

## **Media Release - Medical Letter to Naqvi to stop immigration transfers to Ontario jails**

Doctors, nurses and other healthcare providers in Ontario demand the Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services halt the practice of holding immigration detainees in provincial jails.

This morning, a group of over 140 doctors, nurses and other healthcare providers of Ontario sent a letter to Minister Yasir Naqvi, Minister of Community Safety and Correctional Services. The letter expressed their alarm around the practice of detaining individuals for immigration purposes in Ontario jails - facilities intended for those charged or convicted of criminal offences. Immigration detainees include refugees, permanent residents and other non-citizens. According to health care providers, the detention of these individuals in Ontario jails is damaging the health of this very vulnerable population. Many of the detainees are survivors of severe trauma or persecution or are dealing with mental health challenges.

Many immigration detainees are transferred to Ontario jails solely because they are suffering from a physical or mental illness. Some are transferred because they are suspected of being suicidal. This is done on the basis that immigration holding centres cannot provide appropriate treatment.

“Jails are not hospitals”, explains Dr. Michaela Beder, psychiatrist. “The idea of incarcerating people in high security prisons, solely because they are sick, outrages me as a doctor and as an Ontarian.” Moreover, states Dr. Beder, “Treatment in provincial jails is woefully inadequate. Rather than getting proper treatment, many immigration detainees who are mentally ill are simply relegated to solitary confinement. They can remain there for weeks, months and in some cases even a year.”

Family physician Dr. Ritika Goel, adds “Many immigration detainees suffer from pre-existing health conditions, those seen in refugee claimants and survivors of trauma. Incarcerating these vulnerable individuals leads to worse outcomes for the detainees and can have a profound and debilitating impact on their overall health.”

Healthcare providers are calling on Minister Naqvi to end this harmful practice by immediately refusing all transfers of immigration detainees with a serious physical or mental illness and cancelling the federal-provincial agreement under which the transfers are made. They are joining their voices to detainees and community groups who, for years, have been calling for an end to these transfers. Dr. Rachel Kronick, psychiatrist, states: “As the outpouring of support for Syrian refugees in the past few months has shown, Ontario can and should be a place where migrants find hope and safety. Not a place where they are incarcerated.”

A copy of the letter from healthcare providers to Minister Naqvi and a copy of the agreement between the federal and Ontario governments allowing immigration detainees to be incarcerated in Ontario’s jails can be found at the following link:

<https://stoptransferstojails.wordpress.com/>