



# Australian Red Cross Submission – Determinants of Regional Airtfares

Date: March 2026

## About us

Established in 1914 and by [Royal Charter](#) in 1941, Australian Red Cross is auxiliary to the public authorities in the humanitarian field. We have a unique humanitarian mandate to respond to disasters and emergencies. This partnership means governments can benefit from a trusted, credible, independent and non-political partner with local to global networks, who will work to implement humanitarian goals in a way that maintains the trust of government and Australian society.

Australian Red Cross is one of 191 Red Cross or Red Crescent National Societies that, together with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), make up the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement (the Movement) – the world’s largest and most experienced humanitarian network.

The Movement is guided at all times and in all places by seven [Fundamental Principles](#): Humanity, Impartiality, Neutrality, Independence, Voluntary Service, Unity and Universality. These principles sum up our ethics and the way we work, and they are at the core of our mission to prevent and alleviate suffering.

We remain neutral, and don’t take sides, including in politics; enabling us to maintain the trust of all and to provide assistance in locations others are unable to go. Volunteering is in our DNA, and thousands of volunteers and members support us every day, helping solve social issues in their own communities. All our work is inspired and framed by the principle of Humanity: we seek always to act where there is humanitarian need.

Core areas of expertise for Australian Red Cross include Emergency Services, Migration, International Humanitarian Law (IHL), International Programs, Community Activities and Programs.

Highlights from our [2024-25 Annual Report](#):



**18,200**  
Members and volunteers  
acting for humanity



**281,900**  
Australians supported before,  
during and after disasters

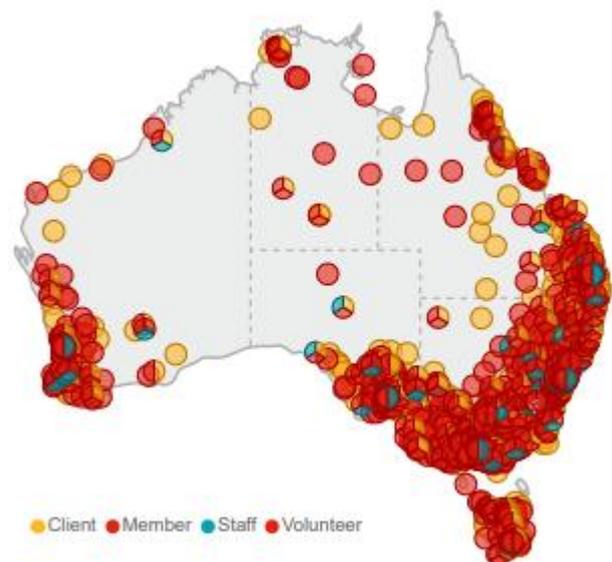


**3.8 million**  
People accessed information  
from disaster preparedness  
campaigns



**34,100**  
People from 129 countries  
supported through migration  
programs

**Location of Red Cross people and clients**



## **Purpose**

The Australian Government is seeking submissions to the Productivity Commission's *Determinants of Regional Airfares* public inquiry. Australian Red Cross welcomes the opportunity to contribute insights drawn from our experience delivering Community Programs in remote Northern Territory locations, particularly the Tiwi Islands and Galiwin'ku.

Australian Red Cross has focused this submission on the operational realities faced by humanitarian and community service organisations working in remote Australia. High regional airfare costs directly affect our ability to provide equitable services, maintain workforce stability, and ensure that essential programs remain accessible to communities. These challenges ultimately reduce the reach and impact of social, health, safety and wellbeing supports in some of Australia's most remote locations.

Australian Red Cross welcomes the opportunity to provide our input to this inquiry. We have focused our response on areas where we have extensive expertise and that align with the unique humanitarian mandate of Australian Red Cross.

## **Summary of recommendations**

Australian Red Cross recommends that the Australian Government:

### **Recommendation 1**

Work with state and territory governments, airlines, and regional airports to develop mechanisms that reduce the cost of essential service travel to remote communities.

### **Recommendation 2**

Improve the frequency and reliability of flights servicing remote regions, enabling more consistent access for community programs and urgent response needs.

### **Recommendation 3**

Incentivise regional workforce attraction and retention by ensuring affordable, accessible airfares for employees travelling to and from remote placements, including for leave, training, and critical wellbeing breaks.

## 1. Issue 1 High airfares create significant barriers to service delivery

- 1.1 Air travel is essential for Australian Red Cross staff supporting Community Programs in Tennant Creek, Alice Springs, Tiwi Islands and Galiwin'ku, where there is no feasible alternative means of access due to distance, terrain, and in some cases limited or no maritime schedules.
- 1.2 Flight prices on these routes are frequently high and fluctuate unpredictably, consuming a disproportionate share of program budgets and limiting the overall availability of resources for frontline services
- 1.3 High airfares directly reduce the frequency with which staff can travel into communities, delaying program delivery, reducing continuity of support, and limiting our ability to respond flexibly to emerging needs within families and communities.
- 1.4 In some instances, Australian Red Cross staff must ration travel or reduce onsite time due to cost constraints, which weakens the effectiveness of programs designed to provide consistent presence, engagement, and culturally responsive practice.
- 1.5 The cost associated with flying staff located in remote communities to attend external training is prohibitive. This significantly constrains our ability to ensure best-practice approaches are embedded and sustained in program delivery.

### Recommendation 1

Work with state and territory governments, airlines, and regional airports to develop mechanisms that reduce the cost of essential service travel to remote communities..

## 2. Issue 2 Airfare costs create inequitable access to additional support services

- 2.1 Many specialised support services—such as child and family specialists, clinicians, allied health providers, or culturally specific consultants—are based in major centres. Their ability to travel to remote communities depends on the affordability and availability of flights.
- 2.2 When flight prices spike or schedules are reduced, partner organisations often decline or postpone travel, resulting in communities missing out on services that would otherwise contribute to safety, wellbeing and resilience.
- 2.3 High fares also hinder multiagency collaboration, as co-located visits become financially unviable, reducing coordination and increasing the burden on local teams already supporting complex, high need caseloads.
- 2.4 More affordable regional fares would enable more frequent specialist visits, greater integration of supports, and improved outcomes for families and children.

### Recommendation 2

Improve the frequency and reliability of flights servicing remote regions, enabling more consistent access for community programs and urgent response needs.

### **3. Issue 3 High airfare costs undermine workforce recruitment and retention**

3.1 Recruitment to remote communities such as Tiwi and Galiwin'ku is already challenging due to limited housing, geographical isolation, and the need for staff with specialised skills and cultural capability.

3.2 The high personal cost of travel is a major deterrent for potential recruits. For many applicants, the cost of flying in and out for weekends, family visits, or holidays becomes prohibitive and ultimately discourages them from accepting or sustaining remote placements.

3.3 Staff wellbeing is closely linked to regular opportunities to reconnect with family and support networks. When flights are financially inaccessible, staff may experience burnout or choose to leave roles prematurely, disrupting program continuity and increasing recruitment costs.

3.4 Making air travel more affordable for employees in essential community service roles would improve attraction, enhance retention, and stabilise support services delivered in remote communities.

3.5 During Emergency Activations, high and unpredictable airfares can delay surge workforce deployment and increase the cost of rapid response, placing additional strain on program delivery.

#### **Recommendation 3**

Incentivise regional workforce attraction and retention by ensuring affordable, accessible airfares for employees travelling to and from remote placements, including for leave, training, and critical wellbeing breaks.

### **Conclusion**

Affordable, reliable aviation services are a foundational enabler of equitable service delivery in remote Australia. In regions such as the Tiwi Islands and Galiwin'ku, air travel is not optional, it is essential infrastructure.

Where airfare costs are volatile and disproportionately high, the consequences extend beyond organisational budgets. They affect workforce stability, service continuity, multi-agency collaboration, and ultimately community wellbeing.

Addressing the determinants of regional airfares through targeted, practical interventions will strengthen productivity, improve service sustainability, and support better long-term outcomes for remote communities.

Australian Red Cross welcomes continued engagement with the Productivity Commission and relevant governments to develop workable, evidence-based solutions.

# Contact Details

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