



Primary Health Care 10 Year Plan – Stronger Rural Health Strategy – Royal Flying Doctor Service, CareFlight, Little Wings, and Heart of Australia

The Australian Government will provide \$72.6 million funding for aeromedical and outreach health services which ensure people in rural and remote Australia can access emergency evacuation services and other health services, including primary care and dental clinics, regardless of their distance from other medical services.

Aeromedical services are iconic and vitally important across rural and remote Australia, the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) alone covers approximately 6.5 million square kilometres, or 85% of Australia for primary care and emergency care.

Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS)

The Australian Government is investing \$33.3 million over four years in additional funding to establish a 10 Year Strategic Agreement with the RFDS. This builds on the existing, ongoing funding of \$84 million per year provided to the RFDS. Over the coming decade of the Strategic Agreement this additional funding will amount to \$81.1 million, bringing the total Australian Government investment to \$991.7 million.

Funding certainty for the RFDS will assist in delivering better overall health management and preventative health care to tens of thousands of Australians in rural and remote Australia.

CareFlight

The Australian Government is also investing \$18 million in 2022–23, to guarantee rescue services and emergency aeromedical services through CareFlight.

This investment complements the work of the RFDS, which delivers primary aeromedical evacuations, GP and nursing clinics from the Northern Territory/South Australian border up to Tennant Creek.

This funding will expand aeromedical support to remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the Top End region.

CareFlight funding will be contingent on an agreement with the Northern Territory Government to meet the ongoing maintenance and operational costs of the funded aircraft.

Little Wings

\$4.1 million over four years to support Little Wings to continue providing critical aeromedical and ground transport for seriously ill children, in rural regions of New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and Queensland.

This funding includes \$2.5 million in 2022–23 to enable Little Wings to secure a fourth aircraft increasing its capacity from 550 flights per year, to approximately 800 flights. Ongoing funding will continue to support these services.

Heart of Australia

The Australian Government is investing \$17.2 million to Heart of Australia to enable the continuation of five mobile health clinics to provide clinical services and other health services to regional, rural and remote Queensland.

Heart of Australia operates five mobile clinics which provide outreach services to 32 communities, including specialist medical consultations in cardiology, endocrinology, sleep medicine, psychiatry, geriatric medicine, immunology, general medicine, neurology, gastroenterology and gynaecology.

In 2022, Heart of Australia will also commence providing access to CT and x-ray services.

Why is this important?

The Australian Government is committed to taking action to improve access to emergency health care and primary care, and address workforce issues in rural and remote communities.

The Government continues to make significant investment in rural health through the *Stronger Rural Health Strategy*, as it addresses the range and availability of services to many communities.

The additional funding will support the RFDS to remain sustainable and to continue to deliver essential health care, including critical emergency evacuations to Australians in rural, regional and remote communities.

Funding for CareFlight will address the following critical needs:

- rescue capability in the Northern Territory. The Territory currently has only one rescue helicopter
- rapid deployment of critical care and trauma capabilities during crisis events, including bushfires and COVID-19, and
- increased delivery of culturally appropriate and clinically safe care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Little Wings is a non-profit organisation that provides free, professional and safe flight and ground transport services for seriously ill children. Support for Little Wings is critical as the population of the 55 regions of NSW, ACT and Queensland it services has grown, and Little Wings has experienced a 60% growth in demand for its aeromedical transport services in the past 12 months.

Heart of Australia will both improve health and medical service availability in regional, rural and remote Queensland, whether that is emergency response, aeromedical transport, or access to specialist medical outreach services.

Who will benefit?

Patients in rural and remote areas will benefit through improved access to primary care, mental health, and dental services through the RFDS, emergency services through CareFlight, children's aeromedical transport through Little Wings, and specialist medical services through the Heart of Australia.

The RFDS supports very remote regions to receive regular care, noting the extreme difficulties in maintaining long term in community care services in very remote areas with low serviceable populations.

Continued investment in CareFlight will ensure that patients in the Top End region of the Northern Territory who would otherwise be unable to access or facing delayed access to health services due to their remoteness will be able to receive emergency aeromedical services through CareFlight. People requiring rescue will also have better access to the help they need in hard to reach locations.

Little Wings will continue to operate its aeromedical transport services for seriously ill children and their families in rural NSW, ACT and Queensland.

Heart of Australia will improve services to regional, rural and remote Queenslanders, improving access to a range of care, whether emergency response, primary care or preventive health.

How much will this cost?

The Australian Government is investing \$72.6 million over four years from 2022–23 to 2025–26.