

Response to the Hearing Services Program Review

To whom it may concern,

The Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) is pleased to provide the following input to the Hearing Services Program Review.

Having provided critical and comprehensive services particularly to rural and remote areas for almost 90 years, the RFDS is acutely aware of the significant disparities in health outcomes and the inequity in access to health services experienced by those in rural and particularly remote parts of our country, and this includes hearing services.

The RFDS provides a comprehensive suite of services to people living, working and travelling in remote and rural Australia. In some instances, these are the only health services received by people living in these areas. This includes a 24 hour, seven-days-a-week (24/7) aeromedical retrieval service for those who experience a medical emergency requiring definitive care in a tertiary hospital, and comprehensive primary health care services. This includes fly-in fly-out GP and nursing clinics; mental health and wellbeing services; dental health services; and a growing number of allied health and health promotion activities all of which are both of which are integrated with a 24/7 remote consultation (telehealth) system.

RFDS research shows that, on average, [REDACTED] people each year are transported by the RFDS to a major hospital for diseases of the ear and mastoid process. The majority of these transfers are for acute presentations of mastoiditis or otitis media, and are from remote areas. As a result of these findings and the success pilot programs in a number of locations, the RFDS has in partnership with Hearing Australia developed a Hearing Screening Toolbox for use by RFDS clinicians across the toolbox. More on RFDS hearing screening services can be found in the 2019 report *Evaluation of the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) and Australian Hearing, Hearing Screening Trial* [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

The RFDS is also committed to improving the health of those living in the areas we serve, and seeks to work with communities, governments, other funders and healthcare providers to ensure all have access to appropriate, affordable and effective health services. The Commonwealth has invested in RFDS services for almost 8 decades, providing funding which has contributed to the building of a
[REDACTED]
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significant RFDS asset base. This includes aircraft, equipment, experience, know-how and a strong brand in areas where services are provided. The opportunity exists for the Commonwealth to further leverage the significant investment it has made in building up the health service delivery capacity of the RFDS to remote Australia. The RFDS proposes that greater use of RFDS assets could be easily and effectively harnessed to efficiently deliver further services, including hearing services, on behalf of the Commonwealth to areas where small populations across large geographic areas make it unviable for permanent, local services to exist.

I would be pleased to further any of the matters raised in this submission. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]