



**Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara
Women's Council (Aboriginal Corporation)**

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***It's no life for an old lady. Remote renal patient told:
"Go to Adelaide or go home to palliative care."***

Media release



Nura Ward & her niece Melissa Thompson, Alice Springs Hospital 22.2.10

A grandmother and respected senior community member from Ernabella on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) lands in South Australia's far north-west with kidney failure has been told she must choose between a permanent move to Adelaide for renal dialysis – 1400 kilometres from her community - or go home to die.

Nura Ward is about to become the latest victim of a year-long government policy that denies dialysis treatment in Alice Springs to new renal patients from remote parts of SA, even though Alice is much closer to their home communities. Several Anangu (Aboriginal people) from the Lands have been moved to Adelaide since the policy took effect in January 2009.

Mrs. Ward, in her seventies, is a former cattle station worker; a health worker with her local APY health service, Nganampa Health; and an aged and disability advocate for several years and then an elected member of the NPY Women's Council board. She campaigned vigorously against petrol sniffing and for the wide regional distribution of Opal low octane fuel. A highly accomplished dancer and cultural interpreter in the traditional style of her region, in the late 1990s she instructed the Sydney-based Bangarra Aboriginal dance troupe.

She also has heart problems and is diabetic. Mrs. Ward was admitted to the Alice Springs Hospital just over two weeks ago. In that time it has been ascertained that she now also has serious kidney problems. She has been living part of the time in a house at Ernabella, and part at an aged care facility in that community. She now faces living out the rest of her days in a hostel room or aged care home far away from anyone or anything familiar.

Patron: Professor Marcia Langton AM

“It was bad enough when people had to go on dialysis and live in Alice Springs, but this is much, much worse. We might never see Nura again. She came in to hospital and now they want to shift her to the city, to Adelaide. That’s a very cruel thing, especially for an old lady,” said her niece Melissa Thompson. “I bet this wouldn’t happen to Mike Rann or Paul Henderson or Warren Snowdon’s mum, or aunty, or nana.”

“What will she do there – with no family, no arts centre with other women around, no close friends? Will she sit in a room by herself waiting to get hooked up to the machine every few days? She might finish up even quicker when we can’t visit her. At least in Alice there are other renal patients and patients’ wives - some relatives and childhood friends from her country. She’ll be lost and lonely like the others who have to live far away for dialysis.”

“She is upset and doesn’t want to go. But it’s not just about Nura. This is happening to Anangu from the Lands because governments can’t work out how to provide services and accommodation properly for these people with kidney failure. Can’t they see them coming? Can’t they count? It’s been happening for years but they don’t listen – don’t increase the services or housing enough. Now they get this choice - go to Adelaide or go home and get ready to die.”

The NT Health dialysis facilities are full up and NT Health will not accept any new SA patients. The SA government is increasing its facilities and supposedly also entering into an agreement with the NT, but the policy remains, and SA people continue to have to make a cruel choice.

Additional Commonwealth funds to the NT are used only for NT patients. A planned new facility in Alice is already ‘booked up’ for NT renal patients. End-stage renal patients from remote SA communities continue to be subjected to a doubly harsh blow – the rest of their life ‘on the machine’ isolated from their country and families.

“We need a more caring and a fair dinkum regional approach to this – like we’ve now got with cross-border policing and the justice system under the new tri-state laws in Central Australia,” said Melissa Thompson.

“This cutting people out by State borders is rubbish. SA says it’s still talking to the NT, but it’s more than a year and nothing has really changed. People still have to live so far from home. The idea of living in Adelaide is like moving to Mars for many Anangu.”

For more information or to contact Mrs. Ward or Melissa Thompson please ring:
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Note: Ernabella is 1397 kms. or more than twenty hours from Adelaide by road, but much closer - 480 kms. - to Alice Springs. SA renal patients living in Alice are able to go home for occasional visits between regular dialysis treatments. They typically share hostel accommodation with their spouse if they have one. The Topsy Smith Hostel in Alice Springs, for example, caters solely for renal patients and their spouses/carers.

Photos attached in jpg format.

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NPY Women's Council website: www.npywc.org.au

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