

# Position Statement

## Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Jewish Care has one clear vision: **Together, building and supporting a healthy, resilient, and inclusive Jewish community.** Our values are universal and enduring in nature, but are also particular to the Jewish approach to creating a meaningful life, and a strong, cohesive community.

Our foundational values define who we are and underpin everything we do. The values, **Respect** (*derech erez*), **Community** (*kehilla*), **Inclusion** (*hachlala*) and **Social Responsibility** (*achrayoot chevratit*), are about people - they provide a moral compass for the way we respond to challenges and the decisions we make.

These values pervade every aspect Jewish Care, informing relationships between colleagues, staff and clients, and our organisation and the wider community.

The Board of Jewish Care seeks to demonstrate our commitment to these values by clearly stating Jewish Care's position on important issues that are contextual to the Jewish community's rich history or because it frames the way we will conduct ourselves and our engagement with members of the community.

### Preface

An 'asylum seeker' is referred to as an individual who has escaped from their own country and applied for refugee protection in another nation.<sup>i</sup> A 'refugee' is defined as an individual who is "unable or unwilling" to return to their country of origin due to a well-founded fear of persecution resulting from their religion, ethnicity, race, nationality, membership of a particular social group such as gender or sexuality, and/or political opinion<sup>ii</sup>. 'Asylum seekers' and 'refugees' differ from 'migrants' in that their options of movement, namely their return to their countries of origin, are severely limited due to real and significant concerns about retaliation, persecution, and even death.<sup>iii</sup>

Australia is a signatory to the United Nations Refugee Convention<sup>iv</sup> and as such is expected to comply with specific obligations to preserve and respect the human rights of individuals who are seeking assistance as asylum seekers or refugees.<sup>v</sup> In 2017-18, Australia granted 16,250 protection visas under the annual Humanitarian Program.<sup>vi</sup>

Jewish Care (through predecessor organisations) was pivotal in supporting Holocaust survivors affected by the Nazi regime (before, during, and after the

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Holocaust), advocating for their needs, lobbying government, and ensuring that they were provided with appropriate resources and services in their new home environment. Key figures of influence such as Walter Lippmann and social worker Marion Friend Lippmann were paramount to establishing supports for Jewish refugees<sup>vii</sup>. Jewish Care also supported refugees from the Former Soviet Union who made Melbourne their new home during the late 1980s and early 1990s.

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Jewish Care has empathy for the plight of those who have arrived in Australia fleeing from persecution and seeking a new refuge, and supports the need for a humane response from Governments and Departmental authorities.

Jewish Care recognises the significant legacy of trauma that persecution, racism and terror inflict upon individuals and their families and the entire texture of a community. It is our firm belief that inaction can provoke the most horrific behaviours and outcomes within society and as such, we are committed to being an active and vocal political participant in the promotion of rights and compassion to individuals who have fled persecution and are seeking to make a new home within Australia.

Jewish Care does not advocate a particular legal or moral definition of asylum seekers and refugees and instead welcomes and supports individuals who are in need of protection, and seek assistance from the Australian Government, regardless of country of origin or circumstance. Jewish Care believes all human beings have an inherent right to a safe living environment free from prejudice, persecution, and fear.

Jewish Care is committed to upholding the principles of human dignity, respect, social justice and universal human rights. In line with that commitment and in accordance with the 1951 UNCHR Refugee Convention, Jewish Care supports the elimination of policies that endorse harsh, punitive or discriminatory treatment of asylum seekers and refugees, including mandatory detention. Jewish Care strongly believes that people of refugee backgrounds can make important contributions to society, and through investment in support, rather than detention, we can enable people to reach their full potential.

Jewish Care welcomes partnerships with other community providers which represent the interests of individuals and communities affected and traumatised by persecution.

This Position Statement was reviewed and approved by the CEO in August 2021.

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<sup>i</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission n.d., *Asylum seekers and refugees guide*, Australian Human Rights Commission, viewed 2 November, 2018, <<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/asylum-seekers-and-refugees/asylum-seekers-and-refugees-guide>>.

<sup>ii</sup> Australian Government Department of Home Affairs guidance relating to Protection Visas (subclass 866), viewed 2 November, 2018 <<https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/trav/visa-1/866->>

<sup>iii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>iv</sup> UNCHR n.d., *The 1951 Refugee Convention, UNHC*, viewed 2 November, 2018 <<http://www.unhcr.org/en-au/3b66c2aa10>>.

<sup>v</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission n.d., *Asylum seekers and refugees guide*, Australian Human Rights Commission, viewed 2 November, 2018, <<https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/asylum-seekers-and-refugees/asylum-seekers-and-refugees-guide>>.

<sup>vi</sup> Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, *Australia's Offshore Humanitarian Program: 2017-18*, viewed 2 November, 2018, <<https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/research-and-stats/files/australia-offshore-humanitarian-program-2017-18.pdf>>.

<sup>vii</sup> Benjamin, R 1998. *A serious influx of Jews: a history of Jewish welfare in Victoria*, Allen & Unwin, NSW.

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