee primary healthcare provider not funded by Queensland Health, which is accessible for people regardless of visa or Medicare status. Ukrainian doctors have indicated their willingness to support the clinic through a pro-bono arrangement.

**MINISTERIAL BRIEFING NOTE**

12. It is expected a proportion of Ukrainian arrivals will be directed to quarantine at the Toowoomba QRAC as Ukraine's vaccination rate is low. In recognition of their limited financial means, the Department of Health is also seeking approval to waive quarantine fees for this cohort.
13. Ms Joanne Greenfield, Commissioner for Quarantine Taskforce, is already preparing QRAC for Ukrainian arrivals, including the translation of resources into Ukrainian, coordination with health providers and liaison with Queensland Police Service at Brisbane Airport.

**BACKGROUND**

14. People seeking asylum experience administrative barriers to health services due to delays in visa processing and infrequent access to Medicare. On 29 July 2017, the Queensland Government committed to provide public health services at no charge to Asylum Seekers who were Medicare ineligible. The Asylum Seeker Health Directive (which can be accessed at: <https://www.health.qld.gov.au/multicultural/public/language/translated-asylum-seeker-factsheets>) provides the process to ensure consistent application of fees and charges across HHSs and no out of pocket expenses for asylum seekers.
15. Tensions along the Ukrainian border were escalating from late last year, with 100,000 Russian troops reported on Ukrainian borders by December 2021. The conflict in Ukraine reached crisis in early February 2022 with the invasion of Russia and continues to escalate. Already over 2 million people have fled and sought refuge in neighbouring European countries.
16. On 23 February 2022, the Commonwealth Government announced the extension of tourist visas to support Ukrainians seeking temporary relocation in Australia. The Commonwealth has since reiterated their readiness to provide further assistance to support Ukrainian Nationals fleeing to other countries and committed \$35 million for humanitarian assistance in Ukraine.

**RESULTS OF CONSULTATION**

17. Social Policy and Legislation Branch, Office of the Director-General and System Strategy Division (SPLB), has engaged with the Ukraine Community Association of Queensland via the Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs, who are acting as community liaison for emerging community needs. SBLB is also aware that the Association has lobbied Mr Joe Kelly MP, Member for Greenslopes, for assistance and is in discussions with Commonwealth Department of Home Affairs.
18. Representatives from the Revenue Strategy and Support Unit, Corporate Services Division, confirmed the limited healthcare options and treatment available to people on tourist visas in Queensland.
19. Dr Peter Aitken, Deputy Chief Health Officer, supported the extension of asylum seekers health directive to this cohort to enable access to public healthcare.
20. The Department of the Premier and Cabinet is aware of visa and associated health access issues for this cohort and is in direct discussion with the Commonwealth.

**RESOURCE/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

21. Approval will incur additional costs to Queensland Health for:
  - 21.1. Quarantine services: anticipated to be under \$200,000 (billed at \$2,800 per adult); and
  - 21.2. Health services for this cohort: to be absorbed by HHSs.

**SENSITIVITIES/RISKS**

22. The relocation of Ukrainian nationals to Queensland has already attracted media attention: ABC article published on 08 March 2022 ([https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-03-08/woman-reunited-with-daughter-in-mackay-after-fleeing-ukraine/100889756?utm\\_campaign=abc\\_news\\_web&utm\\_content=link&utm\\_medium=content\\_shared&utm\\_source=abc\\_news\\_web](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-03-08/woman-reunited-with-daughter-in-mackay-after-fleeing-ukraine/100889756?utm_campaign=abc_news_web&utm_content=link&utm_medium=content_shared&utm_source=abc_news_web)).
23. Without access to healthcare, there may be adverse health outcomes for this cohort and the potential for transmission of communicable diseases in the Queensland community such as antibiotic resistant tuberculosis which is prevalent in Ukraine.
24. The Queensland Government has committed to upholding the protected rights of all people in Queensland. Section 37 of Queensland's *Human rights Act 2019* specifically protects the right for every person to access health services without discrimination.
25. Extending the asylum seeker directive for Ukrainian nationals may create an expectation of similar support for other communities where community members are in Queensland on tourism visas away from their home country due to conflict. While it is not expected that this will be a large group, a similar response could be considered if necessary.

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