



# **Jillian Skinner MP**

## **Minister for Health**

## **Minister for Medical Research**

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### **MEDIA RELEASE**

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#### **CONTRACTS SIGNED: NEW AEROMEDICAL SERVICE TO TAKE FLIGHT**

Contracts have been signed with the two preferred proponents to deliver the state's new Helicopter Retrieval Network – one of the largest of its type in the world, Health Minister Jillian Skinner announced today.

Mrs Skinner said the new network is made up of two regions, which will improve response times and deliver better patient outcomes across the state.

- The Northern region will be run by Northern NSW Helicopter Rescue Service Pty Ltd - an amalgamation of two well-known non-government organisations (NGO). This operator is already engaged in aeromedical retrieval which will be tasked to perform patient retrieval from newly constructed helicopter bases in Lismore and Newcastle and the existing base in Tamworth.
- The Southern region will be run by Toll Group - an Australian-listed corporation with a strong track record in helicopter aviation. Toll will operate helicopter patient retrieval services from newly constructed bases in Bankstown, Orange, and Wollongong and the existing base in Canberra.

The new Helicopter Retrieval Network will be operational in 2017 to allow a smooth transition of services.

Mrs Skinner said the finalisation of the contract follows an extensive tender process undertaken by the NSW Government as part of its Reform Plan for Aeromedical (Rotary Wing) Retrieval Services in NSW.

“The signing of these contracts marks another milestone in the NSW Government’s reform of aeromedical services to ensure the delivery of safe, sustainable care to patients right across the state,” Mrs Skinner said.

“A tender process has been undertaken which has successfully engaged a mix of not-for-profit and commercial operators.

“I have no doubt the new Helicopter Retrieval Network will deliver improved retrieval coverage for metropolitan, rural, regional and remote NSW and, most importantly, better outcomes for patients no matter where they live.”

Mrs Skinner said the signing of contracts and the introduction of the Helicopter Retrieval Network will result in every helicopter having the capability to transfer sick neonates and babies, removing the need for a single NETS helicopter.

“The reform plan has paved the way for the streamlining of our helicopters and I’m pleased to say the larger Augusta Westland 139 helicopter will be implemented state-wide as the standard aircraft for the state’s aeromedical fleet,” Mrs Skinner said.

“In a first for NSW, this world-class aircraft will also be NETS (Newborn and Paediatric Transport Service)-capable to deliver life-saving clinical care to our smallest and most vulnerable patients.”

Other key highlights of the new Helicopter Retrieval Network include:

- For the first time in NSW, a doctor will be on every patient retrieval flight, from every base across the Helicopter Retrieval Network;
- Patients will receive faster emergency care with bases operating 24/7 including Newcastle, Tamworth, Orange, Wollongong, Canberra and Lismore, which will allow aircraft to respond to emergencies up to 30 minutes faster;
- The NSW Government has fulfilled its commitment to employ an additional 11.5 FTE retrieval doctors and 18 new FTE paramedics to enhance the service;
- Funding of \$151.2 million from the NSW Government for the new network;
- A newly constructed base at Bankstown airport will include a world-class training facility with an advanced helicopter pilot training simulator and medical and paramedic crew training facilities;
- The Reform Plan guarantees that the Helicopter Retrieval Network can meet the growing demand for retrieval missions in NSW.

There will be further progress of the reform, including medical crewing, in 2015.

The tender recommendations were reviewed and endorsed by a Procurement Governance Committee chaired by Dr Peter Sharley, an independent intensive care and retrieval specialist from South Australia.

Mrs Skinner said aeromedical retrieval services play a vital role in delivery of care to patients across NSW.

“Our aeromedical helicopters are more than just transportation aircraft – they are mobile emergency departments in the sky, providing high-level, quality care to very sick patients,” Mrs Skinner said.

“This new Helicopter Retrieval Network will deliver a world class modern, flexible and effective helicopter fleet to deliver the best care for babies, children and adults and it will give more local paramedics and doctors the ability to get to patients faster than ever before.”

NSW Ambulance Commissioner Ray Creen welcomed today’s announcement.

“Retrieval service paramedics and doctors provide an exemplary aeromedical retrieval service to patients in all corners of the state. Today’s announcement not only secures this service, but enhances it for patients well into the future,” Commissioner Creen said.

“The aeromedical fleet carries out more than 3000 missions each year. The introduction of the new Helicopter Retrieval Network will assist us to meet patient demand for NSW Ambulance aeromedical retrieval which is expected to increase by 23 per cent by 2022.”

For further information about the Helicopter Retrieval Network, please visit [www.health.nsw.gov.au/helicoptertender](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/helicoptertender)