



## **Joint media release**

### **Australia and Solomon Islands - stronger together in the face of COVID-19**

19 February 2022

Australia has delivered eighteen tonnes of tailored medical supplies and equipment to assist provinces respond to COVID-19.

This much needed assistance follows three weeks of consultations and partnership between the Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MHMS) and the Australian Medical Assistance Team (AUSMAT) during its rapid assessment of Solomon Island's national response to COVID-19.

AUSMAT, following consultations with MHMS, recommended the deployment of tailored COVID-19 response kits to Solomon Islands. Known as 'bricks', these kits consist of critical health supplies and equipment specifically used to treat and manage severe COVID-19. Each 'brick' includes oxygen concentrators and consumables for oxygen therapy, rapid antigen tests, essential medicines and over 32,000 items of personal protective equipment including masks, face shields, gloves and hand sanitiser.

Over the last week, MHMS and AUSMAT have conducted rapid assessments of provincial health systems in Guadalcanal, Malaita and Western provinces – the hardest hit by COVID-19 outside Honiara.

Thanks to the hard work of staff at the National Medical Stores, MHMS, the National Disaster Management Office and Australia, vital medical supplies have already reached the provinces through the two Royal Australian Airforce C-27J Spartans currently in Solomon Islands. The C27s have flown seventeen missions around the country to date, delivering medical supplies and rice. Australia has also ensured that much needed medical supplies, food and fuel are reaching the people who need them in the provinces by funding Solomon Airlines flights and chartering Silent World vessels.

The delivery of the COVID-19 bricks will further bolster on-hand medical supplies and the response capabilities of health care workers in provincial areas. The bricks will be transported by the two Royal Australian Airforce C-27J Spartans in the coming week to support the immediate to longer term responses to COVID-19 in the provinces.

At a small event with the Minister for Health and Medical Services, Hon. Culwick Togamana to acknowledge the arrival of the bricks, Australian High Commissioner, Dr Lachlan Strahan thanked the AUSMAT team for its work before its departure from Honiara on 19 February.

'Australia has been standing shoulder to shoulder with Solomon Islands to respond to COVID-19 since the pandemic started in early 2020, building on a longstanding and deep partnership between the two countries.

'We have been quick to support Solomon Island as it confronts an actual outbreak of the virus, providing urgently needed supplies and expertise. In these tough times, it has been empowering to see how well Australian and Solomon Islands personnel have worked together so well as one big team.



'I'd like to acknowledge in particular the fabulous contribution of the AUSMAT personnel, who have so willingly left their normal jobs back in Australia for some weeks to come and help their Solomon Islander colleagues. It's time for them to go home but they have made a magnificent contribution to strengthening the fight in Solomon Islands against COVID-19. At the same time, I'd like to recognise that the Australian Defence Force and the Australian High Commission who have stepped up yet again to work so well with their partner Solomon Islands agencies.

'Many people have been hit hard in Solomon Islands over recent weeks as the virus has spread in a number of locations. We know that many people have fallen ill, often severely. Tragically a number of people have died. Our hearts go out to all the families who have been affected by this scourge.'

Minister for Health and Medical Services, Hon. Culwick Togamana acknowledged the arrival of the bricks. 'It is truly a pleasure to receive these health preserving and lifesaving COVID-19 supplies especially during this difficult time when our country is battling the transmission of the virus in our communities. It is becoming evident that the virus is now transmitting to our rural and remote areas where the majority of our population reside. These areas are already faced with the problem of limited health services, let alone difficulties with access. Therefore, these supplies provided today such as oxygen concentrators, rapid test kits and PPEs, will greatly enable us to enhance capacity in our provincial hospitals, area health centres including nurse aid posts right at community level to be able to test for COVID-19, provide appropriate care for those severely sick with COVID and greatly help our workers to discharge their duties safely'.

'I'd like to also thank in particular the AUSMAT group who have been very instrumental in supporting us assessing our capacities and capabilities, identifying both strength to capitalize on and gaps requiring urgent attention. What we are receiving today is part and parcel of the overall recommendations provided by the Medical Assistance Team. Ministry is greatly appreciative to the team. Timely intervention indeed', said Dr. Togamana.

He also thanked Australia for standing by Solomon Islands since the start of the pandemic and the success of preventing a community transmission in the past 2 years can be attributed to the strong partnership and friendship between Solomon Islands and Australia.

AUSMAT was deployed to Solomon Islands on 29 January in response to a request by the Solomon Islands Government. As a multidisciplinary healthcare team, the AUSMAT personnel have worked alongside MHMS to provide mentoring and advice on the clinical management of COVID-19 cases, the distribution of critical health supplies and infection prevention and control. AUSMAT's three-week mission has come to an end but the team members will continue their support to MHMS remotely on their return to Australia.

Australia and Solomon Islands are committed to working together to respond to the shared challenge that is the COVID-19 pandemic.

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## Photos



*Front row: Deputy High Commissioner, Sally-Anne Vincent, Permanent Secretary of Police, National Security and Correctional Services, Karen Galokale, Secretary to the Prime Minister, Dr Jimmie Rodgers, Minister for Health and Medical Services, Hon. Culwick Togamana, Australian High Commissioner, Dr Lachlan Strahan, AUSMAT lead Bronte Martin, Permanent Secretary of Health and Medical Services, Pauline McNeil.*

*Second and third rows: Wing Commander Stuart Wheal, Lieutenant Colonel Steve Frankel, Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs and External Trade, Collin Beck, Dr Elizabeth Rogers, Jed Abad AUSMAT Liaison Officer, Royal Australian Airforce Squadron Leader Justin Dellabosca and Ministry of Health and Medical Services officials.*



*Oxygen concentrator for Makira Province as one small part of the AUSMAT 'bricks' specifically compiled with medical supplies and equipment to treat and manage severe COVID-19.*



*Royal Australian Airforce member guiding offloading of the AUMAT 'bricks' at Henderson Airport.*

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