**Treasury Pre-Budget Submission**

**Federal Budget 2020-21**

December 2019

**Royal Far West** is one of Australia’s oldest and most respected charities. Our mission is to strengthen the health and well-being of children and young people living in rural and remote communities across Australia. Our purpose is to ensure all children can access the services and supports that are essential to their development, no matter where they live.

We work to reduce the impact of physical, social, developmental and mental health concerns on children's health and enhance their developmental trajectory, to allow them to achieve their full potential. We work closely with governments to deliver workable solutions to seemingly intractable problems for people living in rural Australia – in this case, the inequity of access to specialist health and education services for isolated and vulnerable country children.

Our prime areas of focus and success are multidisciplinary child and family service delivery, advocacy and rural and remote community capacity building.

Each year we conduct more than 38,000 essential consultations. We deal directly with 10,000 isolated and remote Australian children and young people, families, health professionals and teachers each year.

Royal Far West is governed by a Board of Directors. It was founded in 1925. It has 141 paid staff (full-time equivalents) and an unparalleled reputation in effectively partnering with geographically disadvantaged communities and serving the developmental health needs of children living in rural and remote Australia.

**Our Specific Financial and Project Objective**

Royal Far West is re-imagining health and learning outcomes for children in rural and remote Australia, by providing a scalable and sustainable developmental health service driven by technology to overcome distance and chronic workforce shortages to address the declining trend in developmental health outcomes of country children.

The project will implement a **Remote Australian Communities Program** to complement our existing **National Paediatric Telecare Service (NPTS),** delivering world class, technology-assisted health, education and social care services to children living in some of the most remote geographical regions of Australia.

We will build on our current pilot program in the remote Fitzroy Valley community of the West Kimberley region, where we are successfully delivering premium specialist child health services into this remote township. We will develop essential community led partnerships in a select number of remote towns, where there is a clear community commitment to tackle children’s health outcomes; we will strengthen the capacity of all those existing supports around the child, enhance those services with our own expertise and then evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of this innovative remote model. We will deliver world-class, paediatric health specialists to remote communities, both through virtual and on-the-ground services and provide ongoing weekly therapy and capacity building using technology, to address developmental vulnerabilities for children ages 3 – 5 years, many of them Indigenous Australians.

We seek the opportunity to brief Treasury and other decision-makers on the context and detail of our proposal, including the comprehensive data and pilot results upon which we have based our key objectives and demand model. These data, collated using internationally recognised measures, attest to the chronic need for this service in areas classified as Remote and Very Remote Australia.

We are happy to make this data available to Treasury on a Strictly Confidential basis.

**Royal Far West is seeking $A15 million and the opportunity to work closely with the Australian Government in order to make this important objective a national reality.**

**Our project objectives are:**

1. Improved outcomes for rural, regional and remote Australian children and families with complex health, education and developmental needs by addressing trauma and reducing developmental vulnerability through a combination of clever partnering, clinical services and capability building;

2. Create a proven, clinical service model that is underpinned by evidence, is outcome driven and replicable, whilst constantly demonstrating client-centricity and a focus on remote community needs;

3. Build the infrastructure – people frameworks and measurement to provide efficient, effective developmental care to children in the hardest to reach remote communities;

4. Create a model that can inform public policy and demonstrates practical, effective solutions to address complex remote workforce and funding issues.

This project will sit “alongside” and integrate with RFW’s National Paediatric Schools Telecare Service. It will be a unique project that will be designed specifically for remote communities to drive important reforms for their children’s health. It will allow Royal Far West, one of the only systematic providers of child and family health services to remote Australian kids and communities, to increase its client service capacity nine-fold.

**Most importantly however, this project will enable the Federal Government and Royal Far West to go to the hardest places in rural Australia to address market failure and show them to be a national priority.** It will offer a substantially increased, more specialised and direct means of tackling un-met demand and disadvantage through improving child health and educational outcomes in the most disadvantaged and isolated areas of Australia. There is evident and desperate social need for this service.

**Lifetime economic return of early developmental interventions has been calculated to be $3.1 for every $1 invested by Royal Far West in paediatric health services**.

The Remote Australia Communities program will provide:

• a major step change in the level of access to high quality allied health services in rural and remote communities across Australia;

• a business case for sustainably funding this model to reach all developmentally vulnerable children across rural and remote Australia.

This project will draw on Royal Far West’s existing investment in Telecare Health and strong relationships with rural and remote communities. It aims to establish a comprehensive response to developmental vulnerability in Australia’s most isolated and disadvantaged communities.

This model combines delivery of specialist, multi-disciplinary health services to address speech, behavioural and mental health concerns in young children, combined with strengthening local community capability – all aiming to give children the best start in life by helping to identify, understand and respond to trauma and developmental vulnerability.

**Expected outcomes are:**

• An essential service that responds to the disparity between city and remote areas, access through provision of developmental health services;

• Growth in adoption of telehealth models for allied and mental health services in remote areas;

• Ground breaking opportunities for clinical and translational research projects that can enhance the case for early intervention focused on improving the developmental health of isolated children;

• Improved access to and support for developmental health related professional development activities for early childhood and Aboriginal educators and teachers;

• Provision of culturally appropriate developmental health information and resources for Aboriginal parents/carers and other community members.

The project will also leverage the findings from a one-year strategic partnership with **Charles Sturt University** that has focused on developing detailed requirements for the scaling of Royal Far West’s Telecare service.

The project will be delivered over the five-year funding period in the following phases:

Year 1 - Workforce growth and training

Year 2 – Service delivery across pre-existing pilot communities

Year 3 – Embedding and enhancing service delivery models

Year 4 – Growth into new markets and service extensions

Year 5 – Optimisation and evaluation of project goals.

**Geography should not be a barrier to disadvantage. Yet their children living in very remote areas of Australia have a rate of developmental vulnerability that is 53% higher than major cities.**

These increasing rates of developmental vulnerability combined with decreasing number of clinicians exacerbates inequity between city and county. For example, there are 12 times the number of children per psychologist in very remote regions of Australia compared to city areas. Lack of access to services creates systemic barriers to optimising health and well-being outcomes, so children and families affected by these challenges who live in remote areas are often doubly disadvantaged, with life-long implications.

Physical, emotional and social development attained in childhood sets a trajectory for long term outcomes in health, education and well-being.

Delays or vulnerabilities are linked with poor educational outcomes, disability, chronic mental health problems and a higher risk of unemployment, welfare-dependency, personal relationship difficulties, recidivist contact with the criminal justice system and homelessness.

* **1 in 5 children across Australia begin school with a significant developmental deficiency or vulnerability;**
* **1 in 7 children and adolescents experience a mental health condition;**
* **42% of Indigenous Children are vulnerable on one or more developmental domains.**

Too many children are falling through the cracks of our national health and education systems. Despite its critical importance, childhood development does not get the attention or investment it deserves.

This project addresses the wicked and intractable problems of isolation, disadvantage and inequity that remote communities have experienced over generations. It builds a national asset for country children and their families that will contribute to the long-term future and sustainability of regional Australia.

**Creation of the Remote Communities Model overcomes geographic, cultural, and economic and workforce barriers to achieving equitable health and educational outcomes for children in remote communities, where there is demonstrable, long term market failure.**

It seeks to achieve a generational shift for the levels of developmental vulnerability in children– by providing access to a unique and proven, multi-disciplinary model of care using technology and embedding wrap-around capacity-building supports, in a way that can improve outcomes at scale.

Developmental vulnerability has lifetime impacts if left unresolved and creates significant issues and social costs downstream. However, in many cases it is resolvable if the right intervention is available at the right time.

There are three key areas of investment for this project:

1. **Workforce** – establishment of a dedicated remote communities’ team that is highly experienced and trauma informed, including specialist paediatric clinicians, Aboriginal Liaison officers, business development and community engagement professionals;
2. **Service Delivery** – the variable costs associated with, needs analysis, screening and therapy to children via technology;
3. **Research** – evaluation of the model and services pertaining to it to ensure robust understanding and measurement of impact.

**Budget**

**Projected annualised expenditure is:**

* **Year 1 - $2.19 Million** Project set up, workforce growth and training, research planning and evaluation, including ethics approvals, service delivery within existing pilot communities of Fitzroy Crossing/Marninwarntikura and Bourke;
* **Year 2 – $2.25 Million** Implementation service delivery across targeted communities, establishment of foundational research projects, extension of service delivery;
* **Year 3 – $2.87 Million** Embedding and enhancing service delivery models, workforce growth implementing research projects, extension of service delivery;
* **Year 4 – $3.42 Million** Growth into new markets and service extensions, workforce growth, implementing research projects, extension of service delivery;
* **Year 5 – $3.71 Million** Optimisation and evaluation of project goals, evaluating and finalising research projects, extension of service delivery.

We propose the sustainability of the project will rely on the following:

* Government to underpin investment for early development assessment, therapy provision and capacity building services for rural and remote communities, via technology;
* Continuing to build on our base fee-for-service service model through existing channels into schools, pre-schools and community health networks, supporting access for more children and families;
* Commercialising the methodology and program logic for licensed use by other service providers.

**Royal Far West is a charity and relies on substantial fundraising to support the delivery of services. RFW is currently also investing heavily in our fundraising capacity to build a stronger more predictable funding base within the proposed funding period.**

**Outcomes**

**Royal Far West will assess the activity, outcome and impact of the project over the five-year time-line as follows:**

* Number of **children** supported - % of sized market they represent, annually;
* Number of **communities** assisted - % of sized market they represent, annually;
* Number of **people** (early childhood educators, teachers and parents / carers) accessing health literacy and capacity building resources in community and online;
* Improved levels of confidence for those individuals that support developmentally vulnerable children within their community, assessed through surveys;
* Achievement of goal attainment scores, as set by parents, carers, educators for children supported;
* Outcomes for children supported as measured by appropriate clinical indicators;
* Number and % of children starting school ready to learn, as reported by parents and teachers/early educators.
* Evidence of educational / social impact as measured by improved NAPLAN scores or an alternative Federal sanctioned educational measure.

**Royal Far West already collaborates on the foundations for this project with;**

* Charles Sturt University (working to size market, develop human resourcing strategy, provide research rigour, and to improve allied health workforce availability);
* Marninwarntikura Women’s Resource Centre, Fitzroy Crossing;
* Primary Health Networks;
* Aboriginal Health Services;
* Schools and pre-schools;
* Local councils;
* Sydney University (specifically assessing clinical outcomes using technology);
* NSW Department of Industry (which has awarded Royal Far West a grant to scale our disability services).
* Philanthropic funders including the Cages Foundation.

**Tackling this intractable problem is one of the most important economic investments Australia can make – starting with most isolated rural and remote communities where need is greatest. Using available communications technology, the reach of this project is Australia-wide. On the global stage this is an opportunity for Australia to be an exemplar of efficacious tele-health models for remote communities.**

**Achievements to Date**

Royal Far West has been working steadily toward achieving the goals and outcomes of this project since 2011. The achievements so far:

* Building a unique multi-disciplinary team of 90 paediatric specialists that are trauma-informed and dedicated to working with rural and remote children and families.
* Piloting and growing an allied health Telecare service that in just five years is now supporting 3469 people, delivering 11,714 client sessions and over 650,000 clinical services hours per year;
* Achieving recognition and awards for innovation in delivering paediatric allied health services into rural and remote areas;
* Building partnerships with 120 rural and remote schools and communities across Australia, spanning the distance from Lord Howe Island in the East to Fitzroy Crossing in the West - 4000 kilometres from Manly;
* Conducting several projects with the University of Sydney and NSW Health focusing on the sustainability and value of Telecare in rural and remote settings;
* Achieving NSW Educations Standards Authority accreditation for capacity building and professional development for NSW teachers;
* Conducting research with the Murdoch Children’s Research Institute, Centre for Community Child Health on the state of country children’s health and development in Australia.
* Partnering with the NSW Department of Education to trial Virtual School Counselling to address chronic workforce shortages; now on a panel of select providers to deliver services ongoing.
* Service contracts with Primary Health Networks in NSW and QLD to deliver mental health services via Telecare to children;
* A strategic partnership with Charles Sturt University to conduct a formal industry review and needs analysis, assessment of potential national expansion options, information technology needs analysis and budget, and workforce needs analysis and budget;
* Construction of the $40 Million Royal Far West Centre for Country Kids in Manly, opened December 2018, effectively doubling our physical capacity to deliver Telecare services.
* Funding from the Commonwealth Department of Health to lay the foundation of the NPTS through a rural schools Telecare model - $19m over 7 years
* A second 3-year MOU with Marnwarntikura Resource Centre in Fitzroy Valley and beyond
* Continued funding from the CAGES Foundation to deliver development screenings for 3-5-year old’s, in Bourke as part of the Justice Re-invest Program and MOUs with AMS’s across NSW.

**Underpinning all these achievements is a 95-year track record of commitment to supporting country families and communities. The challenges of ensuring expert child health care reaches deep into rural and remote communities have not swayed us from pursuing our overriding goal: healthy country kids.**

Royal Far West continues to adapt with the times. We find new ways to improve the health and well-being of children and young people, going to the hard places, often beyond the point where the system stops. Royal Far West has a rich history and an exciting future, breaking new barriers, entering new markets and reaching across the nation to give every country child the best chance in life.

Royal Far West’s years of success in addressing the most pressing health needs of country children is based on an ethos and practice of respectful partnering with families, schools and healthcare providers, local government and community groups to create services and solutions that respond to the complexities of country life.

Royal Far West is enormously grateful for the on-going support of the Federal Government in financing its efforts to address developmental issues among children in remote areas.

Funds ($19.7 million) allocated to date are being spent on Rural Schools Telecare, in order to lay the foundation for the National Paediatric Telecare Service becoming a self-sustaining model connecting with rural schools.

**Attached to this submission:**

* **Latest financial accounts showing Royal Far West annual revenue was $AUD 9,955,054**
* **Reference Letter #1 –NSW Governor in 2018- His Excellency David Hurley**
* **Reference Letter #2 - Letter of endorsement from Lake Cargelligo Early Learning Centre**
* **Memorandum of Understanding between RFW and Marninwarntikura Women’s Resource Centre, Fitzroy Valley**
* **Evaluation Plan – Marurra –U Partnership Yiyili School Telecare Pilot, Fitzroy Valley**
* **Remote Communities Model – Phases and Costing**
* **Royal Far West (RFW) and Charles Sturt University (CSU proposal**
* **Letter of endorsement from Country Mayors**

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| **Royal Far West acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and the ongoing and important wisdom shared through their continued connection with the land, waters and community. We respectfully recognise the Elders of the past and present and walk with the children who will become future Elders.** | |