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## MEDIA RELEASE

### RFDS COMMITTED TO IMPROVING HEALTH OUTCOMES FOR REMOTE COMMUNITIES

The Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) in Tasmania is committed to assisting to improve the health outcomes of remote and rural Tasmanians. Following the release of the RFDS *Provision of Primary Health Care Service Strategic Study* in April the RFDS commissioned a survey to gather community feedback about the importance of improving health outcomes for those living in rural and remote areas of Tasmania.

The community survey research report conducted by EMRS during July 2015 surveyed 800 respondents, aged 18+ across the geographical regions of Tasmania. The sample size was robust and yielded a 95% confidence level.

The key findings of the survey revealed that:

- > 67% of respondents agreed that Tasmanians living in rural and remote areas experience poorer health outcomes than those living in larger cities;
- > 94% of respondents said that it was important to improve the health outcomes of Tasmanians living in remote and rural areas; and
- > 60% of respondents reported that they would be 'very likely' or 'somewhat likely' to support the funding of targeted RFDS programs to improve access and better health outcomes for Tasmanians living in remote and rural areas.

RFDS Tasmania, Chief Executive Officer, John Kirwan said that these results reinforce the submission made by the RFDS to the State Government on the need to include health outcome KPIs, as part of the White Paper reforms. "Unless we start making these poor health outcomes transparent, develop and implement strategies and report on progress to close this gap, we will not be able to achieve the Governments stated goal of the best health outcomes for Tasmania by 2025. These results show that all Tasmanians are supportive of initiatives to improve the health outcomes for rural and remote Tasmanians."

The survey found that 92% of respondents indicated that offering training to health practitioners was important. In addition, 88% of respondents considered that providing GP and other community-level services as important in remote and rural areas of the state.

The findings reinforce the KP Health *Provision of Primary Health Care Service Strategic Study* research highlighting that rural Tasmanians experience poorer health outcomes and poorer access to general practice services than non-rural Tasmanians. This report can be accessed at <http://www.flyingdoctor.org.au/IgnitionSuite/uploads/docs/RFDS%20Tas%20Primary%20Health%20Care%20Public%20Report.pdf?130842435738596296>

The RFDS Tasmania Board, at its meeting on the 20 August in Hobart, received a presentation from EMRS and discussed the survey findings. The survey identified several opportunities for RFDS Tasmania to engage in assisting or providing rural and remote primary health care programs. This includes

- > Enhanced dental services, in particular, with a focus on expanding the RFDS sponsored primary school screening program and other areas in consultation with key partners;
- > Improving the patient care experience through rebuilding and expanding our aeromedical shelters to allow patient transfers to be undertaken under cover. The current focus is on rebuilding and expanding the shelter at Burnie Airport and following our meeting at Hobart Airport we will explore the options that have been presented to us;
- > The development with RFDS Victoria of a integrated patient transfer service, on both sides of Bass Strait; a bed to bed model for those that have to go, or return from the mainland;
- > The implementation of a targeted primary care program, with a strong focus on screening and the early detection of risk and health conditions, suitable health promotion and prevention activities and the development of local capacity building;
- > Due consideration of a range of current and future tender opportunities, both as a primary care provider or partnering with other providers; and
- > Ensuring RFDS strategies and activities are directed at improving health outcomes. We will work to ensure they are complementary to the Government's *A Healthy Tasmania*; a new strategic direction in preventative health that is yet to be released.

John Kirwan said the survey adds voice to support the focus on improving primary health care services in disadvantaged communities across the state. "The RFDS are now partnering with a range of stakeholders to address the inadequacies in rural and remote health care. Programs are currently being developed in line with the needs identified in dental health and health promotion and screening".

"As a charitable, not-for-profit organisation the Board has indicated that we will now implement appropriate fundraising to support these programs to improve the health outcomes of remote and rural Tasmanians".

John Kirwan, CEO, RFDS Tasmania is available for interview.

For further information please contact:  
Mary Frost  
Royal Flying Doctor Service Tasmania  
Mobile: 0438 100 076  
Email: [Mary.Frost@rfdstas.org.au](mailto:Mary.Frost@rfdstas.org.au)