

COVID-19

RURAL AND REMOTE RESPONSE

Media release

Tuesday 21 April 2020

Rural doctors welcome boost to COVID-19 aeromedical support

Australia's peak rural doctor bodies have welcomed \$52 million in Federal Government support for aeromedical organisations to provide additional retrievals, and other assistance, to rural and remote communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Funding is being provided for the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) to help:

- evacuate initial COVID-19 cases
- evacuate suspected COVID-19 cases
- deliver fly-in General Practitioner Respiratory Clinics, including testing, for a broader outbreak
- pre-position and replenish personal protective equipment for frontline medical staff

The package also includes funding for CareFlight and other state and territory aeromedical departments to enable more evacuations.

President of the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA), Dr John Hall, said: "We are very pleased to see this funding, as boosting aeromedical retrieval capacity is something we have been strongly advocating for since the COVID-19 emergency began in Australia.

"International experience has shown us that it is crucial to be many steps ahead of this virus.

"For rural and remote Australia, this means ensuring that aeromedical retrieval is boosted early to ensure that if we do see significant outbreaks, there will be extra capacity already in place to fly rural COVID-19 patients quickly to larger centres for more intensive treatment.

"The funding will also provide more scope to retrieve suspected COVID-19 patients to larger centres, taking pressure off our rural hospitals and getting these patients to larger hospitals earlier. This means that treatment can commence sooner if they end up being confirmed with COVID-19."

President of the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM), Dr Ewen McPhee, welcomed the funding support to deliver fly-in GP Respiratory Clinics, including testing, and to pre-position and replenish personal protective equipment (PPE) for frontline rural health professionals.

"The need for PPE has also been something on which ACRRM and RDAA have advocated strongly" he said.

COVID-19

RURAL AND REMOTE RESPONSE

“We have been very concerned that rural general practices, as well as other rural health services and hospitals, won’t have enough PPE to meet potential outbreaks of COVID-19 in our rural and remote communities.

“So it is great to see that this funding will help ensure rural doctors and other health professionals have more timely access to this essential safety equipment.

“It is also pleasing to see recognition that PPE should not just be replenished, but proactively positioned in rural and remote communities in case of any outbreaks.

“Having fly-in GP Respiratory clinics available in some rural communities, with testing available, will also help local health services in those communities to be on the front foot in better managing any local outbreaks.

“In some cases, it will ensure that testing is available to some communities that do not currently have this - and where rapid point-of-care testing is utilised, it will assist with the much quicker turnaround of results for suspected COVID-19 patients. This will ensure health professionals can quickly isolate confirmed patients and undertake tracing of their contacts much sooner than otherwise.

“We look forward to working with the aero-medical services to put the additional funding support into best effect on-the-ground.”

Find more information on how to protect yourself, your family and community from COVID-19 at www.health.gov.au.

A high resolution photo of ACRRM President, Dr Ewen McPhee, is available here:

<https://www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/968>

A high resolution photo of RDAA President, Dr John Hall, is available here:

<https://www.rdaa.com.au/documents/item/687>

Available for interview:

Dr John Hall - RDAA President

Dr Ewen McPhee - ACRRM President

Media contacts (RDAA)

Patrick Daley on 0408 004 890

Ineke Kuiper on 0408 669 638

Media contacts (ACRRM)

Petrina Smith on 0414 820 847

ACRRM National Office on 1800 223 226