



Royal Flying Doctor Service

The Royal Flying Doctor Service Clinical and Health Services Research Committee

Introduction

The Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) plays a vital role in the provision of medical services to people living and working in remote and rural regions of Australia. The RFDS operates a 24-hour, seven-days-a-week (24/7) aeromedical retrieval service, supported by a 24/7 telehealth system, to patients who live, work or travel in remote and rural Australia and who experience a medical emergency requiring definitive care in a tertiary hospital. The RFDS also provides the following services to people in remote and rural areas: primary healthcare; a 24/7 telehealth system for individuals or health workers who require medical assistance or advice from an RFDS doctor; non-emergency patient ground transport service in Victoria (Vic), New South Wales (NSW) and South Australia (SA); emergency patient ground transport in SA; medical chests; oral health services; outreach programs; health promotion and education activities; clinic charter services; and repatriation services.

In addition to service provision, the RFDS is committed to representing priority issues within the sector and to promoting and championing better health outcomes for people in rural and remote Australia. The RFDS is dedicated to ensuring excellent client outcomes, reducing the disparities in chronic illness and life expectancy that exist between rural, remote and city residents, improving access to primary health services and improving the social determinants of health in rural and remote communities.

The RFDS recognises that to achieve maximum impact and to “give voice” to remote and rural Australians, research and policy responses must be founded on a credible evidence base. Best practice in health involves utilising the highest quality available evidence. **Maximising success in championing improved outcomes for rural and remote Australians requires both an evidence-based narrative and an evidence-based approach, supported by appropriate data.**

In order to support evidence-based research and policy responses, the RFDS of Australia established a Research and Policy Unit in mid-2015, located in the Federation Office (Canberra). The Unit’s role is to gather evidence about, and recommend solutions to, overcoming barriers to poor health outcomes and limited health service access for patients and communities cared for by RFDS programs.

In addition to facilitating internal capacity around research, the RFDS sought expressions of interest from appropriately qualified researchers, with a mix of skills and research interests, to be part of the newly formed **RFDS Clinical and Health Services Research Committee (‘the Committee’)**. Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and consumers of remote health services are represented on the Committee.

Purpose of the Committee

The Committee works with internal RFDS Sections and Operations (which are generally state-based), and external researchers, to identify, seek funding for, and undertake clinical research and health services research that contributes to improved aeromedical, primary health, telehealth and workforce outcomes in remote and rural Australia. This research is separate to, but may help to inform, internal RFDS service evaluations, public policy discussion papers, or other research activities undertaken by the Research and Policy Unit.



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The Committee also works with internal RFDS Sections and Operations to promote internal research capacity building, and with external organisations to facilitate permanent and productive relationships.

The Committee held its first meeting in May, 2016 and continues to meet face-to-face, or by teleconference, on a regular basis.

Click [here](#) for members of the Committee.

Vision and Mission of the Committee

The Committee has developed both a vision and mission statement.

Vision: Improving health outcomes for people in remote and rural regions.

Mission: Driving change to implement global best practice in clinical health service delivery through research and its dissemination.

Defining primary healthcare

The Committee uses the Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute's (APHCRI) definition of primary healthcare (<http://aphcri.anu.edu.au/about-us/what-primary-health-care>). APHCRI defines primary healthcare as:

Socially appropriate, universally accessible, scientifically sound first level care provided by a suitably trained workforce supported by integrated referral systems and in a way that gives priority to those most need, maximises community and individual self-reliance and participation and involves collaboration with other sectors. It includes the following:

- *health promotion*
- *illness prevention*
- *care of the sick*
- *advocacy*
- *community development.*

Research priorities

The Committee is actively seeking partnerships with external organisations to seek funding for, and undertake research in, the following areas of remote and rural health:

- Primary health care—e.g. How can the RFDS, in collaboration with other healthcare organisations, improve patient outcomes in primary care?
- Disease prevention—e.g. Focus on disenfranchised remote and rural communities and models for improving community participation in disease prevention e.g. prevention of kidney disease or cardiac disease;
- Chronic diseases
- Indigenous health
- Role of technology in health care
- Mental health—e.g. How can primary health better detect mental health problems and how can these be prevented?



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Assessing potential research projects

In order to determine whether to support or participate in internal or external research projects, and to apply for research funding with potential partners, the Committee developed a comprehensive guide for assessing research proposals. A brief summary of the criteria for assessing research proposals is provided and includes:

- Relevance to the RFDS and our priority research areas;
- Quality of the research protocol, including information on:
 - the context of the study; and
 - level of engagement with RFDS programs and staff, consumers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians;
- Clearly developed aims and hypotheses;
- Robust research methodology, including:
 - Well-developed study design;
 - Appropriate sampling techniques;
 - Availability of materials or personnel for the study;
 - Well planned implementation processes;
 - A strategy for analysing results; and
 - A strategy around knowledge translation;
- Ethics approval or a plan for the study to be submitted to an ethics committee; and
- A well-developed and realistic budget.

These criteria provide a guide to assessing research proposals, and are not meant to be prescriptive.

Contact details

If you have a research idea or proposal, and would like to partner with the RFDS to conduct research, please contact us to discuss your proposal.

In the first instance, please email enquiries@rfd.org.au and include PROPOSED RESEARCH in the subject line.