

Media Release

## World Oral Health Day: Flying Doctor research shows a healthy mouth is linked to a healthy body

Flying Doctor research shows oral disease, particularly when left untreated, is associated with certain cardiovascular diseases, respiratory illnesses, and other chronic diseases.

Other diseases include endocarditis, (inflammation of the lining of the heart) stroke, aspiration pneumonia, diabetes, kidney disease, and some adverse pregnancy outcomes, are also associated with poor oral health.

Flying Doctor research highlights the oral health and dental care access disparities between the city and the bush. These include:

- **Childhood cavities** are 55% higher for remote area children than children in major cities, and the number of filled teeth in remote area is double that of city children.
- **Tooth Decay:** A quarter (23%) of adults in major cities have untreated tooth decay, but this rises to one third (37%) of remote area residents;
- **Indigenous:** More than half (57%) of Indigenous Australians have one or more teeth affected by decay;
- **Visits to the Dentist:** Six in ten (63%) major city adults visited a dentist in a year, compared to little more than four in ten (45%) visiting a dentist in remote areas;
- **Extractions:** One in three (33%) remote area residents had a tooth extraction in a year compared to little more than one in ten (12%) people from major cities;
- **Lack of Dentists:** Cities have three times as many working dentists than country areas, with 72 dentists for every 100,000 people in cities compared to only 22 for every 100,000 people in the country.

“No one will be surprised there are more dentists in cities than in the bush. However, a consequence is greater decay in mouths of country people, particularly children. This decay is entirely preventable, and it’s making people sick”, says Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia CEO Martin Laverty.

To read, download or share *Filling the gap: disparities in oral health access and outcomes between major cities and remote and rural Australia*, go to [www.flyingdoctor.org.au/research](http://www.flyingdoctor.org.au/research).

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## Media Backgrounder

**RFDS MISSION:** To provide 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 healthy eating 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 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 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 Royal Flying Doctor Service is comprised of seven organisations, called Sections or Operations, working around Australia and under a federated 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.