



Australian Government
Refugee Review Tribunal

Country Advice

Fiji

Fiji – FJI36624 – Government employees –
Retirement age – Health care – Heart
disease
13 May 2010

1. Please provide information on a government law or policy to retrench government employees over 55 years of age.

According to a 15 April 2009 article from *Fiji Times Online*¹, entitled *Mandatory retirement age at 55*, the Fiji government decreed on 14 April 2009 that all civil servants would be subject to a mandatory retirement age of 55. This new age for retirement lowers the age of retirement from the previous age of 60. The government decree was published in a government gazette on 14 April 2009. Several media sources² reported that the new age restriction was effective immediately and required anyone over the age of 55 to retire by 30 April 2009. The decree provided for some exceptions, including civil servants possessing specialised and essential skills and exempted senior officials such as the Commissioner of Police, the Commissioner of Prisons, and the Military Commander. The reduction is part of a government plan to reform government and came at a time when the economy was suffering from the global recession and reduced tourism revenues.

According to a 29 January 2010 Fiji Government Ministry of Information bulletin entitled 'Retirement policy implementation on schedule'³ the permanent secretary of the Public Service Commission reported the following statistical updates of the Retirement Program:

- In 2009 a total 2231 civil servants retired
- 292 retired civil servants were reengaged to ensure continuity of services
- 357 civil servants are expected to retire in 2010

According to a 2 July 2009 article entitled *Fixing Fiji's civil service overweight problem in the Pacific Economic Bulletin*⁴, the new mandatory retirement rules are part of a strategy to achieve a 30% reduction (equivalent to 10 000 jobs) in the size of the civil service and to promote greater efficiencies. The current government's plan to reform the civil service by cutting the work force had been proposed, but not implemented, by at least two previous administrations as far back as 1993.

¹ 'Mandatory retirement at 55' 2009, *Fiji Times Online* 15 April

<http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=119273> - Accessed 7 May 2010 – Attachment 1.

² Young, A. 2009, 'Fiji slashes retirement age in bid to cut costs' *nzherald.co.nz* website 17 April http://www.nzherald.co.nz/world/news/article.cfm?c_id=2&objectid=10567012 - Accessed 7 May 2010 – Attachment 2.

³ 'Retirement policy implementation on schedule' *Fiji Government Online Portal* website 29 January http://www.fiji.gov.fj/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=960:retirement-policy-implementation-on-schedule&catid=71:press-releases&Itemid=155 - Accessed 7 May 2010 – Attachment 3.

⁴ Amosa, D., Narayan, J., Naz, R., & Pandaram, A. 2009, 'Fixing Fiji's civil service overweight problem: a challenge', *Pacific Economic Bulletin*, 2 July, vol.24 pp. 43-53 https://classshares.student.usp.ac.fj/BS307/BS307_2009/public%20sector.pdf - Accessed 12 May 2010 – Attachment 4.

2. Is the private sector following this policy as well?

No information was located regarding retirement policies or trends in the private sector in Fiji.

3. Please provide any information on the Fiji health system and whether there would be adequate care for a person with heart disease.

The Fiji Ministry of Health acknowledges the right of every citizen to have access to a national health system providing a high quality of health services. The World Health Organisation (WHO) reports that basic universal health care is provided to all residents of Fiji through a hierarchy of village health workers, nursing stations, health centres, subdivisional hospitals, divisional hospitals, and specialised hospitals. Specialised health care is available at three divisional hospitals. The health services delivery system is composed of the following number of units:⁵

- 900 Village clinics
- 124 Nursing stations
- 3 Area Hospitals
- 76 Health Centres
- 19 Sub-Divisional Medical Centres
- 3 Divisional Hospitals
- 3 Speciality Hospitals

In 2008, Fiji's Ministry of Health noted that, among the Divisional Hospitals, the Colonial War Memorial Hospital (CWM) in Suva was the largest hospital in Fiji with approximately 500 beds, and characterised it as the best 'resourced' hospital in Fiji.⁶ Several sources also identify the Lautoka Hospital, in Lautoka City, along with the CWM, as the pre-eminent hospitals in Fiji, reporting that medical care is more limited at other national institutions and clinics.⁷

A Cardiac Catheterisation Laboratory was recently opened at the Colonial War Memorial Hospital. On 6 January 2010, the Minister of Health issued a statement stating that this facility had begun operations, and had already performed 30 angiograms. The laboratory was expected to begin performing stenting procedures by February 2010 and balloon angioplasty by June 2010.⁸ An Australian doctor participating in an exchange programme at CWM in 2006 made several observations about CWM, including that this facility possessed a relatively comprehensive range of services. He specifically noted that echocardiography capabilities (used in diagnosing heart disease) are more available at CWM than at many peripheral Australian hospitals and that the 'overall clinical outcomes

⁵ World Health Organisation 2009, *Regional Office for the Western Pacific - Fiji* http://www.wpro.who.int/countries/2009/fij/national_health_priorities.htm - Accessed 11 May 2010 – Attachment 5.

⁶ Fiji Ministry of Health 2008, 'Expressions of Interest: Laboratory Information System for Colonial War Memorial Hospital, Suva, Fiji Islands', *Fiji Health Sector Improvement Program*, January, http://www.health.gov.fj/LIS_EOI.pdf - Accessed 27 April 2010 - Attachment 6.

⁷ Fiji Hospitals/Doctors' 2010, *travmed.com* website <http://www.travmed.com/guide/country.php?c=Fiji> - Accessed 11 May 2010 – Attachment 7.

⁸ Ministry of Health Fiji 2010, *Healthcare Reform - Fiji 2009-2010*, 6 January <http://www.health.gov.fj/articles/healthcare-reform--fiji-2009-2010.html> - Accessed 11 May 2010 – Attachment 8.

are impressive, given substantial resource constraints⁹ On the other hand, he also commented that additional qualified staff, medications, and equipment were still needed and pointed out that emergency services were poor.

The Australian Government website, *SmartTraveller* advises that ‘public hospitals and medical facilities in Fiji are generally not as well-equipped as hospitals in Australia in terms of specialist equipment and pharmaceuticals’. The US Department of State similarly advises travellers to Fiji that health care facilities in urban areas are adequate for treating routine medical problems. The US State Department warns that in rural areas the level of care is diminished and someone seeking medical treatment may find that staff are not as well-trained and there are shortages of medical supplies and medications. Emergency response is not well-rated due to shortages of ambulances, poorly equipped vehicles and a lack of training. Further comments include that medical emergencies and complex medical problems may be referred to experts in Australia, New Zealand, and the US.¹⁰

Heart Disease in Fiji

In 2009, the Fiji Ministry of Health reported that heart disease is the leading cause of death among Fijians.¹¹ The 1 April 2009 edition of *The Fiji College of General Practitioners*, reported that in 2007 the Ministry of Health reported 616 cases of Hypertensive Heart Disease and 1386 cases of Ischaemic Heart Disease, and that 1759 people have been diagnosed with diabetes, which is a leading cause of heart failure. (See also RRT Country Advice Service 2010, *Research Response FJI36545* for information about health care and kidney dialysis services in Fiji.) The journal comments that these statistics indicate that a large number of citizens suffer from heart disease. The journal further states that due to limited resources in Fiji, vital tests to identify, prevent, and treat heart disease, specifically echocardiograms, are not performed for all patients.¹²

The World Heart Federation (WHA) reports that the Pacific Island Countries, including Fiji, have the highest documented incidence of rheumatic heart disease among all nations in the world. Many experts attribute this prevalence to poor diet and high smoking rates.¹³ The WHA also reports that these countries do not have effective monitoring programs to prevent the occurrence of this disease nor adequate surgical facilities needed to lower the incidence rate. Limited medical facilities, geographic isolation among the islands, internal communication and travel challenges, and great distances to other more advanced nations with expertise and better equipped facilities all contribute to the problem.¹⁴

⁹ Flint, Dr. S, 2006, ‘Colonial War Memorial Hospital and the Fiji School of Medicine, Suva, 2006, Fiji’, *MedicineUncharted.org*, http://www.medicineuncharted.org/destinations/medical/Fiji_CWMHospital.html - Accessed 27 April 2010 – Attachment 9.

¹⁰ US Department of State 2010 *Fiji Country Specific Information*, 19 January, Medical Facilities and Health Information section http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1114.html#medical - Accessed 11 May 2010 – Attachment 10.

¹¹ ‘Heart disease tops death cause list: Official’ 2009, *Fijilive.com* 19 January <http://www.fijilive.com/news/2009/07/19/18404.Fijilive> - Accessed 11 May 2010 – Attachment 11.

¹² Saraf, P. & Saraf R 2009, ‘Integrated Approach in the Management of Chronic Heart Failure’, *Journal of The Fiji College of General Practitioners*, 1 April, vol.17, no. 1, p.6-7 <http://www.globalfamilydoctor.com/fiji/Docs/GP%20Vol%2017%20No%201%202009.pdf> - Accessed 7 May 2010 – Attachment 12

¹³ ‘Heart to heart from the coast’ 2007, *Fiji Times Online* website, 15 November <http://fijituwawa-news.blogspot.com/2007/11/heart-to-heart-from-gold-coast.html> - Accessed 11 May 2010 – Attachment 13

¹⁴ ‘Rheumatic heart disease workshop 2008’ *World Heart Federation* website April/May <http://www.world-heart-federation.org/publications/heart-beat-e-newsletter/heart-beat-aprilmay-2008/in-this-issue/rhd-workshop-2008/> - Accessed 11 May 2010 – Attachment 14.

According to the *Friends of Fiji Heart Foundation* website,¹⁵ valvular heart disease is another fatal disease afflicting hundred of Fijians who are unable to be treated due to the absence of Fijian medical facilities capable of performing necessary surgery. The option to be operated on overseas is beyond the financial means of most members of the population, according to the foundation.

New Initiatives in Treating Heart Disease and Outreach Programs

The Fiji Ministry of Health is well aware of the need for improved training and better heart disease treatment facilities and has launched some initiatives. The Ministry of Health has listed cardiology in the Health Strategic Plan 2007-2011 as one of several areas for targeted improvement in clinical services.¹⁶ A 27 September 2009 medical conference in Fiji brought doctors and cardiologists together from the Australian Gold Coast Medical Association, the Fiji Medical Association, and the Fiji College of General Practitioners. At the conference, a leading Australian cardiologist acknowledged that Fijian cardiologists were performing remarkable work with limited resources, but called for a strategy to develop a better provision of services to Fijians by linking with overseas experts.¹⁷

Several charitable organisations provide specialist care to heart disease patients in Fiji. According to a 15 November 2007 article in the *Fiji Times*, a Pacific Island exchange program was established that year with the John Flynn Hospital located in the Gold Coast of Australia. Two Fiji-born doctors working at John Flynn Hospital headed a program to tutor Fijian doctors in performing angiograms and angioplasty procedures.¹⁸

The Friends of Fiji Heart Foundation is an organisation composed of former Fijians now living in Auckland, New Zealand, working to provide free heart operations to needy recipients in Fiji. On an annual basis, since 2007, the foundation has raised money to send a 25-member team of cardiologists and other surgical staff to Fiji to perform heart operations and raise awareness of heart disease.¹⁹

Attachments

1. 'Mandatory retirement at 55' 2009, *Fiji Times Online* 15 April <http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=119273> - Accessed 7 May 2010.
2. Young, A. 2009, 'Fiji slashes retirement age in bid to cut costs' *nzherald.co.nz* website 17 April http://www.nzherald.co.nz/world/news/article.cfm?c_id=2&objectid=10567012 - Accessed 7 May 2010.

¹⁵ 'Welcome message' Friends of Fiji Heart Foundation website, <http://www.fofhf.org.nz/index.html> - Accessed 12 May 2010 – Attachment 15.

¹⁶ World Health Organisation 2009, *Regional Office for the Western Pacific - Fiji* http://www.wpro.who.int/countries/2009/fij/national_health_priorities.htm - Accessed 11 May 2010 – Attachment 16.

¹⁷ 'Heart doctor stresses needs' 2009, *Fiji Times Online*, 27 September <http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=130311> - Accessed 11 May 2010 – Attachment 17.

¹⁸ 'Heart to heart from the coast' 2007, *Fiji Times Online* website, 15 November <http://fijituwawa-news.blogspot.com/2007/11/heart-to-heart-from-gold-coast.html> - Accessed 11 May 2010 – Attachment 13.

¹⁹ 'Heart to heart from the coast' 2007, *Fiji Times Online* website, 15 November <http://fijituwawa-news.blogspot.com/2007/11/heart-to-heart-from-gold-coast.html> - Accessed 11 May 2010 – Attachment 13 & 'Welcome message' Friends of Fiji Heart Foundation website, <http://www.fofhf.org.nz/index.html> - Accessed 12 May 2010 – Attachment 15.

3. 'Retirement policy implementation on schedule' *Fiji Government Online Portal* website 29 January
http://www.fiji.gov.fj/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=960:retirement-policy-implementation-on-schedule&catid=71:press-releases&Itemid=155 - Accessed 7 May 2010.
4. Amosa, D., Narayan, J., Naz, R., & Pandaram, A. 2009, 'Fixing Fiji's civil service overweight problem: a challenge', *Pacific Economic Bulletin*, 2 July, vol.24 pp. 43-53
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5. World Health Organisation 2009, *Regional Office for the Western Pacific - Fiji*
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6. Fiji Ministry of Health 2008, 'Expressions of Interest: Laboratory Information System for Colonial War Memorial Hospital, Suva, Fiji Islands', *Fiji Health Sector Improvement Program*, January, http://www.health.gov.fj/LIS_EOI.pdf - Accessed 27 April 2010.
7. 'Fiji Hospitals/Doctors' 2010, *travmed.com* website
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8. Ministry of Health Fiji 2010, *Healthcare Reform - Fiji 2009-2010*, 6 January
<http://www.health.gov.fj/articles/healthcare-reform---fiji-2009-2010.html> - Accessed 11 May 2010.
9. Flint, Dr. S, 2006, 'Colonial War Memorial Hospital and the Fiji School of Medicine, Suva, 2006, Fiji', *MedicineUncharted.org*,
http://www.medicineuncharted.org/destinations/medical/Fiji_CWMHospital.html - Accessed 27 April 2010.
10. US Department of State 2010 *Fiji Country Specific Information*, 19 January, Medical Facilities and Health Information section
http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1114.html#medical - Accessed 11 May 2010.
11. 'Heart disease tops death cause list: Official' 2009, *Fijilive.com* 19 January
<http://www.fijilive.com/news/2009/07/19/18404.Fijilive> - Accessed 11 May 2010.
12. Saraf, P. & Saraf R 2009, 'Integrated Approach in the Management of Chronic Heart Failure', *Journal of The Fiji College of General Practitioners*, 1 April, vol.17, no. 1, p.6-7
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<http://www.world-heart-federation.org/publications/heart-beat-e-newsletter/heart-beat-aprilmay-2008/in-this-issue/rhd-workshop-2008/> - Accessed 11 May 2010.
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16. World Health Organisation 2009, *Regional Office for the Western Pacific - Fiji*
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17. 'Heart doctor stresses needs' 2009, *Fiji Times Online*, 27 September
<http://www.fjtimes.com/story.aspx?id=130311> - Accessed 11 May 2010.