MEDIA RELEASE

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Smile: $11m reduces gap in rural and remote dental services

People living and working in rural and remote Australia will now have access to dental services that were previously unavailable.

Assistant Minister for Health, Dr David Gillespie, said today that the Coalition Government is providing $11 million to the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) to provide dental services.

“The Royal Flying Doctor Service is well-placed to provide these essential mobile outreach dental services in rural and remote Australia,” Minister Gillespie said.

“Where there is an identified market failure and there are gaps in services, it is important that the Government steps in to provide assistance. Today we deliver on our election commitment to ensure people outside our major cities have better access to high quality dental services.”

The Government provides funding to the RFDS under the RFDS Program, which aims to ensure access to essential emergency aeromedical and other primary health care services in rural and remote areas of Australia.

"The Flying Doctor welcomes this new funding for dental services in rural and remote Australia," RFDS of Australia CEO, Martin Laverty, said.

“There are only one third the dentists in remote areas, with 72 dentists per 100,000 people in major cities, and less than 23 per 100,000 people in remote areas.”

“The research statistics are compelling, with more than one-third of remote area residents living with untreated decay. Essentially, when people from remote areas visit the dentist, they are more likely to require acute intervention – 1 in 3 had a tooth extraction in a year, compared with less than 1 in 10 in metropolitan areas.”

“This funding from the Federal Government will enable the Flying Doctor to expand its dental outreach program to start tackling the disparity that exists between city and the bush – and for that we are very, very thankful”.

On 28 June 2016, the Government announced it would continue to support the RFDS by extending its contract for continued delivery of aeromedical services until 30 June 2020.

The announcement included a commitment of an additional $11 million over two years for the RFDS to expand its existing non-Commonwealth funded dental services for the period 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2019.

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