



**The Hon Mark Coulton MP**  
Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications  
and Local Government

**Media release**

20 April 2020

**\$52m injection for rural COVID-19 aeromedical retrievals**

A \$52.8 million aeromedical retrieval package to support rural and remote communities during the COVID-19 health emergency was announced today by Federal Regional Health Minister, Mark Coulton.

Minister Coulton, making the announcement at the Royal Flying Doctors Service (RFDS) base in Dubbo today, said the Australian Government's investment of close to \$53 million will increase Australia's aeromedical capacity to evacuate COVID-19 cases in remote areas.

"This package will increase the capacity to evacuate early COVID-19 cases in remote areas and enable a more effective response if an outbreak occurs," Minister Coulton said.

"COVID-19 is affecting every Australian no matter where they live, and we're putting in place measures that will support regional Australians to get through this pandemic.

"This package will boost the ability to provide medical evacuations for patients in remote and rural areas across Australia by up to 50 per cent."

Minister Coulton said of the \$52.8 million, funding is provided for the 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; and
- Pre-position and replenish personal protective equipment for frontline medical staff.

RFDS Federation Executive Director, Frank Quinlan said the additional funding from the Australian Government is an important injection to enhance rural and remote retrieval and response capability.

"The RFDS is very thankful for additional support from the Federal Government as part of the national health pandemic response," Mr Quinlan said.

"The RFDS has been there for rural and remote communities for generations and is committed to responding to the COVID-19 pandemic with all the supports and services necessary. This funding will assist us in our preparedness. It gives country Australians confidence and assurance that they are cared for through this pandemic -- and the RFDS is ready."

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

CareFlight Chief Executive Office, Mick Frewen welcomed Minister Coulton's announcement.

“This funding allows us to increase our capacity to respond to this emergency and serve remote communities in the Northern Territory and deliver equity in healthcare to our most vulnerable populations,” Mr Frewen said.

Minister Coulton said the funding is part of the Government’s \$2.4 billion National Health Response Plan for the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Our support for rural, regional and remote communities is about minimising the likelihood of exposure to COVID-19 while increasing the capacity to evacuate early cases and provide a rapid response should an outbreak occur,” he said.

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