

MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday 24 October 2019



RFDS announces first Patient Transfer Facility in regional SA

The Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) has today announced a landmark project to establish the *RFDS Mount Gambier Patient Transfer Facility*, the first of its kind in regional South Australia.

The *RFDS Mount Gambier Patient Transfer Facility* will enhance patient care and operational response times for critical patients, as well as upgrading comfort levels for patients, crews and service-delivery partners.

RFDS crews land twice a day somewhere in the South East – at least once a day at Mount Gambier Airport – to airlift residents and tourists to one of Adelaide's major hospitals for life-saving care or specialist medical treatment.

Mount Gambier patients – like those at every other rural, regional and outback aerodrome in the state – are transferred into a RFDS aircraft standing on the tarmac at all times of day and night, in the elements and in all extremes of seasonal weather.

To improve patient comfort and care, the RFDS has purchased an existing aircraft hangar on site, and will refurbish half the structure into an indoor patient care facility and retain the other half as a traditional hangar for aircraft parking and patient loading under cover, when required.

The converted hangar will enable RFDS and SAAS MedSTAR crews to stabilise a deteriorating patient more effectively prior to flight or, more simply, enable the transfer of patients into the aircraft under cover and protected from extremes of weather.

"The *RFDS Mount Gambier Patient Transfer Facility* will set a new standard of care provided by the RFDS and its service-delivery partners at regional aerodromes across South Australia," Tony Vaughan ASM, Chief Executive of RFDS Central Operations, said on the tarmac at Mount Gambier Airport today.

"The RFDS is focused on driving continual improvement in our care for every patient and at every touchpoint, and we're delighted that the community has come on board and supported this landmark project every step of the way," Mr Vaughan said.

"We directed the \$70,000 donation received back in May from our Mount Gambier RFDS Support Group towards the purchase of the hangar, and the District Council of Grant has been fantastic in waiving costs and offering in-kind services now and into the future," he said.

District Council of Grant Acting CEO Jane Fetherstonhaugh said the Council was proud to support the project by providing civil services to the building and waiving rent/lease charges on a long-term basis.

"Council identify this as a landmark project, setting a new standard for patient transport and have entered into a peppercorn lease arrangement for a period of twenty one years with the RFDS," Mrs Fetherstonhaugh said.

"This means that Council will waive the cost of utilities, lease fees, rates and other costs associated with the lease of the land to support the RFDS in providing this critical service," she said.

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The *RFDS Mount Gambier Patient Transfer Facility* will feature:

- **stabilisation bay** for retrieval teams to manage deteriorating patients prior to flight;
- **climate controlled** environment for the transfer of patients between SA Ambulance (SAAS) and RFDS crews;
- **weather protection** for the loading of patients into aircraft during extreme weather conditions;
- **spacious floorplan** to accommodate multiple patients and crews at the same time;
- **modern amenities** such as a private patient bathroom and crew rest areas;
- **aircraft hangar** to provide an undercover area with optimum artificial lighting for engineers to perform unscheduled aircraft maintenance; and
- **secure parking** to protect ambulances stationed at the facility.

The SA Ambulance Service (SAAS) will also support the new facility and patients by locating an ambulance at the *RFDS Mount Gambier Patient Transfer Facility* for use by RFDS and SAAS MedSTAR retrieval teams. This additional capacity will ensure patients are transferred in a timely manner with minimal impact on ambulance resources in Mount Gambier.

Andrew Thomas, Operations Manager, SAAS, said the RFDS was a highly valued service-delivery partner, and the hangar redevelopment would ensure those living in the Lower South East will continue to access the very best health care.

“The significant investment by the RFDS in this important infrastructure, supported by the SAAS contribution of an ambulance on site, will enable RFDS and SAAS MedSTAR teams to jointly deliver a better patient experience and more seamless patient journey.”

Overall works for the *RFDS Mount Gambier Patient Transfer Facility* project are budgeted at \$500,000, and include the purchase of the existing hangar, concrete flooring and all related structural and refurbishment costs.

Ahrens Group Pty Ltd has been awarded the head contractor of the design, construction and refurbishment project, and local trades will be sourced wherever possible to complete the works.

“Just like our aircraft and medical equipment, this infrastructure will be funded solely by our fundraising and donations from the community,” Mr Vaughan said.

“Today we are launching a local fundraising campaign that will see all donations received from the Lower South East region between now and Christmas directed to completing the *RFDS Mount Gambier Patient Transfer Facility* project,” he said.

“In addition to monetary support, we are also seeking support from local trades such as electrical, carpentry, painting and air-conditioning, which can provide in-kind professional services and make significant cost-savings to the project.”

The refurbishment work is scheduled to commence within weeks, and it is anticipated the facility will be fully operational by the New Year.

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EDITOR'S NOTES

- Vision opportunities will be made available at 0930 today (24 October) at Mt Gambier Airport, including RFDS aircraft and SAAS ambulance alongside the purchased hangar.
- RFDS Central Operations CEO Tony Vaughan, District Council of Grant CEO Jane Fetherstonhaugh and SA Ambulance Service Operations Manager Andrew Thomas, will be available for interviews on request. Please access via Airport Administration Office.
- Mt Gambier was the top landing location (outside RFDS aeromedical bases in Adelaide and Port Augusta) in 2018/19.
- The transfer of patients between hospitals in South Australia is funded by the Government of South Australia.

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ABOUT THE RFDS

Established in 1928 by the Reverend John Flynn (Australian \$20 note), the RFDS is the largest and most comprehensive aeromedical organisation in the world.

In addition to the aeromedical retrieval of the critically ill or injured, the RFDS also delivers a broad range of essential primary and preventative health care services, including tele-health, mental health, oral health and chronic disease management.

Today, the RFDS provides the finest care to more than 330,000 Australians each year – equivalent to one person every two minutes.

In addition to assisting those living, working and travelling in regional, rural and remote Australia, the RFDS also delivers critical support to those who live in urban centres. This includes the regular transfer of patients to interstate hospitals for life-saving surgery such as organ transplant and heart surgery on newborn babies.

The RFDS is a not-for-profit organisation. While supported by Commonwealth, State and Territory governments, the RFDS relies on bequests, sponsorships and donations to bridge the gap in its operational funding and to purchase its 'flying intensive care units' at a cost of more than \$7 million each.

RFDS Central Operations is responsible for delivering 24/7 emergency aeromedical and essential primary health care services throughout South Australia and the southern half of the Northern Territory. It operates four aeromedical bases located in Adelaide, Port Augusta, Alice Springs and Darwin, as well as three primary health care facilities in Marree, Andamooka and Marla in outback South Australia.

The RFDS has been voted Australia's Most Reputable Charity for the past eight years in a row by the Reputation Institute Charity Reputation Index.