



**ST VINCENT'S
HEALTH AUSTRALIA**

UNDER THE STEWARDSHIP OF MARY AIKENHEAD MINISTRIES

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Australian Border Force
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To whom it may concern,

National Action Plan to Combat Modern Slavery 2020-24

St Vincent's Health Australia welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposed goals as identified in the *National Action Plan to Combat Modern Slavery 2020-24: Public Consultation Paper*. We commend the Australian Government for their commitment to taking action to eradicate modern slavery.

About St Vincent's Health Australia

Founded by the Sisters of Charity, St Vincent's has been providing compassionate, high quality health and aged care to the Australian community since 1857. As a Catholic healthcare service we bring God's love to those in need through the healing ministry of Jesus. We are especially committed to people who are poor or vulnerable.

Across St Vincent's, we have 39 facilities comprising:

- 6 public hospitals
- 10 private hospitals
- 20 aged care facilities
- 3 co-located research institutes:
 - Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute
 - St Vincent's Institute of Medical Research
 - Garvan Institute of Medical Research, and
- 1 co-located partner facility.

As a healthcare provider, we have seen the impact of human trafficking.

How St Vincent's Health Australia is combatting modern slavery

Since May 2017, St Vincent's has been in collaboration with the Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH) as part of our partnership to address human trafficking. The goal of the project is achieving systemic change in the Australian healthcare community, so that the needs of those affected by human trafficking and modern slavery can be more strategically addressed within the sector. This project has three objectives:

1. The safe identification, treatment and referral of victims of human trafficking and modern slavery who present for treatment,
2. Investigation of the supply chains of services and goods used that are liable these issues, so that a plan to address these issues can be developed, and
3. Awareness raising, across the organisation, about the project to give staff the opportunity to take action in the workplace (and beyond) to help eliminate human trafficking and modern slavery.

Through this work, the ultimate goal is to end human trafficking.

St Vincent's is also a participating organisation of the Australian Catholic Anti-Slavery Network.

Consultation response

1. Do the 12 goals capture key areas of focus for Australia over the next five years?

St Vincent's welcomes the proposed 12 goals as set out in the Public Consultation Paper.

We take this opportunity to particularly acknowledge the focus of proposed goal five (*train frontline officials to support the identification of victims and effective investigations of modern slavery*). We note the important role of training, this is particularly relevant for St Vincent's as Australia's largest not-for-profit health and aged care provider. St Vincent's employs approximately 20,000 staff and operates more than 2,600 hospital beds and 1,100 residential aged care places. In our hospitals, we provide more than 1 million episodes of care for patients each year.

Many victims of human trafficking and modern slavery are likely to present to an Emergency Department during the course of their exploitation, making health professionals uniquely placed to identify, respond and intervene in the trafficking¹. Yet the research conducted as part of our project indicated that:

"trafficked persons were predominantly invisible within the health setting. When practitioners did suspect trafficking, they considered themselves as lacking the professional skills and knowledge, or the clear organisational policy or procedures to confidently identify and manage the complex health needs of the suspected trafficked persons."²

In order to better support our staff to offer the best possible care to this vulnerable population, St Vincent's has commenced an awareness raising campaign across the organisation. Part of this initiative has been to train interested staff in advocacy roles – SVHA's *Modern Slavery Advocates for Change*. While this strategy is only in its infancy, the advocates have already embarked on a variety of awareness raising activities in their facilities, including education sessions with their teams, and importantly with nursing and medical staff in the Emergency Department at our Public Hospital in Melbourne.

To this end, we support goals which emphasise the merits of training opportunities. Building from this, we recognise goal twelve (*work collaboratively across government, along with non-government stakeholders, to combat modern slavery*) and the important role of a collaborative approach across sectors.

2. Should there be additional goals to address other areas of focus, emerging issues or trends? If so, what should they be?

Whilst we welcome the 12 proposed goals, we would suggest that as part of the activities undertaken to pursue their success that there should also be a focus on cultural identity. According to the Australian Federal Police³, people trafficked into Australia primarily come from Asia, and in particular Thailand, Korea, the Philippines and Malaysia. It is important to note this cultural and linguistic diversity and therefore SVHA would recommend that ABF consider drafting a statement on cultural diversity and cultural sensitivity.

3. The Government is committed to ensuring victims of modern slavery are supported, protected and empowered. Are there ways in which the Government can better reflect the voices of victims and their lived experiences in the 2020-24 Plan and Australia's response to modern slavery?

St Vincent's would recommend that, where appropriate to do so, the Government proactively engages with people with lived experience and reflects their voices in the draft National Action Plan. This includes survivors, as well as health care workers who have encountered victims and their families.

4. The Government is committed to ensuring that we can measure the impacts of the 2020-24 Plan. Are there evaluation methods, data sources or metrics the Government should consider in developing an evaluation framework?

St Vincent's encourages the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data in order to support future planning of services and activities. One area that we are particularly mindful of is the need for understanding what have been the most useful responses for people as they progressed through the system.

Conclusion

St Vincent's remains strongly committed to our work combatting modern slavery, and as such we commend the Australian Government for their public consultation for the

National Action Plan to Combat Modern Slavery 2020-24. We would welcome the opportunity to remain engaged in the Government's consultation process.

If you would to discuss the contents of this submission, or for more information about our work, please do not hesitate to contact Samantha Corrie, Senior Project Officer, via Samantha.Corrie@svha.org.au

Yours sincerely,



Toby Hall
Group Chief Executive Officer

¹ Gibbons, P., & Stoklosa, H. (2016). Identification and treatment of human trafficking victims in the emergency department: a case report. *The Journal of emergency medicine*, 50(5), 715-719

² Testa, D. (2020). Hospital Health Provider Experiences of Identifying and Treating Trafficked Persons. *Australian Social Work*, 73(1), 92-104.

³ <https://www.afp.gov.au/what-we-do/crime-types/human-trafficking>