



**The Hon Tony Abbott MP  
Minister for Health and Ageing**

**David Tollner MP  
Member for Solomon**

**Senator Nigel Scullion  
Senator for the Northern Territory**

**MEDIA RELEASE**

23 March 2006

ABB034/06

**National trauma centre for Northern Territory**

The Minister for Health and Ageing, Tony Abbott; the Member for Solomon, David Tollner; and Northern Territory Senator Nigel Scullion today announced that the Howard Government is delivering on a major health election commitment.

“The Howard Government has finalized arrangements for implementing a commitment of \$65.8 million over four years to establish a National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre at the Royal Darwin Hospital,” Mr Abbott said.

“This will provide not only the Northern Territory but Australia with a first class national health emergency response point to deal with disasters and major incidents in our region.”

The centre will ensure Australia can receive and treat casualties at the first line of reception should there be another major incident or natural disaster on the scale of the Bali bombings, or a natural disaster like the Indian Ocean tsunami of Boxing Day 2004.

“It benefits the Territory by ensuring that the additional capacity, including operating theatres, burns beds and a Medicare-funded MRI machine, will also be used on a day to day basis by Territorians when not required for such events,” Mr Tollner said.

“It also recognises the standing of Royal Darwin Hospital and the talents of the people who work there,” Senator Scullion said.

The centre will be run by the Northern Territory Government under contract to the Federal Government. The funding is over above what the Commonwealth already provides to the Territory for public hospital services.

Funding includes \$1.7 million allocated by the Commonwealth to the Northern Territory last year to begin engaging specialist staff, review burns treatment capacity, purchase medical and pharmaceutical supplies and to train staff for the proposed centre.

A further \$1 million over four years has been allocated to program management and planning within the Government on related critical care and trauma response issues.

At RDH the funding will:

---

- expand the capacity of the hospital's burns unit with 10 'burns capable' beds in a dedicated burns-acute surgical ward which will include stockpiled dressings, specialist medications and equipment;
- establish a 10-bed extended emergency care unit within the existing hospital emergency department and establish a capacity to convert the critical care unit to enable extra intensive care and high dependency unit facilities to respond to a national emergency;
- increase the number of surgical and orthopaedic acute care beds;
- reactivate five operating theatres, bringing the total number of operating theatres at Royal Darwin Hospital to 10;
- providing emergency stocks of pharmaceuticals and medical equipment;
- increase the number of rehabilitation beds;
- provide access to incident-ready radiology facilities, including a Magnetic Resonance Imaging machine;
- enhance training of incident-ready staff;
- enhance arrangements for the rapid deployment of a skilled and trained medical workforce both from within the Northern Territory and from other states and territories;
- establish a Chair of Trauma Medicine and Critical Care and a Chair in Emergency Preparedness and Response; and
- improve linkages to aero-medical retrieval and emergency services.

The new centre forms part of a total commitment of \$240 million by the Howard Government to biosecurity measures and to strengthen the national response to a critical incident.

**Media contact: For more information call Mr Abbott's office on ph 02 6277 7220.  
Michael Kauter, Office of David Tollner, 0401 119 789  
Lisa MacLean, Office of Senator Nigel Scullion, 0419 641 282**

# Questions and Answers

## National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre – Royal Darwin Hospital

**Q. When will the new National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre be up and running?**

**A.** Upgrading the Royal Darwin Hospital has already begun and improvements will be made over the next three years. New expert staff, facilities and infrastructure will be established to provide Australia with increased capacity to manage large numbers of casualties in the event of a health emergency.

Although many of the new improvements will be used by the Northern Territory community on a day-to-day basis, the full capacity of the centre will remain on standby, ready to be rapidly deployed to respond to a health emergency.

**Q. Why was Darwin chosen as the location for the National Critical Care and Trauma Response Centre?**

**A.** The Royal Darwin Hospital played a pivotal role in treating large numbers of casualties from the Bali bombings of 2002 and 2005. The work of medical and other staff at the hospital was outstanding. However, in mounting those large-scale medical responses, the capacity of the hospital and associated Northern Territory health services were stretched.

Royal Darwin Hospital's capacity will be enhanced to ensure that, in the event of another major incident of the scale of the Bali bombings, Australia will have a greater ability to receive and treat as many casualties as possible. Darwin is strategically placed to provide such services. It is important to minimise further risks to casualties from transporting them long distances to appropriate emergency medical care.

**Q. What will the Australian Government's funding be spent on at Royal Darwin Hospital?**

**A.** The total \$65.8 million funding package over five years honours a Howard Government election promise to provide Australia with a first class national health emergency response system based in the Northern Territory.

This funding includes \$1.7 million allocated by the Australian Government to the Northern Territory last year to begin engaging specialist staff, review burns treatment capacity, purchase medical and pharmaceutical supplies and to train staff for the proposed centre.

The centre will ensure Australia has an effective capacity to receive and treat casualties in our northern region should there be another terrorist attack or natural disaster. It will also be used on a day to day basis by Territorians.

**The new money will be used to:**

- expand the capacity of the hospital's burns unit with 10 'burns capable' beds in a dedicated burns-acute surgical ward which will include stockpiled dressings, specialist medications and equipment;
- establish a 10-bed extended emergency care unit within the existing hospital emergency department and establish a capacity to convert the critical care unit to enable extra intensive care and high dependency unit facilities to respond to a national emergency;
- increase the number of surgical and orthopaedic acute care beds;
- reactivate five operating theatres bringing the total number of operating theatres at Royal Darwin Hospital to 10;
- provide emergency stocks of pharmaceuticals and medical equipment;
- increase the number of rehabilitation beds;
- provide access to incident-ready radiology facilities including a Magnetic Resonance Imaging machine;
- enhance training of incident-ready staff;
- enhance arrangements for the rapid deployment of a skilled and trained medical workforce both from within the Northern Territory and from other states and territories;
- establish a Chair of Trauma Medicine and Critical Care and a Chair in Emergency Preparedness and Response; and
- improve linkages to aero-medical retrieval and emergency services.

The new centre forms part of a total commitment of \$240 million by the Howard Government to biosecurity measures and to strengthen the national response to a critical incident.

**Q. Why is the Australian Government establishing the centre now? Is there an increased risk of a future health emergency such as a terrorist attack?**

**A.** Australia's National Counter-Terrorism Alert Level is currently at 'Medium' and has been at this level since the events of 11 September 2001. The establishment of the centre does not indicate an increased risk of a health emergency occurring.

The Australian Government is focussing considerable resources on national preparedness for a health emergency which could arise in the form of a communicable disease outbreak, terrorist attack or natural disaster. The establishment of the centre contributes to Australia's preparedness to meet a health emergency.

**Q. Who will manage the centre?**

**A.** The Northern Territory Government will be responsible for managing the day to day establishment and operation of the centre. The Australian Government is responsible for coordinating national emergency responses and ensuring that Australia has access

to high quality trauma response capabilities, such as the new Royal Darwin Hospital Centre.

Two academic Chairs will be appointed (a Clinical Chair in Trauma and Critical care and a Clinical Chair in Emergency Preparedness and Response) to ensure the centre engages with a national network of academics and policy makers, to oversee the relevance of the centre and its activities and to foster and maintain relationships with other trauma centres of excellence.

**Q. What happens in an emergency? Who will give the order to scale up the capacity of the centre to deal with a national emergency involving a high number of casualties?**

**A.** The Australian Government and the Northern Territory Government would work closely in coordinating a health response to a major national emergency, just as they did in response to both Bali bombings.

The operation of the centre will be triggered by the declaration of a health related emergency or mass casualty event that has operational consequences exceeding the capacity of normal day-to-day operations of relevant agencies in the location in which the incident has occurred.

The level of activation of the new centre will be determined by health authorities in consultation with expert emergency physicians to respond to the scale of the incident and the number of casualties.

Depending on the type of event, its location, numbers of persons involved and the severity of their injuries, the centre may be activated at very short notice.