

July 2020

Going the **DISTANCE**

Stories of strength and survival, made possible by you



Thanks to you

Nothing will stop
our frontline teams
from saving lives!



Royal Flying Doctor Service
VICTORIA

To you, from Scott

2020 has been a year of unprecedented emergencies.

However, it will also be remembered as a year when humanity, bravery and community spirit shone through brightly.

From the incredible courage of Australia's firefighting volunteers, to the numerous acts of kindness shown by ordinary people to vulnerable members of their communities. Thanks to people like you, we've come through these challenging and difficult times together.

The Flying Doctor frontline teams have been working under very challenging circumstances this year. But they've remained focused, carrying out missions across the nation and making a lifesaving difference to many people.

To date, the Flying Doctor has safely transported 550 confirmed or suspected COVID-19 patients in Australia, including 330 in Victoria.

The stories featured in this special edition of *Going the Distance* reinforce what I have always known; our staff are not just dedicated and committed professionals – they are driven by a need to help others. And that's a quality they share with you.

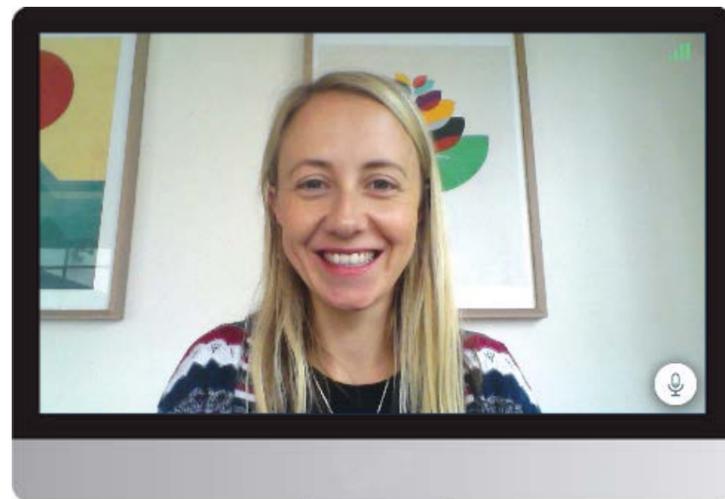
When our medics take to the skies for another lifesaving mission, you're right there with them. When our patient transport vehicles hit the road or telehealth services help someone access the health care they need, you're making it possible.

Together we make such a powerful team; united by a belief that no one should die because of where they live.

Thank you for your continued support.

Scott Chapman
Chief Executive
Royal Flying Doctor Service Victoria

AUSTRALIANS EMBRACE TELEHEALTH TO SAVE LIVES DURING COVID-19



Meagan helps patients access specialist health care from home.

Your support helps people to access specialist health care and advice from the safety of their own homes.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented us with a unique set of challenges. How can we give rural communities access to the health care they need, while keeping them and our staff protected?

The Flying Doctor Telehealth service has been running since 2013, but during the COVID-19 crisis, it's become obvious how beneficial the program is for our communities. The service uses online video calls to connect patients in rural Victoria, with health specialists in Melbourne and other locations. The service is 100% bulk billed and operates thanks to our strong partnerships with local health services.

Meet Meagan, Telehealth Program Support Officer

Meagan provides support to rural GP practices and health providers, and organises telehealth consultations between patients and specialists.

"It's my job to arrange appointments and make sure they go smoothly, so that our clients can get the most out of their time with the specialists."

- MEAGAN

Meagan explains how things have changed for the Telehealth team during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The main difference is that we now have the ability to do most of our appointments from people's home. If they have access to Wi-Fi and a smart phone or laptop, we can have them set up for a meeting in 10 minutes.

"The best part about this is that I'm getting to engage with our clients on a daily basis. Once we get the call set up, I wait with the client until the specialist joins us. That way I know it's all connected and they aren't wasting precious time with the specialist working out sound issues. While we wait we get to chat about how they're coping with isolation. I have met beautiful dogs, been on tours of people's houses and seen grandchildren's artwork on fridges. It's lovely!

"One lovely couple who live very far away told me that if they couldn't access their specialist in Swan Hill, they would have to drive to Melbourne every 1-2 months. They would have to stay overnight

to see the specialist and it would cost them \$500 every trip, which is money they don't have.

"Instead they're able to go to their local health service and use our telehealth service and talk to their doctor via video conference. More recently, during lockdown, they were able to do this from home."

When asked what she loves most about her job, Meagan said "I love it when we can move things around to get someone an appointment who really needs it. I love it when we hear back from a client that the specialist was excellent. Our days are full of moments like this."

Meagan knows that the vital service her telehealth team provides is only possible with your help.

"A huge thank you! I wish you could see the happy, sometimes nervous, but always lovely faces that I get to see every day. The smiles I get when the camera connects and they realise the technology is working are so heart-warming.

"Thank you for believing that the health of every person in Australia is important."

"I love being able to help people"
– Meagan, Telehealth Program Support Officer



YOU'RE PROTECTING FRONTLINE WORKERS LIKE ALLISON

With your help, our hard-working crews have continued to transport patients to hospital by air and road during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Our crews have needed to be extra vigilant about the threat of infection to themselves and vulnerable patients – and your support has helped to keep them safe.

Meet Allison, Patient Transport Officer

Allison's working day starts a little differently since the COVID-19 outbreak.

"We take our temperature first thing when we arrive at work. It's not something we did before. We're rigorous about that now," she said.

"Ambulance checks look a little bit different now, because we have to make sure that suits, masks and antibacterial soaps are there just in case we get a COVID call."

What happens when Allison gets a call where the patient is showing possible COVID-19 symptoms?

"We've got a special COVID-19 ambulance. To reduce the risk of transmission, it's got the bare essentials on board. We get all suited up. I've got double gloves on, goggles, a mask and a hood on... I call it my full Oompa Loompa suit!

"Then, when we arrive, we have to keep our distance. We go to the door and stay 1.5 meters away. If the patients are sick and need our help, we give them all our help and love."

One of the biggest changes that Allison is facing is the way protection gear has changed her interaction with patients.

"There's a lot of intimacy lost between us and the patient. It's hard to reassure people in the same way when they can't see your face. I always tell people that they may not be able to see my face under here, but I'm definitely smiling!"

When we asked Allison what her favourite part of the job is, she said, "I just really love meeting people. It's incredible how quickly we can build trust and rapport. That doesn't happen anywhere else in life."

Allison is proud to work for the Flying Doctor and saw first hand the closeness and connection many people feel towards the organisation at a recent fundraising event.

"I had my RFDS polo shirt on and the warmth and love that people showed us was amazing."



"If they're sick and they need our help, we give them all our help and love" - Allison

"I always tell people that they may not be able to see my face under here, but I'm definitely smiling!"

- ALLISON



Allison in her protective suit.



MEET DR BEC JACOBS

Dr Bec loves serving her community in Robinvale, located in north-west Victoria by the Murray River.

In 2006, Dr Bec Jacobs undertook a university placement with the Royal Flying Doctor Service in Broken Hill and fell in love with it. Fourteen years later, she's serving the rural community of Robinvale; working to rebuild the community's health care services as a GP and coordinating a response to COVID-19.

"The testing clinic we've set up at the Robinvale hospital has been running since COVID testing started. We've got a drive through testing clinic, with self-testing kits, so none of us actually have to be exposed. The patient can drive into the front of the hospital and take a self-testing kit off a peg while staying in their car. Following the instructions in the kit, they do the swab, drop it in the box, and then return home to continue self-isolation."

The presence of the Flying Doctor in Robinvale during the COVID-19 crisis has been critical.

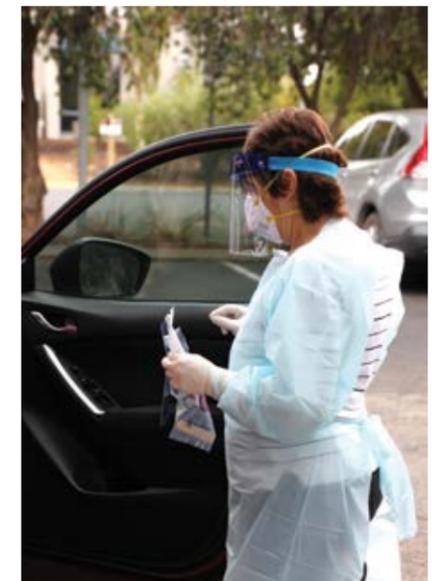
"The local private practice has one doctor at the moment. The Aboriginal co-op runs on

"Thank you, you help me make a difference to the patients I see every day in my room. And we're doing that in locations where people wouldn't have had a service otherwise."

- BEC

locum (temporary) doctors, but their locum hasn't been able to get in due to the lockdown. So, potentially, you've got a community of 10,000 people facing a pandemic with only one full-time doctor. That would be the reality for Robinvale if the Flying Doctor hadn't come in."

When asked what the most meaningful part of her job is, Dr Bec says, "I have the privilege of seeing people on some of the best days of their life. But we can also make a real difference even on the worst days of their lives. I get the privilege of being there to share that. And being able to change that."



Leanne Adcock, Director of Clinical Services Robinvale assists with COVID-19 testing.

A MAP OF MEMORIES

Gillian is a beloved supporter of the Flying Doctor. Like you, she helps to keep us in the air and on the road.

Gillian Knight's love of travel has taken her all over Australia, travels which she's documented with badges on a much-loved quilt.

"For about 35 years I have been travelling and when I got 50 badges on my Akubra I couldn't wear it anymore, it was too heavy! So I made this map," Gillian told us.

Having traversed the vastness of our great country, Gillian says she has a real appreciation for the Flying Doctor.

A service the adventurous octogenarian describes as "an absolute godsend."

"One time I was driving down the great north road, listening to the ABC, and all through the day they were warning you to keep off the road at about half past seven because the Flying Doctor was going to land on the road! This was near Onslow about 20 years ago."

As a resident of Raymond Island, a small community in the Gippsland lakes, Gillian has seen firsthand the impact the recent bushfires have had on the local community.

In early January, Gillian made the decision to evacuate to the nearby town of Briagolong for a few days, after the fires got dangerously close to her home. Thankfully Raymond Island was saved from the fires, but the nearby town of Sarsfield was, tragically, not so fortunate.

Having witnessed the devastation the bushfires have had on the East Gippsland community, Gillian believes that the ongoing mental health support provided by the Flying Doctor is vital to communities as they rebuild.

They need all the help they can get.

– Gillian Knight,
Flying Doctor Supporter



Gillian has travelled far and wide - documenting her travels on a handmade quilt of Australia.



REPAIRING FENCES... AND COMMUNITIES

You're helping to rebuild the lives of communities hurt by the bushfires in Buchan, East Gippsland.

Campbell Sinclair is always looking to do more to help others.

In the wake of the bushfires Campbell was inspired by his personal connection to Buchan to join the Flying Doctor Wellbeing Bushfire recovery service, funded by the Gippsland Primary Health Network.

A psychologist with over 30 years' experience, Campbell was determined to combine his professional expertise and local knowledge to support the people of Buchan.

When fires tore through the small town, locals were devastated by the damage caused to homes and wildlife.

"Many local farmers were distressed about having to shoot some of their own animals that were suffering," said Campbell.

Campbell knew that his support wouldn't just be needed in the immediate aftermath of the bushfires, it would take time for the community to recover.

"In my career as a psychologist, I've done a fair bit of work with

people that have had trauma so I felt I could make a difference. After a huge fire like this, the community runs on adrenaline for a while, particularly the men. They need to get their fences fixed to get their stock back in. They need to get feed for the animals.

"After about four months, people start to come off the adrenaline and that's when they struggle to cope. They start to think about what happened and what they've lost. For example, they go to get the screwdriver in the shed, and they don't have a shed anymore."

With your support, we can continue to stay and help communities in the aftermath of emergencies.

Through experience, he knew that the men of the community might need more support. He also knew he had to earn their trust to get them to open up.

"Us men tend to bottle it up. We don't tend to go and see somebody about our problems. To engage the farming community, you've got to earn their confidence.

During the first few weeks I helped repair fences on their properties. I knew nothing about fencing, but I do now.

– Campbell Sinclair,
Mental Health Clinician

"Having previously helped out with the fencing, I've got a bit of a reputation of going around and helping out. I knew nothing about fencing, but I do now."

In spite of everything they've been through, Campbell has hope for the community; "I think they're very resilient and they will bounce back. But it's going to be a long journey."

For anyone having a tough time, Campbell says, "There's no shame in going to ask somebody for some help on a mental health problem. Put your hand up. Ask somebody. Don't be ashamed."

Campbell is part of an incredible team of staff and volunteers supporting communities across Victoria impacted by the bushfires. And supporters like you have been there with them. Together, we'll help our neighbours rebuild.

A NEW EVENT FOR YOU: BASE TO BUSH

The COVID-19 crisis has put a number of our events on hold, and we've really missed meeting the wonderful people who support the important work we do.

As a not-for-profit organisation, your support is critical for ensuring we can be there for anyone who needs the Flying Doctor.

That's why we're introducing an exciting new event that's safe for everyone to take part in.



Register – get sponsored – get going!

Register now to take part in our new virtual challenge: Base to Bush!

Track your daily walking, running or cycling and tackle the distance from our Airbase at Essendon to one of our 16 Flying Doctor Wellbeing clinics in rural and remote Victoria.

Not only will you challenge yourself and get fitter, you'll also be raising much-needed funds for Flying Doctor Wellbeing – our free mental health service.

Register now and choose your distance at groundcrew.org.au/basetobush

CALVARY, A PICTURE OF HAPPINESS

When Calvary's mum needed the Flying Doctor to take her seriously ill daughter to hospital, she was handing over the most precious thing in her life.

Thanks to supporters like you, we sent an aircraft with a highly trained nursing team to rush Calvary from her home in Perth, to the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne where she received lifesaving surgery.

Today, Calvary is a bright, bubbly 3-year-old – and quite the artist!

That's the difference your donation makes - giving children like Calvary, and her family, the best chance of a future together.



"From the bottom of my heart, thank you for what you've done for us."

- SOFIA, CALVARY'S MUM

Forever flying with a gift in your Will

Gifts in Will keep our crews flying and saving lives no matter where people might need them.

When you've looked after your loved ones, please consider leaving a gift in your Will to the Flying Doctor.

Contact Teresa Cianciosi to learn more:
teresa.cianciosi@rfdsvic.com.au



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