

Media release – 2 October 2024

Rural Doctors Foundation partners with Angel Flight to improve access to healthcare in rural Australia

After the success of our GPs4RuralDocs program launch, providing GP services to rural health practitioners, we're flying back out again – with Angel Flight in the pilot's seat.

GPs4RuralDocs is a program aimed at supporting rural health practitioners to keep them living and working in the rural communities that need them.

Angel Flight, under their new 'Rural Medi Flights' service have partnered with Rural Doctors Foundation, providing cost effective air transportation that enables our treating GP to access hard-to-reach communities.

Angel Flight has been flying doctors to rural and remote locations since late 2022 and officially launched the dedicated service, Rural Medi-Flights in early 2024, since which time they have been busy flying medics across Queensland.

Angel Flight CEO, Marjorie Pagani comments; "From 2021-2022, we saw an 80% increase in demand for health practitioners requiring reliable, on demand air transport to rural and remote areas."

"We are committing to improving health care access for rural people and by providing reliable, on demand air transport for health practitioners to and from the bush, we are contributing to a more sustainable health care model for rural communities."

Dr John Douyere and the team from Rural Doctors Foundation will fly with Angel Flight from Archerfield to the outback towns of Quilpie and Charleville and be in these communities for the next few days. We will also be visiting the towns of Stanthorpe, Goondiwindi and St George at the end of this month, with Dr John Buckley offering GP services for rural health practitioners.

CEO of Rural Doctors Foundation, Fran Avon, says this partnership is vital to the future of the program, and to the current health crisis in rural Australia.

"Distance and isolation pose a huge challenge for rural health practitioners and so what happens when they need a doctor, and the closest one is over 300 kilometres away? This is the problem we're addressing and it's why we're passionate about providing this GP service for rural health practitioners in rural and remote towns," she says.

"The more time we can spend in each of these towns, the more health practitioners our Treating GP can see. To achieve this, a fly-in and fly-out

Rural Doctors Foundation acknowledges the ongoing dedication of rural doctors, their colleagues, family and community members to provide caring, committed health care in Rural Australia. The Foundation supports and encourages their ability to connect with each other to overcome adversity, focusing on better health outcomes for generations of Rural Australians.

We acknowledge and extend our sincere respect and appreciation to the Turrbal People – the traditional Owners of the land on which our office is located. We also acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we implement our programs. We acknowledge their connections to land, sea and community. We pay respect to their ancient and continuing cultures, and to their Elders, past and present.

model is the most efficient way to do it, which is why we're thrilled to have Angel Flight on board."

Amanda Roser, Chair of Rural Doctors Foundation, is excited to see the continuation of the GPs4RuralDocs program and potential expansion for the future.

"We had amazing feedback from the previous clinics we held in Quilpie, Charleville and Cunnamulla. We know how much it means to the incredible health practitioners living and working in these communities – and we're determined to continue supporting them as best we can."

With support from organisations like Angel Flight, we hope to remove barriers to healthcare for medical practitioners by bringing care to them.

Angel Flight Australia is a charitable organisation co-ordinating free, non-emergency flights and ground transportation so people who live in rural and regional Australia can access the specialist medical treatments they need.

Rural Doctors Foundation is a national rural health charity. We exist to give those in rural and remote regions better access to lifesaving healthcare. As rural doctors and community members, we care deeply about the places where we live and work.

As rural doctors, we see health inequities every day. There are fewer services. As well as fewer resources and fewer health professionals in the bush. And as a result, this has a great impact on disease, life expectancy, and mental wellbeing.

The following representatives are available for interview

Amanda Roser Chair – Rural Doctors Foundation

Fran Avon – Chief Executive Officer – Rural Doctors Foundation

Media contact

Fran Avon Rural Doctors Foundation on 0407 236 341

About Rural Doctors Foundation

Rural Doctors Foundation is a national rural health charity focused on supporting Australia's rural communities and the health workforce that cares for them. We do this by:

- Supporting the delivery of a GP service for rural health workers in their own community.
- Delivering emergency relief to rural GPs and communities in times of crisis.
- Providing medical equipment, health education and programs to rural communities.
- Conducting primary research to better understand health challenges for those living remotely.

Our purpose is to deliver better health outcomes for the seven-million Australians living rurally.

Background

- 28% or seven million Australians live in rural, regional, and remote areas. Despite their number, people in these communities experience many negative health impacts due to poor access to healthcare, which is worsened by critical health workforce shortages.
- The number of employed FTE clinicians in Australia decreases with increasing remoteness – with 2.5 doctors per 1,000 people in rural and remote areas vs. 4.1 per 1,000 in urban areas.
- Changes to Distribution Priority Areas saw a more than 50% increase in the movements of GPs from rural and remote areas to newly included areas such as regional cities in the six months following their implementation.
- GPs working in remote and very remote areas were more likely to indicate they intend to retire in the next ten years than GPs working in major cities.

Rural and Remote Medical Practitioners Survey

Research was conducted by Rural Doctors Foundation with 126 respondents in January 2023 to identify needs.

Key Findings

- Almost a quarter of respondents (23%) worked more than 60 hours per week.
- 52% of respondents were working multiple roles to meet community needs.
- 42% of medical practitioners needed to travel out of town to receive healthcare, with 20% travelling more than 800 km.
- Of those in remote and very remote areas (MM6-7):
- 32% of respondents were the only medical practitioner in town.
- 70% received no work relief to attend to their health.

GPs4RuralDocs Program

Objectives

- To provide independent, accessible primary healthcare to rural and remote healthcare professionals.
- To keep rural healthcare professionals in their communities, ensuring access to quality healthcare by Australians in rural and remote regions.

Offering

- Beginning with our first clinic in May 2024, health practitioners, including doctors, nurses, and allied health professionals from the Western Queensland communities of Charleville, Quilpie, and Cunnamulla, can receive continuity of care from a visiting independent GP.
- Practitioners receive a combination of regular face-to-face, in-town consultations by the same visiting doctor supplemented by telehealth consultation services between visits.
- The service is delivered by GPs experienced in doctor-to-doctor care and mental health who understand rural practice and are trained in caring for health practitioners and in mental health.

About Angel Flight Australia

Over the past three years, Angel Flight has seen the growing need for an air transport service that works in with health professionals travelling to rural and remote locations. Approximately 7 million Australians live in regional and remote areas and this portion of the population have higher rates of hospitalisation, deaths, injury and poorer access to, and use of primary health care services, than those living in the cities. Angel Flight have responded to the growing rural health crisis by launching a dedicated Rural Medi-Flight service to transport health professionals to the bush and back.

- For the past 21 years Angel Flight have been offering free non-emergency transport to people living remotely so they can access specialist medical care and over this time have helped 100,000 rural families.
- Angel Flight work with a team of volunteer pilots and drivers across Australia to coordinate free flights in drives from regional, rural and remote parts of Australia into the cities for medical care.
- Our pilots do not carry aeromedical staff or medical equipment so do not act as an alternative to the Air Ambulant services, however they do fly people back home from emergency trips.
- Parallel to its free community service flights is a paid service for health professionals called Rural Medi-Flights which began operating in early 2024 from Archerfield, Brisbane to service Queensland medics.
- Rural Medi-Flights launched the first of its fleet with a Cessna 402C- an 8-10 seat cabin class aircraft, flown by highly experienced airline pilots with Instructor and Check and Training Captain Status. The twin-engine aircraft is named Kayla after a passenger who flew 400 times with Angel Flight but sadly lost her health battle at age 23.