

NEWS

The Minister for Foreign Affairs cancelled or denied seven passports in 2010/11 resulting from adverse security assessments, prohibiting the travel of several people for terrorism related activities.

Ties between Australian intelligence agencies and their foreign counterparts are being strengthened to effectively identify people attempting to enter Australia who pose a security threat.

Visa applications requiring ASIO security checks have increased significantly, placing pressure on the agency. In 2010/11, ASIO completed 34,396 visa security assessments, with 45 adverse assessments issued, 40 of which were on terrorism grounds.

For the same period, the number of complaints to the Inspector General of Intelligence and Security by visa applicants increased by nine per cent, attributed to the growing number of security assessments required by ASIO and the subsequent backlogs.

ASIO has received increasing powers and capabilities to neutralise international threats, ensure Australia's territorial and border integrity and combat people smuggling. These legislative changes follow a number of previous amendments that provided ASIO greater and more intrusive investigative powers.

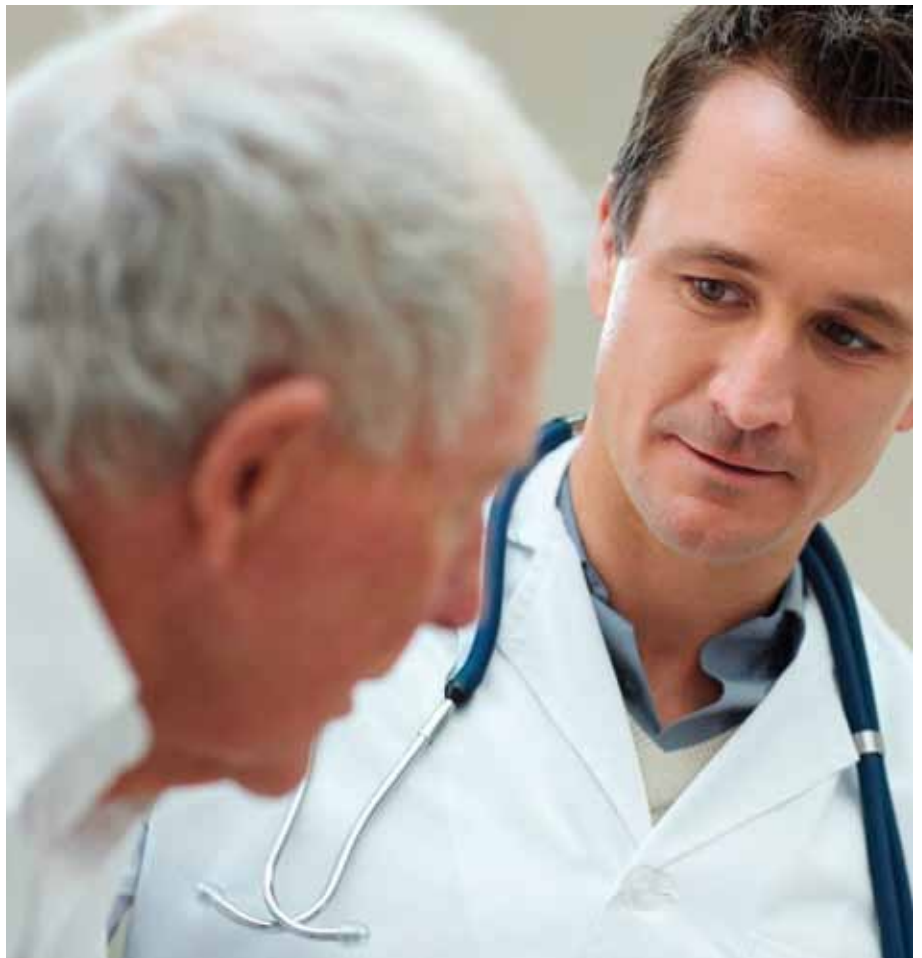
Under warrant, ASIO can enact its powers of intrusive investigation on Australians and within Australia relating to terrorism matters.

ASIO said Australia is experiencing emerging complexities in its security environment and needs to continually review its capabilities to pre-empt the development of increasingly insidious security threats.

"ASIO will need to continue to enhance its capabilities and foster close collaboration with key national and international partners in order to preserve Australia's security," the agency said. •

LINKS

www.apf.gov.au/pjcis
pjcis@apf.gov.au
 (02) 6277 2360



THINKSTOCK

PAINFUL LEGACY: *Polio eradicated but many still suffering*

Polio still affecting thousands

Australia is free of polio but thousands of Australians are still affected by the disease.

Many years after recovering from the initial infection, polio survivors are increasingly experiencing the late effects of polio, characterised by symptoms such as fatigue, weakness and pain.

The House of Representatives Health and Ageing Committee has recommended measures to better estimate the number of people living with the late effects of polio (sometimes known as post polio syndrome) and increasing awareness of the condition among medical practitioners, medical students and the community.

Presenting the committee's report, based on a roundtable that brought together people interested in the treatment and management

of the condition, committee chair Steve Georganas (Hindmarsh, SA) said with the symptoms being largely unrecognised to date, there is a clear need for improved diagnosis of the late effects of polio.

"Improved diagnosis will lead to better estimates of the prevalence of the condition and in turn better management and treatment outcomes for LEOP/PPS sufferers," he said.

The committee said it is important to determine the prevalence of the condition in order to establish a clearer understanding of the potential demand for services and support.

At the committee's roundtable held in Melbourne, national program manager for Polio Australia, Mary-ann Liethof said very little is known about the prevalence of post polio syndrome in Australia.

“All we can indicate at this point is that there may be anything up to hundreds of thousands of polio survivors living with the late effects of polio in Australia today,” Ms Liethof said.

As the Australian Bureau of Statistics already conducts a number of surveys which examine the health of Australians, the committee has recommended the ABS introduce questions to estimate and report on the late effects of polio.

The committee said measures also need to be taken to improve the capacity of clinicians and other health professionals to recognise the condition and confirm clinical diagnosis.

“There is no simple or definitive test for the condition, and it often takes years of persistence and frustration before sufferers receive a diagnosis,” Mr Georganas said.

Some roundtable participants suggested with the eradication of polio in Australia, health professionals are less aware of polio as a problem and medical students were not being taught about it in their undergraduate training. As a result many health professionals may not even consider the late effects of polio as a possible diagnosis.

To help raise awareness of the condition the committee has recommended that the relevant national boards, in consultation with key stakeholders, ensure curricula for medical students includes information on the late effects of polio.

The committee has also called for communication strategies that go beyond just educating health professionals to raise awareness in the wider community as well.

Mr Georganas said increasing community awareness could help to identify polio survivors with late effects of polio symptoms who, being unaware of the condition, may not have mentioned a history of polio to their GPs or other health professionals providing treatment. •

LINKS

www.apf.gov.au/haa
haa.reps@apf.gov.au
 (02) 6277 4145

Epidemic defence starts overseas

Cross border collaboration vital for disease control.



THINKSTOCK

DISEASE CONTROL: Collaboration needed with regional neighbours

Infectious disease experts have called on the government to further develop international disease control protocols and maintain adequate drug stockpiles to limit the impact of future disease epidemics in Australia.

Adrian Sleight, professor of Epidemiology and Population Health at the Australian National University, told a parliamentary roundtable Australia is confronting new or re-emerging infectious diseases at a rate of 50 to 90 per decade, mainly through cross border transmission.

Professor Sleight presented *Epidemics in a changing world*, a report he co-authored with an expert committee, which recommended Australia maintain

its human capacity to combat epidemics, ensure its capability to collect, analyse and interpret disease information, and maintain vaccine stocks and production, particularly for influenza and niche vaccines.

Australia holds valuable influenza vaccine stockpiles which are effective in patient management and controlling disease outbreaks.

The report says stockpiling of antivirals is vital to ensure their availability during times of manufacturer supply shortage such as during epidemics.

Professor Sleight told the House of Representatives Health Committee Australia needs to collaborate with neighbouring states to contain the