About the Royal Flying Doctor Service

The Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) is one of the largest and most comprehensive aeromedical organisations in the world. Using the latest in aviation, medical and communications technology, it delivers extensive primary health care and 24-hour medical service to those who live, work and travel throughout regional, rural and remote Australia.

The RFDS is a not-for-profit organisation. While supported by the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments, the RFDS relies heavily on fundraising and donations from the community to purchase and medically-equip its aircraft, and to finance other major capital initiatives. Today, the RFDS has a fleet of 63 aircraft operating from 21 bases located across the nation and provides medical assistance to over 290,000 people every year – that's one every two minutes.

A Proud History

The Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) was established by the Reverend John Flynn (Flynn of the Inland) in 1928, during his association with the Australian Inland Mission.

During his travels as a young missionary through the Australian Outback, Flynn was amazed and horrified at the lack of medical care available to those attempting to settle and raise families in isolated areas. With the birth of aviation in the country, Flynn seized the opportunity to reach those who were once unreachable, except through journeys of days or weeks, over roads that were mostly unsealed.

The first Flying Doctor was Dr Kenyon St Vincent Welch who performed his first duty on 17 May, conducting two minor operations at Julia Creek, 137km away from their base in Cloncurry. The first Flying Doctor aircraft was a De Havilland DH50A named Victory, flown by pilot Arthur Affleck. The doctor, aircraft and pilot provided the beginnings of the lifeline that was to extend throughout the country.

In 1928, transport was not the only problem facing those living in isolated areas. Communication was practically non-existent over the distances Flynn’s aeromedical service had to travel.

In 1929 a brilliant electrical engineer, Alfred Traeger, solved Flynn’s problem of communication over long distances by inventing the pedal wireless. Traeger’s invention of a pedal operated generator to power a radio transceiver gave isolated Australians the ability to contact the Flying Doctor in emergencies. Two fledging industries of radio and aviation joined with the age-old profession of medicine, and the Royal Flying Doctor Service took off.

RFDS in Mount Isa

2014 marks the 50th anniversary of the RFDS in Mount Isa! The Mount Isa Base commenced operations in 1964 following relocation from Cloncurry, which was the first ever site of the RFDS.

The RFDS Mount Isa Base services people living, working and travelling in the remote regions from the Gulf of Carpentaria in the north, the Northern Territory border in the west, Hughenden in the east and Bedourie in the south.
The Finest Care to the Furthest Corners

The Royal Flying Doctor Service (Queensland Section) is dedicated to providing vital health care to anyone living, working or travelling in Queensland. Today, the RFDS provides more than 90,000 patient consultations across Queensland each year.

The iconic RFDS emergency medical retrieval service operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and has expanded to provide regular inter-hospital transfers of patients for life-saving medical care, such as organ transplants and heart surgery, delivering critical support to those who live in regional and rural areas.

A broad range of essential health care services are also delivered by the RFDS to rural and remote communities. These include:

- General Practice
- Indigenous Health
- Men’s Health
- Allied Health
- Women’s Health
- Health Promotion
- Child and Family Health
- Social and Emotional Wellbeing
- A mobile dental service
- Medical Chest program
- Telehealth

The map to the left shows all the locations the RFDS travelled to in Queensland in the last financial year, to deliver health care services.
Our Aircraft

The RFDS (Queensland Section) has a fleet of 19 aircraft, including 14 Beechcraft King Air B200s, three Pilatus PC-12s and two Cessna Grand Caravan C208Bs. The distance flown by this fleet is over 7 million kilometres each year.

All RFDS aeromedical aircraft are fully medically equipped, enabling them to operate as mobile intensive care units. They are all pressurised, enabling patients to be flown at the equivalent of sea level – an essential requirement in the treatment of many serious injuries. A neonatal unit can also be carried for the emergency care of newborns.

Over the next five years, the RFDS (Queensland Section) will need to replace ten of its aircraft, at a cost of $8 million each.

Medical Chests

Since 1942, the RFDS has administered a medical chest program, with over 3,000 chests now distributed across Australia. Medical Chests contain a range of pharmaceutical and non-pharmaceutical items, which enable emergency and non-emergency treatment to be given to people living and working in remote areas. They are kept in locations such as remote homesteads, pastoral stations, outback schools and mining sites.

The chests are an important tool to enable RFDS medical practitioners to treat people on-site for many conditions and to provide necessary treatment (e.g. pain relief) for those requiring emergency evacuation. When somebody requires medical attention, the medical chest holder can speak to an RFDS Doctor by telephone or radio, and the Doctor can verbally prescribe treatment from the chest.

They also provide enormous comfort to those living in the outback - despite the great distances, help is never far away.

Telehealth

The RFDS provides a 24 hr emergency telehealth service for people without access to hospital services in their local area. People can phone the telehealth number and speak directly to an RFDS doctor, who can provide medical advice, and in some circumstances may arrange for an emergency evacuation. In the Mount Isa region, the number to phone is: 07 4743 2802.

In the last financial year the RFDS provided 14,338 telehealth consultations (averaging 39 each day!).

Did you know?

- The Royal Flying Doctor Service is featured on the Australian $20 note! You can see a portrait of John Flynn, his signature, the first aircraft used by the RFDS, the generator from Traeger’s pedal radio, and a body chart that people in remote areas used to explain “where it hurts” to doctors during telephone consultations.
- The Flying Doctor flies 26,615,486 km each year... that's more than 34 round trips to the moon!
- The first School of the Air lessons were broadcast from an RFDS Base in Alice Springs, and for a while, all across the country, lessons were broadcast using the RFDS radio network.

For more information, visit:

- www.flyingdoctor.org.au
- www.flyingdoctor4education.org.au