

Health
check
for

Norfolk Island



Parliament's Committee on Australia's External Territories has commenced a detailed review of health services on Norfolk Island. The investigation is examining the health services available to residents and visitors to Norfolk Island, as well as the health services that should be available to residents of Norfolk Island when they visit mainland Australia.

While Norfolk Island is a self-governing territory of Australia, Norfolk Island residents do not have access to Medicare. Instead they are covered by the Island's own public health insurance scheme called Healthcare. However, this does not cover any treatment that residents may seek when visiting mainland Australia. Similarly Australian visitors to Norfolk Island are not able to access Medicare for any health services they are required to use on the Island during their stay.

An important question for the External Territories Committee is whether the Medicare system, in whole or in part, should be available to residents of Norfolk Island.

According to Geoff Gardener, Norfolk Island's Health Minister, some Australians have been caught out because they did not realise that they were not covered by Medicare when visiting Norfolk Island. Mr Gardener commented: "Many of the visitors to the Island are unaware of our political situation. To them we are just another state or territory."

Mr Gardener said that both residents and visitors to Norfolk Island have raised the issue of health care coverage with him on numerous occasions. In particular, Australian visitors have questioned him on whether it would be possible to extend

Commonwealth health care legislation to ensure that they are covered for health care services they might need when visiting Norfolk Island.

Another important issue being examined by the External Territories Committee is the medical evacuation of Norfolk Island residents requiring emergency treatment on the mainland. Currently medical evacuations can present problems in terms of timeliness, availability and cost.

Norfolk Island Hospital's Medical Officer, Dr John Davie, stressed to the Committee: "We need to know for the security of the population on the Island that we have a guaranteed system whereby they can be evacuated in the event of an emergency."

Other issues raised by residents of Norfolk Island during a recent visit by the External Territories Committee included the need for a new hospital, an additional doctor, a separate aged care facility, health education programs, counselling services and more affordable child immunisation. With statistics indicating an ageing population, the adequacy of aged care services on Norfolk Island is of particular concern.

As part of the inquiry, the External Territories Committee is exploring the issues raised by Norfolk Island residents with Commonwealth agencies that have responsibilities in these areas, including the Departments of Transport and Regional Services; Defence; Veterans' Affairs; and Health and Aged Care.

For further information visit the External Territories Committee's web site at www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ncet or contact the Committee secretariat, telephone (02) 6277 4355 or email: JSCNCET.Reps@aph.gov.au

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