**Older people flown to hospital for preventable illness**

Thousands of remote Australians aged over 65 are flown by aeromedical teams to hospitals with illnesses that could have been prevented through increased country health services.

A Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) study of 23,377 older remote residents transferred by air to hospital found heart, injury, and digestive illness triggered preventable hospital stays.

The Barkly and Alice Springs regions in the Northern Territory, the Kimberley in Western Australia, and Bourke to Coonamble in NSW had the highest preventable heart conditions.

Hospitalisation of remote stroke patients was found to be 1.5 times higher than for city residents, but less than 8% of the nation’s stroke rehabilitation services are rurally based.

RFDS Chief Executive Dr Martin Laverty said “The population of remote Australia is getting older, but the Nation is yet to work out how to support people to age and stay in the bush.

“Neurological conditions of ageing - dementia and Alzheimer’s - will significantly increase within the bush in a decade. Without new investment, existing country services won’t cope.”

The RFDS report that examined reasons for RFDS transfer by air of people aged over 65 and reasons for attendance at RFDS country health clinics found:

* rates of all cancers are higher in rural and remote areas than in cities, but country areas lack reasonable access to oncology, haematology and palliative care;
* Falls of older people are key reasons for RFDS air transfer, but too few country physiotherapists and occupational therapists exist for injury rehabilitation;
* Absence of aged care services in remote areas correlates with increase in transfer by air of older remote residents for preventable hospital stays.

The RFDS report calls for expanded cancer care in rural and remote areas, together with increased cardiac and injury rehabilitation, expanded dementia and aged care services.

“Ageing of the remote population is occurring faster than in other areas. The Royal Commission into care of the aged needs to consider remote needs,” Dr Laverty said.

The report, *Healthy ageing in rural and remote Australia: Challenges to consider,* can be accessed by clicking here.

Dr Laverty and Council of the Ageing Ian Yates are available for interview. The report contains a Foreword by The Hon Ken Wyatt, Minister for Aged Care.

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