Providing excellence in, and access to, primary health care and aeromedical services across Queensland.
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It has been a humbling year, as we celebrated the legacy and vision of those tenacious enough to tackle the challenge of delivering health care to isolated Australian bush communities almost a century ago.

One of the great highlights of 2018 was hosting His Royal Highness, the Prince of Wales, in April at our Cairns Base, where he officially bestowed the name “Outback Angel” on our latest B350 Super King Aircraft. This special occasion also coincided with the Commonwealth Games, with our team members being honoured to feature in both the Queen’s Baton Relay, as well as the Opening Ceremony on the Gold Coast. One of our aircraft was even custodian of the Commonwealth Games torch as it flew from Mount Isa to Cloncurry, our spiritual home.

Our 90th birthday celebrations culminated on our official birthday – 17th May, with an historic re-enactment of our maiden medical flight between Cloncurry and Julia Creek, in association with the Antique Aeroplane Association of Australia, with 25 of their members and their planes completing the pilgrimage.

While an important opportunity to reflect on the past, 2018 also became a time to look ahead and plan for our future. We have reaffirmed our purpose, with all parts of the organisation participating in the development of a new five-year Strategic Plan, which launched in March this year. A fundamental element of our new Plan is a renewed focus on primary health care services, and actively pursuing new opportunities to expand services in fields such as mental health, telehealth and chronic disease management.

We have also placed increased importance on closer collaboration with other health service agencies, especially Hospital and Health Services and Primary Health Networks. As a result, programs such as our Drought Wellbeing Service, our telehealth programs and dental care services continue to expand.

Another key focus of our renewed vision has been on the lifeblood of our service – our people. Across all our operational disciplines, there will always be challenges in recruitment, retention and professional development of highly skilled individuals in rural and remote parts of the state. However, in 2018, through generous philanthropic support, our first nursing scholarship program has been introduced and we are working towards further investments in clinical simulation and training facilities.

While an important opportunity to reflect on the past, 2018 also became a time to look ahead and plan for our future.
We are excited that, in 2019, we will be embarking on a $6 million development of a new Aeromedical Base and Patient Transfer Facility in Bundaberg.

For the financial year 2017-18, we achieved a consolidated operating surplus of $2.569 million. This was thanks to the generosity of the Queensland people helping to raise $15.6 million in charitable funds to support our vital services. We have also worked diligently to secure our financial future, with new funding arrangements finalised with the Federal Government for expanded services over the next four years.

In addition to the thousands of loyal Flying Doctor supporters, we would like to thank our key corporate sponsors for their ongoing commitment to our cause. To Brisbane Airport Corporation, Ergon Energy Retail, the QCoal Group and Woolworths, we extend our heartfelt thanks. So too our national partners, TAL and Air BP.

To the Queensland State Government and the Federal Government, we would also like to thank you for continuing to partner with us, allowing the RFDS to make such a meaningful contribution to the health of rural, remote and regional communities. We now have enhanced funding arrangements with the Federal Government and we are closing in on 25 years of continuous service to Queensland Health, as the State’s preferred fixed wing aeromedical provider.

We are also continuing to invest in our infrastructure, including replacing and upgrading our aircraft fleet. We are excited that, in 2019, we will be embarking on a $6 million development of a new Aeromedical Base and Patient Transfer Facility in Bundaberg, which is being partly funded by a generous $3 million contribution from the Federal Government’s Building Better Regions Fund.

In a year of change and growth, our CEO for the past twelve years, Nino Di Marco stepped down from his position at the end of July 2018. Having seen us through this period of renewed focus, Nino has left us with the organisation arguably in the best shape it has been for many years. Nino has been the personification of everything that is great about the RFDS. On behalf of the Board, I thank Nino for his steady hand and dedicated service. We wish him, his wife Grace and extended family all the best for the future.

We are also delighted to welcome Meredith Staib as our new CEO. Meredith was previously the CEO of Cover-More Medical Assistance (part of the Zurich Insurance Group). With her background as an aeromedical retrieval nurse and hospital management before embarking on her international corporate career, we believe Meredith is the ideal person to lead our organisation into the future.

Finally, a special thank you must go out to the staff of the RFDS – those people who work tirelessly and selflessly each and every day across our vast state. Your passion and enthusiasm for the organisation, and most importantly our patients, is a daily inspiration to us all and is why the RFDS remains one of the most trusted and respected Australian institutions. May this long continue.

Mark Gray | Chairman
Having the opportunity to reflect upon the very essence of what makes this organisation one of Australia’s longest serving health service institutions, the Strategic Plan outlines our vision, goals and ongoing commitment towards improving the health of people in remote, rural and regional Queensland. The strategic themes attest our continued commitment to support our people, expand and consolidate our primary health care programs and to develop stronger relationships with stakeholders, at all levels.

At a Commonwealth level this year, the RFDS was able to successfully negotiate a four-year extension of its Traditional Services agreement to 2022 on improved commercial terms and with a commitment to support an expansion of both our dental and mental health programs. Our traditional Bases in Cairns, Mount Isa and Charleville will be able to continue to develop their vitally important 24/7 aeromedical retrieval and telehealth services and sustain our regular GP Clinics, as part of this new Commonwealth contract.

With such a focus recently on community wellbeing in the face of a prolonged drought, we were delighted to see that our Drought Wellbeing Service, funded by the Queensland Health Mental Health Branch, was also recontracted for a further four years, providing important continuity and certainty across this statewide program.

Also at a state level, our inter-hospital patient transfer services that transport over 10,000 sick or injured people each year has come into focus. In a collaborative move, the Queensland Government has agreed to consolidate our aeromedical inter-hospital transfer contracts and at time of writing we are in the middle of negotiations that will see these extended until June 2021. We aim through this process to improve the inter-operability of our aircraft fleet and incorporate our four new B350 Super King Airs formally into our service agreements.

As you can see the Queensland Section operations are well placed for an exciting future, but this is due to the significant part the community plays in the quality of service we are able to deliver. It is with much gratitude that we acknowledge the tremendous support of the Queensland community that gave an incredible $15.6 million in philanthropic support this year. This generosity enables us to purchase state-of-the-art equipment, provide essential and on-going training for clinical and aviation staff, as well as invest for future infrastructure projects so we can continue to provide the very best care to our patients.

To our Principal Partners, Ergon Energy Retail, QCoal Group and Brisbane Airport Corporation, we extend our sincere appreciation for your long standing partnerships with us. We are also delighted to continue our charitable association with Woolworths Supermarkets across Queensland as part of their instore token campaigns.

This year, for me personally, is somewhat bittersweet. After 12 years of service I have stepped away from my role as Chief Executive Officer for the Queensland Section. I am enormously proud of the organisation and its people and their commitment to fulfilling our founder, Reverend John Flynn’s vision of the “mantle of safety”.

To our corporate supporters, donors, suppliers and key funding partners I thank you for the faith you have shown in us and for your contributions, large and small, towards our enduring success.

With change comes opportunity, and I welcome our new Chief Executive Officer, Meredith Staib.

With a health background as a Registered Nurse and with a Masters in Health Management, Meredith has over 20 years of clinical and corporate management experience in health, emergency medical assistance and travel insurance. Under Meredith’s leadership, I am confident the RFDS (Queensland Section) is in safe and capable hands and destined for an exciting future.

My best wishes to all.

Nino Di Marco | CEO
RFDS Queensland Section’s year in numbers

11,479
Patients flown by the RFDS in 2017/18

7,743,604
Kilometers flown by the Queensland Section in the past year

366
Staff members across the entire scope of Queensland Section operations
Remote consultation calls through our telehealth service 13,338

Patients seen at 3,280 primary health care clinics 24,992

Mental health clinic patient consultations 8,350

RFDS Dental Service patients 1,192
Pilots

The RFDS pilots are at the forefront of aeromedical aviation and enjoy being part of a multi-disciplined organisation that prides itself in providing a dedicated aeromedical and primary health care service to regional and outback Queensland. Each of our 65 pilots across Queensland have at least 2,000 flight hours, with our aeromedical retrieval pilots requiring at least 4,000 flight hours and 2,000 hours in command.
Our people

All RFDS frontline staff are renowned as being some of the most highly trained and qualified in the country. Backed up by a dedicated and professional cohort of support staff and engineers, our 370 plus workforce operates tirelessly. To ensure we uphold our reputation as Australia’s leading remote area primary health care and aeromedical provider.

SHANE WISE – PILOT, CHARLEVILLE

At the age of 40, Shane Wise, felt it was time for a career change and a flying lesson gifted by his wife cemented just that. Having an avid interest in flying from a young age, Shane knew this was something he always wanted to do but never took up the opportunity until that moment.

“I was at a point in my life where I just knew IT consulting was not what I wanted to do anymore, so I thought … how about I do something I have always wanted to, and become a pilot?” Shane said.

Knowing that he didn’t want to become a commercial airline pilot, the RFDS immediately appealed to him.

“I wanted to do something different and I’ve always had an interest in helping people, so I knew the RFDS was where I wanted to go. I just needed to figure out how.”

From that moment, Shane began working towards accruing the hours needed for a role with the RFDS. Over seven years, and through numerous pilot roles, Shane accrued his hours and landed the opportunity to become a pilot for the RFDS at the Alice Springs base.

“In the four years I was working with RFDS Central Operations I gained so much experience, and when my wife and I decided to make the move back to Queensland a job opportunity in Charleville presented itself so I took it. Really, it all just fell into place,” Shane said.

So, Shane, his wife, and their two dogs made the move to Charleville.

For Shane, each day is different bringing an exciting element to the job, whether it be working on the flights for clinics, inter-hospital transfers or primary retrievals.

“Airline pilots get up and basically know what their route is, but for us it changes every day. No two retrievals are the same, in fact, no day is ever the same and being involved in helping deliver people safely to care is really amazing,” he said.

“In this role you have to be flexible and think on the run – it’s constantly evolving and that’s the whole reason why I do it, and why I love it.”

One clinic in particular that stood out to Shane was in Windorah in August this year.

“We were in the process of packing up the clinic to head back to Charleville when a woman and her husband came in at the last minute – he was having a heart attack.”

It was clear that Shane and his clinical colleagues were running on borrowed time so a plan needed to be made on the spot. As they were about to head back to Charleville for the day, the next rostered aeromedical team was quickly called and asked to come in early to help safely transfer the patient to care.

“Once we realised the severity of the situation, we quickly worked to fly the patient to Charleville and transferred him onto the other aircraft. They immediately took off for Toowoomba so he could receive the care he needed,” said Shane.

“A few weeks later, we got a lovely letter from his wife thanking us for everything we did. Seeing things like that is what makes this job so rewarding.”

In his spare time, Shane is an avid photographer and plays guitar – both of which he’s been doing since school. However, his real passion lies with flying and the love of the job.

“I never get up in the morning and say, ‘I don’t want to go to work today’. For me, every day brings something different and that’s what I love about working with the RFDS.”
All of our Flight Nurses and Primary Health Care Nurses are Registered Nurses with Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency.

Our Flight Nurses are required to have a minimum of five years post-graduate experience including at least three years experience in a major regional or tertiary hospital Emergency Department or Intensive Care Unit. Our Flight Nurses are also registered Midwives.

Our Primary Health Care Nurses have a minimum of four years post RN registration experience as well as a minimum of 12 months experience within a community setting such as general practices, indigenous health services, school nursing or clinical outreach services. Services provided include Child and Family Health, Chronic Disease Management and Immunisation programs.
Originally from Sydney, Charleville Flight Nurse and Nursing Education Officer (Aeromedical) Emma Wex, had always dreamed of working for the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

To make her dream a reality, she completed a Bachelor of Nursing Science followed by a graduate program at Princess Alexandra’s Emergency Department in Brisbane and applied for a Flight Nurse role with the RFDS. Narrowly missing out the first time, Emma returned to university to gain her Masters in Midwifery and applied with us again. This time of course she was successful!

Having gained around five years of experience in a tertiary emergency department, Emma has experienced all manners of medical situations. Now working for the RFDS in both an aeromedical and a primary health care context, she is getting used to providing holistic care rather than only addressing emergencies. “There are many health care providers throughout Australia,” says Emma. “But the RFDS is proudly dedicated to supporting rural and remote Australians, so that makes this service unique.”

Emma and her husband Michael love the beach, so moving to Charleville was a big lifestyle change. With the support of staff at the RFDS Charleville Base, Emma threw herself into the role of Flight Nurse and Michael started a personal training business that is fast becoming a successful venture.

When commenting on some of the challenges she faces in her role, Emma says mostly it’s missing the chance to work closely with other nurses.

“This is such an independent and autonomous job. You don’t get the opportunity to bounce ideas off colleagues or seek guidance. At times, with challenging situations or critically unwell patients I’d love just two minutes to step way, refresh my mind and return, but you can’t. The phone becomes your friend instead.”

The most rewarding part of her day is meeting new people in the South West Queensland community and helping to provide improved access to health care for rural and remote Australians.

“It is well known that remote Australians are faced with unique challenge in regards to their health care needs. Without the RFDS, rural people would have poorer health outcomes when compared to their city counterparts. It feels good that in some very small way I can help people in need.”

Other great aspects to Emma’s role include being involved with the education of new flight nurses and staying up to date with nursing and midwifery skills.

“One challenge we face is maintaining advanced skills across such a broad range of clinical presentations. One day you may be assisting a woman in pre-term labour, the next day you could be attending a car rollover and the following day you could be delivering care to a paediatric patient and their family. Each situation requires a specialised set of skills. The RFDS knows this and supports all clinicians with professional development.”

When not wearing her flight nurse badge, Emma enjoys photography and has even entered some of her pictures in the 2017 and 2018 Charleville Show photography competitions. A promising talent, she won her category in 2017.

“Living and working remotely has been one of the best decisions that I have ever made,” she said. “I moved to Charleville RFDS from Brisbane and have not looked back since.”

Without the RFDS, rural people would have poorer health outcomes when compared to their city counterparts. It feels good that in some very small way I can help people in need.
Medical Officers

To work with RFDS (Queensland Section), all of our Medical Officers require a fellowship with either the Royal Australian College of General Practice (FRACGP) or the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (FACRRM), with extended skills. Fellows of other specialist colleges are considered, depending on their remote/rural and primary health care experience.
From growing up in rural Goondiwindi, to forging her career through work and study right across the country, a career with the RFDS was always in Michelle Hannan’s future.

While pursuing her studies in Medical Science and Medicine at the University of New South Wales, Michelle attended the Rural Clinical School in Wagga Wagga, where she undertook a year-long placement in Tumut. Remaining in Wagga for her internship and residency, it was here Michelle had her first experience in the ICU and emergency wards, gaining invaluable knowledge and first-hand experience.

Never one to let dust settle, Michelle then moved to Tasmania to do both general practice and emergency work for a period, while also lecturing at the University of Tasmania and running a vineyard.

“It’s not typical to have a job that allows you to provide both GP services and emergency care, however that was what I wanted from my career,” Michelle said. “I knew if I wanted to follow both of my passions, I could find that mix in rural medicine which was always something I wanted to do. I’ve had a lot of fantastic rural medicine mentors over the years who have really helped shape my idea of what I wanted my clinical practice to look like.”

Always striving to further her knowledge and career in medicine and health care, Michelle earned her Fellowship of the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine with advanced training in emergency medicine, and she is currently working towards a Masters in Public Health and Tropical Medicine at James Cook University.

Michelle’s hard work and determination finally paid off, securing her current position at the Royal Flying Doctor Service in Mount Isa.

“This job can be really challenging, and it’s always interesting,” she said. “For me, it’s a very different form of medicine. It’s Rural Generalism at its core. There’s a lot of very complex chronic medicine involved, particularly for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients, and you do feel like you are making a difference for the community. The emergency retrieval side of things adds another exciting element to the job, but one aspect I really enjoy is that many of the evacs we perform are for our clinic patients whom we know well.”

However, with the excitement comes the challenges, especially in remote locations. Michelle has experienced this first-hand numerous times, including recently when the Mount Isa crew, including Michelle, was called to a serious car accident. With only a vague report of where the accident was, Michelle and her colleagues had to think quickly on their feet.

“In a situation like that, we need to figure out if there’s a serviceable strip nearby we can land on, or a road strip, or if we need to ask one of the remote nurses to take their ambulance out. Once we get there, it can then take time to stabilise the patient and get them into the aircraft,” she said.

“It was clear when we got to this accident that the patient needed to be flown straight to Townsville Hospital, and fortunately we were able to fly her directly to the tertiary care she needed.

“In this job, there’s always something going on – whether it be someone walking through the door at the clinic or calling for the plane – the possibilities are endless.”

For Michelle, working for the RFDS has given her a whole new perspective on rural and remote medicine.

“Even though you do cover quite large distances, the populations are small and you get to know each person well – it’s more personal, which I really like,” she said.

“The people I work with and the rural and remote Australians I meet are truly inspirational. The local people are always so grateful for our help and are very supportive of the RFDS. I love what I do. I couldn’t think of a better career path, especially with the RFDS, and I would definitely encourage other doctors to think about this as a career option.”
Mental Health Professionals

Our Mental Health Professionals enhance community access to quality, multi-disciplinary, comprehensive psychological services and work within the RFDS Primary Health Care framework. With a background in Psychology, Social Work, Mental Health Nursing or Occupational Therapy, our Mental Health Professionals focus on the provision of clinical interventions, in addition to the development and delivery of early intervention activities that enhance social and emotional wellbeing of individuals, families and communities.
In 2012 Mal Hatcher, along with her husband made the big decision to move from their home in a small UK village to Australia to be closer to their two daughters. After spending her career working in hospitals in the UK, Mal knew that she wanted to take a similar path on her move to Australia and that opportunity presented itself in 2013 when Mal was asked to work for the Royal Flying Doctor Service in Longreach. Instantly, Mal knew that she wanted to be part of the iconic organisation she had grown up hearing about.

“Even on the other side of the world, the RFDS is such an icon. For many back home, Australia is about two things – kangaroos and the Royal Flying Doctor Service. My family in the UK were so proud when I told them about my job,” Mal said.

As a clinical and health psychologist, Mal spends most of her time overseeing clinical roles, supporting staff and working with people suffering from moderate to acute mental health issues. Mal has seen first hand how imperative mental healthcare is to the livelihoods of families in remote and rural areas, who are faced with unique environmental and geographical challenges.

“We’ve had a tough time here in Longreach with the drought impacting heavily on people,” she said.

“At different times for so many people, life doesn’t turn out how they expect and that can be hard for them and their families. That’s when we help.”

For me, it’s incredibly satisfying when a patient recommends the service to a friend or family member, encouraging them to get help too. I love that we’re easily accessible for everyone

For me, it’s incredibly satisfying when a patient recommends the service to a friend or family member, encouraging them to get help too. I love that we’re easily accessible for everyone,” she said.

“And when someone asks what the cost will be, that’s when I turn around with a big smile and say ‘it’s free’. To be able to help someone who feels their world is falling apart, and knowing they don’t have to stress about finding a way to pay is a wonderful thing.”

Working closely with a small group of other allied health professionals in Longreach and outlying areas makes Mal’s job even more enjoyable.

“The team’s diverse, experienced, friendly, totally autonomous and always willing to help – we’re honestly like a small family. We respect each other, support one another and there’s such a strong sense of community.

“I’ve fallen in love and I feel a real connection with this community and the RFDS with whom I get to do amazing work with every day. Australia is certainly home now!”

MAL HATCHER – CLINICAL AND HEALTH PSYCHOLOGIST, LONGREACH

This is what motivates Mal every day – seeing people benefit from the support being provided. For Mal, breaking down the mental health stigma that exists is so important, especially in regional and rural communities.

“I’ve fallen in love and I feel a real connection with this community and the RFDS with whom I get to do amazing work with every day. Australia is certainly home now!”

Queensland Section | 2017-2018 15
Support Services

Working behind the scenes at the Royal Flying Doctor Service (Queensland Section) is a dedicated team of support service personnel, ensuring our front line teams can keep focused on their roles and continue providing the finest care to the furthest corner of the state.

Whether it be in Finance, Human Resources, Clinical Governance, Corporate Services and Administration, Engineering and Maintenance, or Marketing and Fundraising, these team members are providing crucial services to ensure the Queensland Section’s focus remains solely on delivering the best possible care to our patients.
For Cairns Base Service Coordinator Leanne Lowe, working for the Royal Flying Doctor Service was destined to be. With a husband in the Australian Defence Force, moving around frequently was something Leanne and her family were used to, but when they came to Cairns and Leanne landed her job at the RFDS Cairns Base, everything seemed to fall into place.

Starting off as a temporary employee in 2010, Leanne was made permanent seven months later. She knew this was an organisation she wanted to stay a part of for many years to come.

“One of my first jobs was to archive documents and while I was doing this I came across an old box filled with letters that had been sent to us. Reading these letters of gratitude touched my heart and brought tears to my eyes,” Leanne remembers.

“One letter that really stood out to me was from a lady who had a premature baby and was flown to Cairns. Although her baby didn’t survive, the time she took to write this incredible letter filled with kind words of appreciation was so touching to read. It really brought home to me what the RFDS is all about – bringing the finest care to the furthest corner – and I know 90 years on, Reverend John Flynn would be extremely proud.”

For Leanne, who has now been at the Cairns Base for eight years, each day brings something new.

“You can start your day with a to-do-list and that could completely be thrown out the window. You have to be adaptable and juggle multiple priorities so our team can focus on caring for people in need,” she said.

“As I always say, support staff are like a V8 pit crew – no one ever wins a race without them! While my contribution in the scheme of things is small, I know it helps keep the wheels turning.”

At the end of the day, not much has changed from when Leanne first started and read those letters.

“For me, it’s about the people we help and those that help us, our supporters. You never get tired of hearing those stories, they still bring a tear to my eye but at the same time they make me so proud to be part of the RFDS.”
The Queensland Fleet

Beechcraft King Air B350C
Taking our service to the next level with the latest technology

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<th>MAXIMUM SPEED</th>
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The King Air B350C is the latest addition to the Queensland fleet and utilises the latest avionic technology to help our pilots fly safer, further, and faster than ever before. Configured with a three-stretcher solution, we can now transport patients non-stop from Cairns and Mount Isa to tertiary care in Brisbane. This new capability makes the B350 a vital part of our inter-hospital transfer service.

King Air B200
When time is of the essence

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A highly functional and configurable aircraft, the King Air B200 allows us to transfer patients using a two-stretcher configuration. The B200’s speed and agility lets us land on airstrips of only 1200 metres in length in any part of the state.

The B200, as well as being a retrieval aircraft, also flies our clinical teams to remote regions to deliver a range of primary health care services.

Cessna C208
Delivering primary health care to the top end

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Affectionately known as the “caravan” the Cessna C208 operates out of our Cairns Base, transporting our primary health care teams to rural and remote communities in the Cape York region to deliver health care clinics and primary health care services. In 2019, these aircraft will be decommissioned making way for King Air B200 replacements as dedicated clinic aircraft.
Beechcraft King Air B350C

King Air B200

Cessna C208
Top 10 aeromedical evacuation flight paths for each base

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The furthest corner. The finest care.
Locations we travelled to within Queensland

Aviation statistics for 2017/18

- Number of landings: 21,066
- Hours flown: 22,776
- Kilometres flown: 7,743,604
Dedicated to taking the finest care to the furthest corners, we travel to over 79 rural and remote locations across Queensland to provide primary health care services to those in need.
The Wandering Fisherman

With a bag full of fish and his mates in tow, Cliff Packham made his way back to his accommodation on the tranquil Sweers Island in the Gulf of Carpentaria. However, his fishing trip – more than 10 years in the making – was to be cut dramatically short.

After a successful day of fishing, Cliff made his way back to his cabin. Shortly after arriving, he began to feel unwell.

“It was our third day fishing and on our walk back to the accommodation when I said to my mates ‘I am not feeling too good’,” Cliff said.

“When we made it back I suddenly felt very lethargic, I can’t explain it, it was just a feeling of being unwell.”

Cliff’s mates had alerted Tex, one of the owners of Sweers Island, that he was feeling unwell and Tex decided to monitor Cliff’s blood pressure as a precaution and alerted the Flying Doctor.

It was then that Cliff’s heart stopped beating and he went into cardiac arrest.

“I can’t say I had chest pains – we’d been fishing all morning so I can’t even blame the fact that I was fighting a big fish and it put strain on me. There was no pain, no shortness of breath, nothing at all,” reflects Cliff.

But the fact Cliff is alive to tell his story today is testament to many incredible people who came to his rescue.

One of Cliff’s mates began performing CPR straight away, before Kody, a young worker on Sweers Island took over, carrying out CPR on Cliff for more than 20 minutes.

Fortunately, Sweers Island had an operating defibrillator donated by the RFDS. In the 10 years Tex had been looking after it, it had never been used up until that moment. Thankfully Tex and the Sweers Island team had always carried out regular checks to make sure it could operate and these check-ups are what saved Cliff’s life.

“From what I heard, they raced down with the defibrillator and these check-ups are what saved Cliff’s life,” said Cliff.

After a successful day of fishing, Cliff made his way back to his cabin. Shortly after arriving, he began to feel unwell.

“I can’t say I had chest pains – we’d been fishing all morning so I can’t even blame the fact that I was fighting a big fish and it put strain on me. There was no pain, no shortness of breath, nothing at all,” Cliff said.

All the while, Sweers Island staff were on the phone to the Royal Flying Doctor Service in Mount Isa who were providing advice.

After landing on Sweers Island, the RFDS crew stabilised Cliff before flying him to Townsville Hospital, about 1000km away.

“I believe that on the way to Townsville I went through another cardiac arrest, but I have no recollection of that at all. I remember nothing other than telling my mate I was unwell, and I didn’t even know I’d collapsed until I woke up in the hospital in Townsville about 24 hours later,” said Cliff.

It took Cliff several months to work out that his survival had less to do with luck, and more to do with his friends’ quick thinking, the Flying Doctor’s speedy response and Townsville Hospital’s excellent cardiac surgeons.

“It’s more than luck, I’m absolutely astounded because A, my friends knew what to do, B they had a defibrillator on the island, and C, the Flying Doctors were able to come from Mount Isa and land on this little tiny island in dark and difficult conditions. They stabilised me on the ground and got me to where I needed to be,” said Cliff.

“I don’t think people are aware of the invaluable service the Royal Flying Doctor Service provide, or the cost involved for them to provide those services.”

Today, Cliff is well and truly recovered. Every day he is feeling stronger and although it has only been just over a year since he almost died twice, he’s already planning his return to Sweers Island to pick up the pieces of his once-in-a-lifetime holiday.

I can’t say I had chest pains – we’d been fishing all morning so I can’t even blame the fact that I was fighting a big fish and it put strain on me. There was no pain, no shortness of breath, nothing at all.
The furthest corner. The finest care.
Our services

The Royal Flying Doctor Service has been delivering the finest care to the furthest corner in Queensland for 90 years. With our origins in aeromedical retrieval, we have grown throughout our rich history to now be considered one of Australia’s finest primary health care providers.

GP Clinics

Rural and remote Queensland is characterised by small, widely dispersed populations. Because of their geography, these communities often lack easy access to primary health care services. The RFDS works to overcome this, providing regular fly-in fly-out GP, Nursing and allied health clinics to rural and remote communities.

RFDS Medical Officers provide a comprehensive general practice service and facilitate all aspects of primary medical care, including child & maternal health and immunisations. Medical Officers are experienced in providing health services in a rural and remote setting and many have special interests and skills.

General practice clinics are held on a regular basis in remote locations; the frequency of visits depends on local needs. Medical Officers work closely with other health professionals outside of the RFDS to provide best quality care.

24,922 patients visited RFDS primary health care clinics in the 2017/18 financial year.
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AEROMEDICAL RETRIEVAL

All RFDS Bases in Queensland except Longreach and Roma provide an aeromedical and primary response service. This service includes the provision of primary responses and the transport of patients between hospitals (inter-hospital transfers). This financial year, the RFDS conducted 11,479 patient transports, including 1,015 primary responses and 10,318 inter-hospital transfers.

Our aircraft are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week; staffed with a Pilot, Flight Nurse and, if required, a Medical Officer.

Beechcraft King Air B200s and B350 aircraft are used for retrieval and inter-hospital transfer work in Queensland. All aircraft are pressurised and configured to resemble an intensive care unit. Our aircraft are fitted with either Lifeport or TAS systems, which incorporate oxygen, suction and power outlets, to act as a stretcher loading system that is fully compatible with road ambulances.

This financial year, the RFDS conducted 11,479 patient transports, including 1,015 primary responses and 10,318 inter-hospital transfers.

PRIMARY RESPONSE

A primary response involves the RFDS responding to a call from the scene. Often in remote areas, this call can come direct to the RFDS on its medical emergency lines. When “000” calls are received the RFDS is then contacted to respond. Primary responses occur when immediate first line treatment may not be available at the location of the patient.

The RFDS provides telehealth support while flying to the scene, before providing appropriate treatment upon arrival. The patient is then transported to the appropriate hospital if necessary.

Isolated properties, remote health clinics or the scene of an accident are examples of possible retrieval locations.

INTER-HOSPITAL TRANSFERS

Inter-hospital transfers involve the transport of patients between hospital facilities. This frequently occurs when surgery or specialist treatment care is required for the patient, which are not available at the originating facility. Transfer is therefore necessary to enable the patient to access the suitable specialty and acute care.

These transfers are coordinated through Retrieval Services Queensland, a division of Queensland Health.
Mental Health

The RFDS is continuing to develop its mental health services to assist in addressing the health needs of those in rural and remote areas. The limited availability of services combined with a low help-seeking behaviour and stigmas associated with mental health issues, compound the problem even more than in urban areas.

Through the RFDS (Queensland Section) Social and Emotional Wellbeing Program, and a dedicated team of clinical psychologists operating out of the RFDS Longreach Base, we are able to provide psychological counselling services to rural and remote communities. Activities under this program form part of the RFDS primary health care response, with multiple professional disciplines bringing complimentary skills to the range of activities.

DROUGHT WELLBEING SERVICE

Since April 2015, RFDS (Queensland Section) has been leading the Drought Wellbeing Service across Queensland. This program, run through a partnership with Queensland Health’s Mental Health and Other Drugs Branch, offers counselling and support to people living and working in areas impacted by drought. Through the Drought Wellbeing Service, qualified counsellors work alongside existing RFDS clinicians and attend established RFDS primary health care clinics. Counsellors are also available via telehealth or outreach sessions providing strategies that can help in tough times, or an ear to listen to wellbeing concerns.

The RFDS Mental Health program, through its Social and Emotional Wellbeing Service, Drought Wellbeing Service and GP clinic service, delivered 8,350 occasions of care in 2017/18.

headspace CAIRNS

The RFDS (Queensland Section) is carrying on our role as Lead Agency for headspace in Cairns responsible for the provision of youth mental health and counselling services in the region.

Since it was established in 2006, headspace has supported hundreds of thousands of young people and their families through direct clinical services and thousands more through health promotion and community awareness activities.

In 2017/18, the Centre delivered 4,398 mental health assessment and counselling sessions to young people aged between 12 and 25.

Group sessions are provided throughout the school terms, and include activities such as yoga, music, and drama. headspace clinicians also facilitate clinical groups for girls aged 12-14.
Telehealth & Medical Chests

**TELEHEALTH**

RFDS Medical Officers provide a 24-hour medical consultation service to people living, working or travelling in remote and rural Queensland. As well as providing direct patient care services from its traditional Bases in Cairns, Mount Isa and Charleville, RFDS Medical Officers also give advice to rural doctors, remote area nurses, allied health staff, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers, patients and carers that reside in these remote communities.

The RFDS is also currently taking part in a nationwide trial testing the effectiveness of video conference GP consultations conducted from rural clinics. This service is being run as an additional service on top of the pre-existing, face-to-face clinic consultations.

**MEDICAL CHESTS**

In Queensland, the RFDS is responsible for more than 1,200 medical chests located throughout the most remote parts of the state and extending into parts of the Northern Territory. The contents of the medical chests are prescribed remotely on site by RFDS Medical Officers. Patients can be treated for a range of conditions including antibiotics for infections, or pain relief in preparation for an emergency retrieval.

Through our telehealth service, our Medical Officers help those in community to administer first aid and medical assistance to those in immediate need using contents from the Medical Chest.

13,338 people contacted the Flying Doctor through its Telehealth service in the 2017/18 financial year.
Operating since 2001, the RFDS Field Day program was set up with the goal of promoting the benefits of health and wellbeing to people living in rural and remote areas of far north Queensland.

RFDS Field Days are conducted at about 18 cattle properties each year. Held in conjunction with a medical clinic, the Field Day program covers topics such as first aid, diet and nutrition, mental health and exercise.

The RFDS Field Day team usually consists of a doctor, nurse, a mental health professional and a health promotion officer to ensure the information and care delivered at each event is relevant and worthwhile.

But just as important as any of the services we provide, is the community aspect of the Field Days. People travel up to three hours or more from neighbouring properties to attend the sessions. And while the medical and health services we provide at our Field Days are invaluable, the rare opportunity for people to get together in a social setting, and overcome issues surrounding social isolation, is just another reason the RFDS Field Day program is such a highly treasured aspect of our service.
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RFDS Dental Service

Since 2013, the RFDS Dental Service has been delivering vital dental care to more than 20 rural and remote communities across central west and north west Queensland.

Delivering preventative care as well as treatment for a range of oral health conditions at no cost to the patient, the RFDS Dental Service travels a scheduled route each year, staying for a minimum of two weeks in most towns.

These crucial oral health care services are delivered from our state-of-the-art mobile dental truck. The purpose-built semi-trailer features two modern dental surgeries, a sterilisation area, reception desk, kitchenette, and the latest panoramic dental x-ray equipment, allowing the five-person dental team to provide world-class dental care to patients who would otherwise have to travel hundreds of kilometres to receive equivalent care.

In its first five years of service, the RFDS Dental Service has delivered more than $6.4 million in dental care, with close to 1,200 patients accessing the service in the past year.

The RFDS Dental Service was initially made possible through the philanthropic efforts of QCoal Group and the QCoal Foundation, whose financial support and advocacy paved the way for the service to now be wholly funded by the Commonwealth Government, commencing in April 2017. This new federal funding of over $1 million per annum will ensure the RFDS Dental Service can continue delivering vital oral health care to people living and working in rural and remote Queensland through until 2022 and beyond.

The RFDS Dental Service provides services including:
> Oral health maintenance
> X-Rays and extractions
> Treatment for acute or pre-existing conditions
> Treatments for gum disease
> Referral to specialist dental services

For all RFDS Dental Service enquiries and bookings, call 1800 002 507.

RFDS Dental Service: Bringing a smile to rural and remote Queensland
Clinical Governance

Eighteen months have passed since the Clinical Governance team was re-formed following organisational restructure. During this short time, significant gains have been made by the Clinical Governance team including continuation of accreditation against the National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards, self-assessment against the Royal Australian College of General Practice Standards, development and implementation of an electronic aeromedical health record, completion of a state-wide organisational learning strategy review, and development of nursing and medical workforce strategies.

In recognition of the pivotal role our clinicians and multi-disciplinary teams play in patient safety and quality improvement, the Clinical Governance team prioritised communication and engagement with all staff and key stakeholders.

CONSUMER FEEDBACK

Consumer Feedback is used to improve services, provide insight into how to create a better experience for consumers as well as inform organisational decisions regarding consumer needs and service delivery requirements. A summary of consumer feedback received is outlined below.

- 84% - compliments
- 9% - general grievances
- 5% - communications
- 2% - access to services
STAR Program

The retrieval and transport of critically ill patients remains one of the most challenging aspects of modern medicine. There is a requirement for practitioners to possess a broad range of critical care skills and be able to apply them in a highly restrictive and unpredictable environment.

The RFDS Queensland Section has combined all of its expertise into creating the RFDS STAR Program – Specialised Training in Aeromedical Retrieval.

The STAR Program (which is open to both RFDS staff and external health professionals) is recognised as one of the best scenario-based training experiences in the country, with attendees signing up from across Australasia.

The style of training is based on total immersion, with delegates being split into groups which have to overcome a range of realistic scenarios they might encounter during the course of their working day as an aeromedical service provider.

The STAR Program is a real feather in the RFDS hat, with Queensland Section’s Clinical Training and Development team taking immense pride in developing and curating this internationally recognised course.

What is incredible is the trust that’s built between people who did not know each other before beginning the course.
How the Flying Doctor is funded in Queensland

RFDS (Queensland Section) Funding Model
Gross Turnover $92m

- 51% State Government Funding
  - > Inter-Hospital Transfer Via retrieval Services QLD
- 23% Federal Government Funding
  - > Emergency Evacuation
  - > GP Clinics
  - > Dental Services
- 17% Philanthropic Funding
  - > Capital Funding needs and projects
- 8% Project Funding
  - > Health Services
- 1% Other funding

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Sponsors and Corporate Supporters

FUNDING PARTNERS

Australian Government
Department of Health

Queensland Government

PRINCIPAL PARTNERS

BRISBANE AIRPORT CORPORATION

ERGON ENERGY RETAIL

QCOAL GROUP

CORPORATE SUPPORTERS

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McCullough Robertson

Woolworths

RideWest

Beechcraft Cessna Hawker

Rockhampton Regional Council

NATIONAL PARTNERS

air bp Neverfall TAL
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RFDS Townsville Base
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How you can help

To help meet the costs associated with running a 24 hour emergency and comprehensive health care service, the RFDS relies on the generosity of individuals, community groups, business and the corporate sector as well as funding provided by the Commonwealth and State Governments.

The money donated to the RFDS helps to:

> purchase and medically fit out aircraft
> develop a range of outback and rural health initiatives

Please donate today:

> Mail to 12 Casuarina Street, Brisbane Airport QLD 4008
> Call us on 1300 669 569
> Visit our website www.flyingdoctor.org.au/qld

A.B.N. 80 009 663 478

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