[***INSERT MP NAME AND ADDRESS***]

***[INSERT DATE***]

Dear [***insert the name of your local State or Federal Member of Parliament***]

**I/we** write to ask for your support to lobby for change, to ensure all people seeking asylum in WA have access to basic healthcare, mental health and disability services.

Access to health care is a basic human right. In our community, people seeking asylum face significant challenges in accessing adequate healthcare.

* Around 200 people, 25% of those seeking asylum in WA are not eligible for Medicare.

Due to a lack of work rights, welfare eligibility, and visa prejudice, many people seeking asylum do not have a liveable income, and some do not have any income at all to cover their basic needs. Because of this, the cost of health care is well beyond their means.

* For those with a liveable income and Medicare, many do not earn enough to cover gap payments.
* People seeking asylum also encounter additional barriers to accessing healthcare such having a limited understanding of the Australian healthcare system, language barriers and encountering healthcare staff lacking in cultural awareness.

These circumstances often result in people seeking asylum to avoid seeking out primary healthcare. People seeking asylum also face significant barriers accessing mental health and disability support and services. Suicide rates are known to be high among this population. Many of these people have experienced torture, trauma and loss of home and possessions. Research also demonstrates that insecure visa status is itself a predictor of poor mental health.

**Case Study**

Following his application for protection, Mr Ahmadi was granted a bridging visa E with no work rights or access to Medicare. Subsequently he lives on no income and was not eligible for government income support. In December 2018, he was diagnosed with leukemia and was advised to commence immediate treatment. Given lack of access to Medicare and no income, the costs associated with the treatment are financially prohibitive. Based on compassionate grounds the hospital specialists agreed to commence treatment. Doctors noted an improvement in his condition in response to the treatment however after a month they ceased treatment due to the costs associated. Thus, Mr Ahmadi’s pain increased to the extent that it decreased his ability to do daily tasks. To manage his pain, Mr Ahmadi presented to emergency at two major hospitals (Bunbury hospital in December 2018 and Fiona Stanley Hospital in early 2019). He was charged $7000 in total for both presentations. Due to his lack of income, he is unable to pay this cost. Mr Ahmadi reports his mental health is deteriorating due to his diagnosis, lack of access to medical treatment, visa status, and financial situation.

Consistent with the practices of some of the other state and territory governments, **I/we** call on the WA Government to act so that people seeking asylum in WA:

1. Have access to essential medical care including pathology, diagnostic, pharmaceutical, and outpatient services in WA hospitals free of charge to prevent their health conditions from worsening to the point where in-patient hospital care is required.
2. Have the same access as Healthcare Card holders to public dental, community health and ambulance services, and be charged at the standard concession rates or have their fees waived.
3. Are granted access to funded free mental health services and free medication for diagnosed psychiatric conditions.

This would bring WA policy in line with the WA Health Department’s established a priority of “ensuring people in Western Australia receive safe, high quality and accessible health services.”

Due to ineligibility for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) that people seeking asylum on bridging visas as well as those on Temporary Protection Visas (TPVs) or Safe Haven Enterprise Visas (SHEVs) have, **I/we** ask that the Australian Government grant full access to assessment of disabilities, early intervention, and suitable disability support services. We also ask that this be made available to permanent protection visa holders as well.

In addition to ensuring some of the most vulnerable and disenfranchised people in our community have their basic health needs met, there are compelling fiscal and public health reasons to enact the above changes. The strain on precious hospital resources will be reduced as well as the time hospital finance departments and contracted creditors spend pursuing debtors who have no means of paying. Early and timely access to healthcare can also reduce the likelihood of health conditions worsening and therefore reduce the long-term cost. Also, when a person does not have Medicare, it is difficult for them to obtain and manage basic immunisations. If they contract a vaccine preventable disease, it will be a risk not only to themselves but potentially also to others in the community.

Overall, improved access to healthcare and disability services for asylum seekers and refugees in the WA community will result in better outcomes for the state and local community. By committing to the points raised above, the WA and Australian Government will be able to deliver a safe, high quality, sustainable health system for all people in WA.

**I/we** thank you for your time and look forward to hearing from you soon about these issues.

Yours sincerely,

**[*insert your name and address*]**