Quirky fact:
Each year Royal Flying Doctor Service pilots fly the equivalent of 25 round trips to the moon!

Background Information
Reverend John Flynn was committed to the wellbeing of those who lived in remote Australia. A minister with the Presbyterian Church, Flynn had lived in the Outback for most of his life and first-hand experience had taught him much about the harsh conditions and daily struggles endured by people who lived and worked in the remote reaches of Queensland. Known as ‘Flynn of the Inland’, he set up hostels and bush hospitals to care for the sick but was always looking for ways to get medical support to small and isolated communities.

In 1912, he established the Australian Inland Mission which cared for the spiritual, social and medical needs of people in the Outback. Then, in 1917, he received a letter from a young Army Lieutenant, Clifford Peel, a medical student with an interest in aviation. As a young airman and war hero, Peel suggested the use of aviation to bring medical help to the Outback. Sadly, Peel was shot down and killed but his idea, aided by Flynn’s dedicated campaigning, became the blueprint for the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS). For the next ten years, Flynn worked tirelessly for the cause, raising funds to provide a ‘mantle of safety’ for the people of the bush. His vision finally became a reality when a large bequest for ‘an aerial experiment’ enabled Flynn to get the Flying Doctor Service airborne. At this time, Flynn also met Hudson Fysh, a founder of Qantas. In 1927, Qantas and the Aerial Medical Service signed an agreement to operate an aerial ambulance from Cloncurry in Queensland with just two doctors providing the only medical care for an area of almost two million square kilometres.

The RFDS’s first pilot, Arthur Affleck, flew in an open cockpit without the aid of maps, navigational instruments or radio, navigating by river beds, fences, telegraph lines and other familiar landmarks. Airstrips were usually cleared paddocks, dried river beds or claypans. Flights were normally made during daylight hours, although night flights were attempted in cases of extreme urgency. Fuel supplies were also carried on flights until fuel dumps were established at certain strategic outstations. Today, the RFDS fleet of 48 fully instrumented aircraft is fitted with the latest in navigation technology and flown by 146 pilots. The service cares for almost 240,000 patients. As a mark of his enormous contribution to the people of the Outback, Reverend Flynn appears on the Australian $20 note.

Factsheet 16 – Why was Australia the first place to develop a flying doctor service?

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Inquiry Questions

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<td>How has the flying doctor service been significant to our history? Who started it, and why?</td>
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Points of Interest

John Flynn Place Museum in Cloncurry
John Flynn Place Museum & Art Gallery in Cloncurry commemorates the work of John Flynn and the beginnings of the Royal Flying Doctor Service, which was established in Cloncurry in 1928.

Cnr King and Daintree Streets, Cloncurry QLD 4824

Hours: 9.00am – 3.00pm weekends & public holidays
8.30am – 4.30pm Monday to Friday

Phone: (07) 4742 2778
Email: johnflynnplace@cloncurry.qld.gov.au
Website: www.johnflynnplace.com.au

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
Department of Infrastructure and Transport

State Library of New South Wales
Source: History of Aviation

REFERENCES
RFDS
www.flyingdoctor.net

Longreach Regional History
www.longreach.net.au/lre_history.html

Cloncurry Shire Council
www.cloncurry.qld.gov.au

FURTHER INFORMATION
RFDS Visitor Centre at the Australian Stocman’s Hall of Fame
Landsborough Highway, Longreach QLD 4730
Phone: (07) 4658 2166

Qantas Founders Museum
Longreach Airport
Sir Hudson Fysh Drive, Longreach QLD 4730
Phone: (07) 4658 3737
Email: info@qfom.com.au
www.qfom.com.au

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