

**NZ FLYING  
DOCTOR SERVICE**



# Impact Report

New Zealand Flying Doctor Trust

# 2025



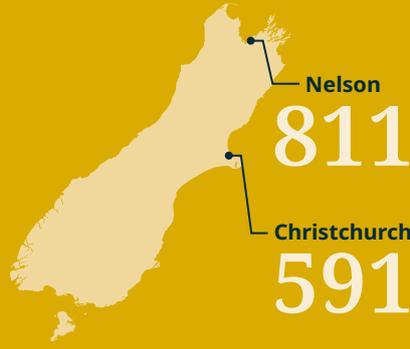
**Saving Lives: Above and beyond the hospital**

# 2025 Summary



Number of patients transferred in 2025

# 1402

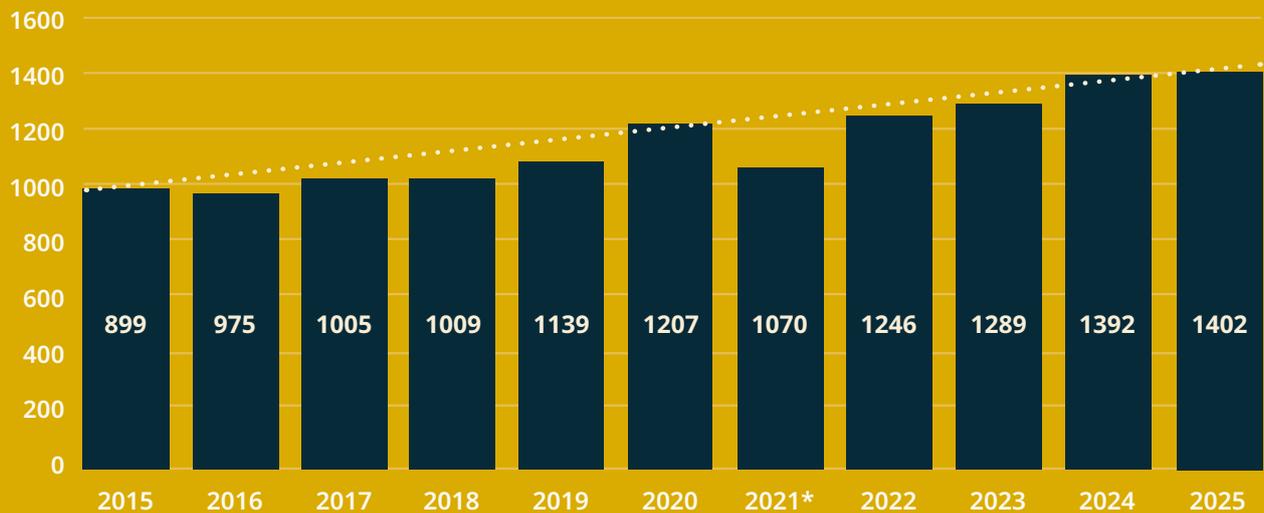


Hours flown

# 2170



## Increase in demand year on year



\*Decrease due to Covid.

# A welcome from our CEO

In 2025, the NZ Flying Doctor Service celebrated 30 years.

While thousands of patients have been supported by the Service, the ripple effect on families, whānau and the community is far greater. The impact of this service cannot be understated.

What started out as a small operation has grown to three turbine aircraft and two bases transporting more than 1,400 patients each year.

While the Service was started thanks to the foresight of Garden City Helicopters (now known as GCH Aviation), its longevity and continued growth is due in large part to you – our community. Thank you.

Three decades on from the Service's first flight, we continue to rely on the community's support. I'd like to take this opportunity to recognise two outstanding

supporters – ROA Mining and the J.I. Urquhart Family Trust. ROA Mining is principal sponsor on the two NZ Flying Doctor planes in Christchurch and the J.I. Urquhart Family Trust has generously sponsored the Nelson based plane. These supporters have shown unmatched dedication to the service and we are deeply grateful for their continued commitment.

With the increasing centralisation of specialist healthcare, we expect demand for the NZ Flying Doctor Service to increase every year. The Service needs to grow to meet that demand, and the Trust is here to support that growth. Already there are plans for an additional plane to join the Service in the coming year.

While 2025 has been a milestone year for the Service, it also marks a personal one for me. After close to eleven years at the helm of the New

Zealand Flying Doctor and Canterbury West Coast Air Rescue Trusts, I am embarking on a new challenge as CEO – Cancer Society Southern. Like many, our family has been impacted by cancer and I look forward to the opportunity to create impact for another wonderful cause.

As I reflect on my time here, I am incredibly proud of how far the Service has come and how, thanks to the generous support of our community, we've been able to meet the needs of the Service every step of the way.

Thank you for the part you have played in keeping our planes flying and ensuring that when patients require critical care in the air, the NZ Flying Doctor Service is there.



**Christine Prince**  
*Chief Executive Officer*  
*New Zealand Flying Doctor Trust*



To keep this 24/7 mobile intensive care unit flying, we need to raise

# \$3 million every year





The first NZ Flying Doctor Service plane, a Cessna 421.



## 2025 HIGHLIGHTS

# 30 years of flight

The NZ Flying Doctor Service celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2025. Garden City Helicopters established the NZ Flying Doctor Service after the 1995 Cave Creek disaster, when a viewing platform collapsed in the Paparoa National Park.

While the rescue helicopter service attended the disaster, it reinforced the need for a flying doctor service that could travel substantial distances and provide advanced on-board medical treatment in a pressurised aircraft.

# Showcasing our service to the community

We opened the hangar doors at the GCH Aviation Air Rescue Base and welcomed hundreds of people behind-the-scenes during our three Community Base Tours. Through these tours of the New Zealand Flying Doctor Service and our sister service, the Westpac Rescue Helicopter, the public had a chance to meet the crew, see the aircraft up close, and get a real glimpse of the life-saving work of both these 24/7 organisations.

# An experience like no other

A successful bid at the NZ Flying Doctor Garden Party saw the team at Colliers' Christchurch office get a rare glimpse inside Christchurch's new stadium, the One NZ Stadium. This private tour experience was generously donated to the Garden Party event by Venues Ōtautahi. The Garden Party raised an incredible \$140,000 to help fund the purchase of two neonatal transport incubators.





## Supporting our littlest patients

Moving the sickest and smallest babies around the country is as challenging as medicine can get.

During 2025 we supported the purchase and commissioning of two new state-of-the-art NXTGen transport incubators, thanks to support from Air Rescue & Community Services, St Vianney's Timaru Trust, the J.I. Urquhart Family Trust, and generous donations from the NZ Flying Doctor Garden Party.

Health NZ Neonatal Paediatrician and transport lead for the Christchurch Neonatal Unit Dr Ruth Sinclair says having the newest and most advanced equipment to provide life support to these babies truly saves lives and improves outcomes to the most precious patients.

## Aeromed 2025

A complex job on a remote island was the subject of a presentation at the Aeromed conference by flight midwife Penny Bee and neonatal retrieval nurse Jacinda Duffy. They were supported to attend the conference, along with New Zealand Flying Doctor Operations Manager Arthur Ruddenklau and Nelson-based pilot Rupert MacLauchlan, by the New Zealand Flying Doctor Trust.

Penny Bee says they received a lot of questions at the conference Q & A and there were many learning and networking opportunities throughout the event.

"We're hoping to integrate some of them into the work we do as midwives, flying pregnant women around New Zealand," Penny says.

## Words from the heart

Hearing positive stories from patients means the world to the crew. Every message is a reminder of why they do this work and showcases the true impact of the Service.

*"I want to extend my deepest gratitude to you all for the exceptional care and support you provided during one of the most challenging times of my life.*

*"Things moved so quickly that day, but one thing is certain — I couldn't have done it without you. From the bottom of my heart, thank you for being there when we needed you the most. You are truly life savers and absolute gems!"*

**Manvi Tandon, transported by the NZ Flying Doctor Service from Christchurch to Dunedin, 14 August 2025**





The NZ Flying Doctor plane crossing the Southern Alps.

# A mission in action

**DATE:** 29 December 2025

**PILOTS:** Arthur, Scott

**FLIGHT NURSE:** Abby

**FLIGHT PATH:** Christchurch, Greymouth, Christchurch

**PURPOSE:** Urgent gastroenterology case requiring treatment at Christchurch Hospital

The NZ Flying Doctor Service team are frequently crossing the main divide, providing West Coast communities with a vital link to critical health services.

During 2025, the NZ Flying Doctor planes transported more than 250 patients from the West Coast.

For Pilot Mark Pettigrew, the West Coast is his favourite destination.

“The West Coast is pretty isolated. The weather can be challenging, the runways are short, and the landing approaches are interesting, but the

views we get as we fly over the main divide – just stunning.

“When we land, we’re always welcomed so warmly. West Coasters rely on the NZ Flying Doctor planes and it’s a privilege to be part of a service that has such an impact on the community,” Mark says.

Our most heartfelt thanks to ROA Mining, principal sponsor of the NZ Flying Doctor planes in Christchurch. Your continued support of the Service demonstrates ROA Mining’s commitment to the health of the West Coast community.



Descending into Greymouth.



On the ground at Greymouth Airport.



Returning home.



On the approach to Christchurch.

# The people who make it possible

Air retrieval is never simple. Every job brings a unique set of challenges and managing those challenges takes a diverse team.

Meet some of the crew who make it all possible.



## Arthur Ruddenklau

**OPERATIONS MANAGER  
AND SENIOR PILOT**

Arthur's job is unpredictable. Urgent calls can come through at any minute, and a mission can last anywhere from three to six hours.

"We spend a lot of time on the phone with Health New Zealand, talking about what specialist support the patient will need and arranging to have that support on hand."

The 24-hour nature of the Service adds another layer of complexity for Arthur and his team, particularly around regional airports.

"You need to know the right people to call to turn on the runway lights and let ambulances through the gates at night. While all our pilots are rated to fly under instrument flight rules, there are still some days we can't fly due to weather. It's tough on the team when we need to get to a patient but the weather just isn't making that possible."

Arthur has been flying for 34 years and at the helm of the NZ Flying Doctor Service for 16 years. His favourite part of the job is the homecomings.

"I love it when we bring patients back home, especially when we're working with tiny babies or unwell children. Being part of their journey home is a real privilege."



## Dr Neil Davidson

**INTENSIVE CARE SPECIALIST AND AEROMEDICAL  
RETRIEVAL SPECIALIST CLINICAL LEAD**

Dr Neil Davidson is an Intensive Care Specialist. He has been involved with the New Zealand Flying Doctor Service for 16 years and has been the Service's Aeromedical Retrieval Specialist Clinical Lead for four years.

While an intensive care specialist and flight coordinator are on call 24/7 for the air retrieval service, Neil is called when there's a trickier situation or one that involves coordinating a lot of moving parts.

"Often my role involves finding solutions to what can be complex situations. At the centre of it all is the needs of the patient. We look at their needs first and then make sure we have the right clinical skillset on each flight to meet those needs."

"It's challenging but when we get it right, it's really satisfying."

Neil says they're lucky to enjoy a high level of collaboration.

"I'm always humbled by everybody involved in the New Zealand Flying Doctor Service. The Trust, pilots, nursing staff, and the community – everybody's passionate and dedicated. They just want to do the right thing for the patients and, as a result, they go the extra mile every day."



## Molly Griffith

### PILOT

It's almost like Molly was destined to be a NZ Flying Doctor pilot – her mum was a nurse, her dad is a pilot, and she knew she wanted a job helping people.

While helping people is a big part of who Molly is, she says the nurses are the real heroes.

"It's really interesting seeing the work the flight nurses and medical teams do to support the patients on the plane," Molly says.

While Molly enjoys a level of excitement not knowing what each day will bring, it can be challenging.

"When we get a job, we immediately start researching our location, especially if it's somewhere we don't go as often. We read up on runways, approaches, hazards we need to know about – stuff like that. We have some great resources with all that information at hand, which is awesome because obviously time is of the essence."



## Jess Doney

### ASSOCIATE CLINICAL NURSE MANAGER, CANTERBURY AIR RETRIEVAL SERVICE

From a flight nursing perspective, every mission brings a different combination of clinical complexity, environmental unpredictability, and the practical realities of delivering care in an aircraft.

"Patients can deteriorate quickly, weather can shift without warning, and the space we work in demands a level of precision and adaptability that's very different from a hospital environment," Jess says.

After three years as a flight nurse and three years as the Associate Clinical Nurse Manager, Jess knows how essential it is to have a crew who can operate confidently.

"The work requires clinical expertise, situational awareness, and the ability to make sound decisions under pressure. It also relies on seamless coordination between everyone involved. Pilots, doctors, flight nurses, and operational staff each contribute a critical piece to the overall safety and success of a mission.

Despite the challenges, Jess says it's amazing working with such a devoted group of nurses.

"Whether we're transporting someone from a remote location, supporting a time sensitive transfer, or stabilising a patient who requires advanced intervention, the team's combined capability ensures we can deliver the level of care required."



# Two flights in six days for baby Blaire

When the RSV virus started circulating around the Westport community in September 2025, Lyndal Watson was worried.

“I knew if Blaire got RSV, she would be hospitalised. We did everything we could to keep her safe. We even took our older son out of daycare to try to lower the risk of coming into contact with the virus,” Lyndal says.

Seven-month-old Blaire had only recently visited Christchurch Hospital for a heart scan – such check-ups are common for the

West Coast family as Blaire was born with Noonan Syndrome, a genetic condition that can affect the heart.

“Blaire had been healthy since we’d been home from hospital, but as soon as she got a runny nose, I had a feeling RSV had caught up with us,” Lyndal says.

The runny nose turned into a raspy cough. A trip to Westport Hospital confirmed it was RSV. They suggested the family drive an hour and a half south to Greymouth Hospital as they were worried that if Blaire’s condition deteriorated, it would happen quickly.

It was 3 am on a Tuesday morning when Blaire went downhill.

“Our tiny girl was working far too hard just to breathe. They put her on oxygen and wanted to get her to Christchurch Hospital as soon as possible. That’s when the NZ Flying Doctor Service was called.”

Despite being hampered by bad weather, the NZ Flying Doctor plane touched down in Greymouth later that morning. Blaire spent



two nights in Christchurch Hospital before being discharged, with the family driving back to Westport.

Little did they know, they were going to be seeing the NZ Flying Doctor crew again.

“We got home on a Thursday and on Friday I was back at the doctor in Westport. People thought she was fine, but I just had a feeling – call it mother’s intuition. She wasn’t eating or drinking and so I wasn’t surprised that we ended up back at Greymouth Hospital by Saturday afternoon.”

At Greymouth Hospital doctors put Blaire on oxygen and inserted a nasogastric tube for nutrition.

“Before we knew it, the wonderful NZ Flying Doctor team was back again, loading us gently on board for another flight to Christchurch so Blaire could get the high level of care she desperately needed.”

After three days in Christchurch Hospital, the family was discharged. This time Lyndal was confident Blaire was well enough to go home and be reunited with her two big brothers, aged two and five.

“I feel like Blaire doesn’t do anything by halves. We get monitored every three months in Christchurch and just take every day as it comes.”

Lyndal says they are so grateful to know the NZ Flying Doctor Service, and its sister service the Westpac Rescue Helicopter, is there.

“Living in Westport and being so far away from high level medical care used to scare me, but the NZ Flying Doctor Service has given me the reassurance that if we have to get to Christchurch quickly, they will get us there.

“We are endlessly grateful for the skill, kindness, and reassurance of everyone on the NZ Flying Doctor plane who cared for us. We will never forget their warmth and professionalism, or the way they made our little girl’s first flying adventures feel safe and even a little bit magical.”



# Thank you.

We are incredibly grateful to the organisations, community groups, Trusts, and individuals who support the NZ Flying Doctor Trust. Thanks to your generosity the NZ Flying Doctor Service can continue to save lives, above and beyond the hospital.

We would also like to thank those who have generously left a gift in their will to the NZ Flying Doctor Trust. A legacy gift is one of the most impactful ways you can support the Trust, and your legacy is life-saving.

## Community Gifts

Two Thumb Brewing Company  
Rotary Club of Christchurch  
Arthrex A-Team  
Waimate Sheep Dog Trial Club  
Waimakariri Ladies Dinner Group  
Medbury School  
Augmento Consulting Ltd

## Gifts in wills

Estate of A Dickerson  
Estate of B Moffatt

## NZ Flying Doctor Garden Party sponsors

St George's Hospital  
Canterbury Orthopaedic Services  
RD Petroleum

## Trusts and Foundations

Air Rescue & Community Services  
J.I. Urquhart Family Trust  
St Vianney's Timaru Trust

## Critical care in the air, 24/7.

## Your support helps us keep this vital service flying.

### Contact us

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