

Media Release
28 June 2016

Government pledge to keep country doctors and dentists flying

Doctors and dentists will continue and expand service delivery across country Australia thanks to dual Government promises to extend the Royal Flying Doctor Service's aeromedical program through to mid-2020, and to fund expanded dental service delivery.

After the release of the Flying Doctor's election policy proposals yesterday, Rural Health Minister Senator the Hon Fiona Nash pledged a re-elected Liberal-National Government will continue funding for the Flying Doctor's emergency and primary health services.

Minister Nash also pledged an additional \$11 million over two years to allow the Flying Doctors to extend dental outreach services to eligible residents of country Australia who otherwise miss out on access to dental care.

The Flying Doctors 2016 Federal Election proposals are for the next Government to:

1. Conduct a non-partisan inquiry to recommend actions for improved health outcomes for remote and rural Australians.
2. Establish a Remote and Rural Dental Outreach program to enable better access to dentistry and oral health in under-served parts of remote and rural Australia.
3. Commit the Council of Australian Governments to a national injury prevention and safety promotion plan focusing on remote and rural Australia.

Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia CEO Martin Lavery "Minister Nash and the Liberal-National Government have proven with these two promises they understand health challenges in country Australia, and have acted quickly to provide solutions.

"Continuing our aeromedical program in country Australia until mid-2020 guarantees access to doctors for those who live in remote areas. It also guarantees our aeromedical service will continue to provide emergency care to people in remote Australia.

"Providing \$11 million over the next two years for Flying Doctor dental outreach will allow expansion of our existing dental services. In Tasmania, it means we can start a brand new service where previously we've simply not had funds available.

"On behalf of country Australians who need certainty in accessing medical and dental care, I call on the Opposition and the Opposition Leader Mr Shorten in particular to match the Government's promise before election day," Mr Lavery said.

Media are invited to launch events being held at Launceston Airport today Tuesday 28 June at 2pm, and at the Rockhampton Airport at tomorrow Wednesday 29 June at 10am.

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Media Backgrounder

RFDS MISSION: Excellence in aeromedical and primary health care across Australia

WHAT WE DO:

Medical Evacuations – 24-hour aeromedical emergency services

GP & Nurse Clinics – Regular fly-in fly-out GP, nursing and allied health clinics

Telehealth – Over the phone medical assistance or advice from an RFDS doctor

Dental Care – Oral health services on a fly-in fly-out or mobile basis

Mental Health – Provision of mental health services in Qld, NSW and Central Australia

Health Education – Programs which help get exercise and better nutrition adopted

Patient Transfers - Inter-hospital transfers by both air and road

Research – Provision of rural health service information and statistics

HISTORY: More than 100 years ago Reverend John Flynn witnessed the struggle of pioneers living in remote areas and recognised the need for medical services in the outback. He launched the first aero-medical service in May of 1928 in Queensland, which flew 20,000 miles in its first year of operation.

Since then the RFDS has grown into the largest aeromedical organisation in the world with a fleet of 66 aircraft, 23 aero-bases, 48 road patient vehicles, and a country doctor's waiting room spanning 71.6 million square kilometres.

Although the Flying Doctor is best known for emergency retrieval work, the delivery of vital primary healthcare services has become a key focus for the RFDS in the 21st century. Using the latest in aviation, medical and communications technology, the Flying Doctor delivers primary healthcare and 24-hour emergency services to those who live, work and travel in rural and remote Australia, with over 290,000 patient contacts in the last year.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

The RFDS comprises seven organisations, called Sections or Operations, working around Australia and under a federated joint venture structure. These are the Queensland Section, South Eastern Section, Victorian Section, Tasmanian Section, Central Operations and Western Operations.

The Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia is located in Canberra and works closely with government and industry, while also conducting research into national rural health issues. The RFDS is a charity, registered with and regulated by the Australian Charities and Not-for-profit Commission. It has been named Australia's most reputable charity by the AMR Charity Reputation index for the last five years in a row.

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