

MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday, 17 November 2016

New \$7 million flying intensive care unit begins service

A new 'flying intensive care unit' has been formally dedicated for emergency aeromedical service on behalf of the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) to communities in South and Central Australia.

The \$7 million aircraft, VH-FXN (Foxtrot-X-ray-November), is the second aeromedically-equipped Pilatus PC-12 aircraft to be delivered in a two-year program to replace four ageing aircraft in the RFDS Central Operations' fleet by mid-2017.

The new aircraft joins last year's acquisition of VH-FXJ in featuring state-of-the art avionics and emergency services communications technology. It replaced the retired aircraft – VH-FMP or 'Papa' – which had flown 17,000 hours over 21 years of service.

In its first two months of service, 'November' has already transported 173 patients from 31 regional and remote locations throughout South Australia. Its maiden flight on September 6 was the retrieval of an 11-year-old boy with spinal injuries from Yorketown on SA's Yorke Peninsula.

RFDS Central Operations Chairman, Loretta Reynolds, said the purchase of the four PC-12s to be followed in late 2018 by the delivery of the medically-equipped Pilatus PC-24 jet. The RFDS PC-24 Jet will be the first permanently configured aeromedical jet in SA.

"The investment in new aircraft will ensure RFDS Central Operations continues to deliver the finest care to the 9,000 patients aeromedically transferred in South and Central Australia each year," Ms Reynolds says.

"The capital-raising and acquisition program of the four medically-equipped PC-12s has been supported with a total of \$4 million in assistance from the Commonwealth Government, along with the financial support of our corporate sponsors, fundraising and donations from the community.

"We thank them for their generosity, and commitment to the Flying Doctor."

The Assistant Minister for Rural Health, The Hon Dr David Gillespie MP, said the Coalition Government is committed to improving the health care of people in rural and remote Australia and will continue to provide access to health care, no matter where they live.

"More than ever, the world-renowned Royal Flying Doctor Service is an essential component of the Government's commitment to rural and remote Australia," Dr Gillespie says.

"The Coalition Government wants to ensure the Royal Flying Doctor Service remains the great service provider that it is – contemporary, competitive and consumer-focused – delivering high-quality, responsive medical services to people across Australia."

John Lynch, CEO of RFDS Central Operations, said the investment in state-of-the-art aircraft was a key element of a five-year, \$65 million capital expenditure program approved by the Board, which included completion of the new Adelaide Base, construction of the RFDS Darwin Tourist Facility and medical equipment upgrades of \$1 million per annum.

“These major projects are critical to the RFDS maintaining its proven track record of innovation, outstanding patient care and the highest safety standards to benefit our staff, health delivery partners and the community we serve,” Mr Lynch says.

“The continuing support of the community, our government partners, donors, corporate sponsors and volunteers – will be essential to us meeting our future financial challenges.”

VH-FXN is one of 11 medically-equipped Pilatus PC-12 aircraft owned and operated by RFDS Central Operations across its aeromedical bases in Adelaide, Port Augusta and Alice Springs.

Mr Lynch said demand for RFDS’ aeromedical services was not only for emergency retrievals from rural and remote areas, but also reflected the growth in the number of patients being transferred between regional and metropolitan hospitals to enable specialist treatment or life-saving surgery.

Over the years to come, VH-FXN will continue to assist members of the community, delivering services ranging from the:

- emergency evacuation of the injured or critically-ill from outback communities;
- transfer of patients from country hospitals to major hospitals in Adelaide for higher levels of care;
- aeromedical transfer of patients interstate for live-saving surgery such as organ transplant and heart surgery on newborn babies; and
- delivery of essential primary health care such as GP consultations and immunisation of children during ‘fly-in’ health clinics to remote communities.

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