

Speech Notes

Introduction/ Acknowledgements

- Good morning everyone. I am James Sherriff, General Manager of Health Delivery Services from the Royal Flying Doctor Service of Western Australia.
- I feel extremely proud to be representing our incredible staff here at the Wheatbelt Regional Health Services Forum.
- I would like to acknowledge Rural Health West, WA Country Health Service, St Johns Ambulance and all healthcare service providers and professionals present.
- I also would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land and the elders, past, present and emerging.

RFDS Positioning and Role

- The RFDS has shared a long history with the Wheatbelt region – which is without doubt much loved Flying Doctor country.
- Working with key healthcare service providers in the region, we have provided a ‘mantle of safety’ to people living in the Wheatbelt through our delivery of emergency aero medical retrievals and primary health care clinics for many decades.
- Over the last year, the RFDS retrieved 766 patients living, working and travelling in the Wheatbelt region. That’s an average of 15 men, women and children flown to safety each day.
- Of these 766 patients, 98% required transfer to Perth for specialist care. We have also cared for thousands more through our GP clinics, our medical chests and our availability through telehealth calls. The Royal Flying Doctor Service is never far away.

Information

- Since 2015, the Royal Flying Doctor Service of Western Australia has coordinated the Rural Women's GP Service Program on behalf of Rural Health West in the Wheatbelt region.
- In that time, the program has delivered a total of 89 clinics and reached 1,548 women in the Wheatbelt communities of Beacon, Bencubbin, Kellerberrin, Kununoppin and Mukinbudin.
- In 2019-2020, a total of 18 clinics has been allocated to these rural and remote communities; Beacon (2), Bencubbin (2), Mukinbudin (3), Kellerberrin (6) and Kununoppin (5).
- The Rural Women's GP Service is highly valued and enables women living in rural areas to have a gender choice when visiting a doctor. This service is free and available to all community members who would like to see a female GP.
- A lack of access to female doctors in the country can have a significant impact on health outcomes for rural women, who may feel uncomfortable discussing particular issues with a male doctor.

Advocacy

- As you can appreciate, the RFDS is a not-for-profit organisation that heavily relies on government funding and public donations to deliver its essential services across vast Western Australia.
- We provide essential health services across the 2.5m square kilometres of this state.
- In essence we provide highly trained clinicians in highly maintained aircraft with a highly trained pilot to ensure the best patient care in the furthest corners of our state.

- The RFDS has in the past had to absorb the administrative costs involved in coordinating the delivery of the Rural Women's GP Service Program which amounts to \$20,000 a year. This is not something we budget for nor is normally in our remit or funding from government. This is not sustainable for our operation, yet it is clearly a need in the community.
- There is a great need for the RFDS to be financially supported so we can continue to ensure the healthcare needs of women living in the Wheatbelt are being addressed and chronic disease avoided.
- We are proud to partner with Rural Health West to ensure women living in remote and isolated areas can overcome geographical and socio-economic barriers to accessing essential healthcare.
- Providing healthcare across rural and remote Western Australia is a team effort, involving a number of key partners to deliver quality healthcare to our communities.
- The RFDS is proud to be a part of the state's health services network and will continue in our mission to ensure all West Australians have access to essential healthcare.
- We are committed to health equity across our vast state and the Flying Doctor is an essential ingredient in the health infrastructure of Western Australia.