

MEDIA RELEASE

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Darwin Airport home to new 'Flying Doctor' Base

Darwin International Airport (DIA) is set to become the home of the 25th aeromedical base for the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS).

The RFDS has been evacuating patients from Central Australia and the Kimberley region to Royal Darwin Hospital for almost 80 years, utilising a combination of hangar sub-lease and shared access arrangements with general aviation providers at Darwin Airport.

A new 15-year lease agreement between DIA and RFDS Central Operations will see DIA construct the \$4 million facility to RFDS design specifications.

The purpose-built RFDS Darwin Base will be located on a greenfields site adjacent to the NT Health hangar facility currently used to service the commercial 'Top End' aeromedical contract.

Last year the RFDS transported more than 2,600 Territorians – equivalent to seven patients per day in the Northern Territory.

John Lynch, CEO of RFDS Central Operations, said the project would enable the RFDS to fulfil its strategic goal of providing the finest care through the entire north-south corridor of South Australia and Northern Territory.

"Every three hours, somewhere in the Territory, the 'Flying Doctor' is assisting someone who is in need of an emergency medical evacuation," Mr Lynch said.

"Set for completion in June 2017, our new Darwin aeromedical facility will enable the RFDS to deliver enhanced care and comfort for our patients heading into Darwin," Mr Lynch said.

"The modern facility will create a streamlined patient transfer process, as well as provide a modern and safe workplace for Darwin staff, guests and our NT Health service-delivery partners.

"It will also offer the NT Government additional aeromedical capacity in the 'Top End' – and a cost-effective option for the repatriation of low acuity patients from Royal Darwin Hospital to hospitals such as Katherine and Gove," Mr Lynch said.

NT Airports CEO, Ian Kew, said Darwin Airport was proud to be the home of this new premium facility for such a critical and valuable remote medical service in the Northern Territory.

"This further solidifies our long-standing relationship with the Royal Flying Doctor Service and we look forward to working with RFDS well into the future," Mr Kew said.

Local design and construction company Ahrens has been awarded the contract for the construction of the RFDS Darwin Base which will commence in February.

“Once again, NT Airports is contracting a local construction company to undertake this build – we are proud to support the Territory,” said NT Airports Director Property, Ross Baynes.

The aviation section of the new facility will include a modern engineering workshop and store with the capacity to hangar up to four RFDS aircraft – including one long-haul aeromedical jet – as well as parking for up to six aircraft on the tarmac apron.

Features of the medical and patient transfer facility include time-critical design factors and private patient management bays, with a separate waiting area/lounge for charter guests such as NT Health clinicians delivering remote clinics.

The new Darwin Base will follow \$18 million of investment by the RFDS in enhanced health services and tourism attractions in the NT over the past five years, including:

- replacement of two ‘flying intensive care units’;
- redevelopment of the RFDS Alice Springs Base;
- refurbishment of the award-winning Alice Springs Tourist Facility;
- construction of 13-unit townhouse complex for staff and visiting service providers; and
- development of the Darwin Tourist Facility at Stokes Hill Wharf.

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MEDIA CONTACT

Charlie Paterson
General Manager, Marketing & PR
RFDS Central Operations
0422 233 134

Claire Eltringham
Communications & Media
NT Airports
0402 088 141

MEDIA BACKGROUNDER

- Since 1928, the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) has provided 24-hour emergency medical services to those who live, work and travel throughout Australia.
- With a fleet of 67 aircraft located at 24 aeromedical bases across the country, the RFDS is the largest and most comprehensive aeromedical organisation in the world.
- Today, it provides emergency aeromedical and primary health care services to more than 280,000 Australians every year – equivalent to one person every two minutes.
- The RFDS receives a mix of financial support from the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments, public donations and corporate sponsorships to deliver its emergency aeromedical, primary health care and preventative health care services.
- The RFDS relies on fundraising initiatives and donations from the community to finance its capital-raising program, including the purchase and medical fit-out of its Pilatus PC-12 aircraft – at a cost of more than \$7 million each.

Northern Territory

- The RFDS Alice Springs Base was opened in 1939. It serves an area of 1.25 million square kilometres – from the SA/NT border to as far north as Newcastle Waters (Elliott) and Barkly Tableland.
- Operating from the RFDS Alice Springs Base:
 - The RFDS is the NT Government's preferred provider of fixed-wing inter-hospital transfer and retrieval services in Central Australia.
 - The RFDS is the NT Government's preferred provider of NT Clinic Charter (NTCC) services to the NT Department of Health in Central Australia.
 - The RFDS is a member of the NT Government's Long-Haul Passenger Air Charter service based in Darwin.
 - The RFDS operates six (6) pressurised Pilatus PC-12 aircraft from its Alice Springs Base, including
 - four (4) medically-equipped aircraft; and
 - two (2) charter-configured aircraft.
- In addition to its aeromedical services, the RFDS also delivers mental health care and primary/allied health care to Central Australians, including, annually:
 - 6,600 mental health consultations in remote communities via its Mental Health Services in Rural and Regional Australia (MHSRRA) program; and
 - 17,000 primary/allied health consultations facilitated by the transport of NT Health clinicians to remote communities.
- In addition to its aeromedical services, the RFDS invests, employs and promotes tourism in the NT via:
 - its award-winning Alice Springs Tourist Facility which attracts more than 50,000 domestic and international tourists annually to Central Australia; and
 - its newly opened (July 2016) Darwin Tourist Facility in partnership with Tourism NT which features the 'Bombing of Darwin' experience and the history of the RFDS at Stokes Hill Wharf, forecast to attract over 80,000 tourists per annum.

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