

Media Release

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## Election must promise solution to rural health crisis

Remote and rural Australians have up to three times the rate of chronic illness than people in cities. Country people die an average two years earlier than city people.

Seven out of ten babies in Northern Australia have scabies before their first birthday. Indigenous child injury deaths are three times higher than non-Indigenous children. Country children have twice as many decayed, missing, or filled teeth than city children.

Across almost every measure, Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) research shows evidence of country residents being, on average, sicker and having less access to health services than city residents.

Flying Doctor research shows rural Australians see doctors at half the rate of city people, medical specialists at a third the rate, and mental health professionals at a fifth the rate. Remote and rural Australia has a third of the number of dentists working in city areas.

In a plea for better health outcomes and improved access to health services in the bush, the Flying Doctor today released its first ever election policy statement calling for all major parties contesting the 2016 Federal election to promise, if elected on 3 July, 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 Laverty said “The Flying Doctor exists to overcome barriers in access to healthcare for country Australians.

“The bush health crisis is not new. It’s not the fault of any person or government. It is a crisis the next elected government must promise, during this election campaign, to address. That’s why the Flying Doctor is speaking out during this election campaign.”

The Flying Doctor election statement is at: <https://www.flyingdoctor.org.au/about-the-rfds/policy-statement/>

Martin Laverty, CEO Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia is available for interview.



Royal Flying Doctor Service

## 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 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 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.

**Media Contact: Lana Mitchell**

Email: [Lana.mitchell@rfd.org.au](mailto:Lana.mitchell@rfd.org.au)

Ph: 02 6269 5505, Mobile: 0401 946 282

**Media contact: Lana Mitchell 0401 946 282**

