

## Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade

### Inquiry into Australia's response to the priorities of Pacific Island countries and the Pacific region

Monday, 2 September 2024 Sydney

#### QUESTION ON NOTICE

##### Question from Senator Fawcett

I'd be interested in understanding what your organisations are doing to address one of the first things that they highlight, which is that the leaders considered the 'ongoing health workforce crisis as a result of shortages, uneven distribution and out-migration of skilled professionals'. **What are you doing at the moment to help Pacific Island nations grow and retain their workforce; and how do you think the Australian government can partner with you and with Pacific Island nations to achieve that?**

##### Answer

Australian Red Cross, through Lifeblood, supports countries in the Pacific to maintain the capability and capacity of their health workforce through our involvement in the Global Advisory Panel (GAP) and through the Lifeblood International Humanitarian Program.

##### Background

The World Health Organisation recognises the provision of a safe and sufficient supply of blood as a critical requirement of every country's health system and blood as an essential medicine.

In Australia, Lifeblood provides blood, plasma, transplantation and biological products across the nation. Lifeblood is the sole blood operator in Australia (funded by Australian governments) and has served the community for over 90 years, growing from state-based transfusion services into a national operation that delivers life-giving donations for life-changing outcomes.

##### Global Advisory Panel

Lifeblood is a member of the Global Advisory Panel (<https://globaladvisorypanel.org/>) on Corporate Governance and Risk Management of Blood Services in Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

GAP is an international network of blood service experts that assists Red Cross and Red Crescent blood programs globally to ensure they are safe, sustainable and resilient. GAP programs are linked to internationally recognised standards and guidelines for blood.

Through GAP, Lifeblood has been involved in helping countries restore their blood services after disasters, supporting disaster preparedness for the future, as well as working with local staff to improve quality systems and their blood services.

Within the Pacific region, Lifeblood has most recently contributed to the following:

- During 2022 and 2023, GAP delivered a series of webinars on blood donation presented by Lifeblood technical experts, which included attendees from Samoa and Tuvalu.
- In August 2024, through GAP, Lifeblood supported the Red Cross in Fiji, Kiribati and Vanuatu through the development of a tailored training program and materials for Red Cross staff and community volunteers. This support served the dual purpose of equipping the local Red Cross workforce with training and resources to enhance their

skills and knowledge in building a sustainable blood donor pool, and developing local community leaders who support the work of blood services.

GAP has been in contact with the Pacific IFRC regional office to explore ways to engage with Pacific Island nations and better understand their needs. This may identify further opportunities to support the blood services in the Pacific region, including their workforce.

### **Lifeblood International Humanitarian Program**

The International Humanitarian Program draws on Lifeblood's capabilities, specialist expertise and experience in international blood program development to support international blood services to address needs at the country or regional level. This includes providing tailored programs and working with local staff to develop their technical skills, improve blood quality and safety systems, provide assistance for strengthening blood donor programs and addressing other local blood challenges as defined by the local health system.

Lifeblood's program design has a focus on sustainability to ensure benefits are ongoing in the local community. It is important to note that these programs are funded through external grants.

In the Pacific, Lifeblood is currently working with the Fiji Red Cross, following a recent request for assistance, to identify challenges within their national blood program to inform areas in need of support. This is in the early stages of scoping. Providing the Fiji Red Cross with targeted assistance to help build capacity will be dependent on the availability of grant funding.

To provide a further example of the support available through the International Humanitarian Program, Lifeblood is currently providing a program of support to Palang Merah Indonesia Kupang Blood Service in West Timor, Indonesia, to help strengthen blood quality and safety standards and improve blood manufacturing processes. Lifeblood has supported the local workforce to develop knowledge and skills in the implementation of good manufacturing practice standards (internationally recognised quality standards for blood as recommended by World Health Organisation), through the provision of in-country local training and hands-on practical support.

Lifeblood has also supported the blood services in Cambodia, Timor-Leste, Indonesia, Nepal and Bangladesh. The project in Cambodia was a significant multi-year initiative led by Lifeblood, funded by the US Presidents Emergency Program for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and undertaken in partnership with multiple in-country partners, including the Cambodian Ministry of Health, Cambodian Red Cross, and the Cambodian National Blood Transfusion Centre. Among the many project achievements were significant advancements in hospital and patient blood management, with the introduction of national clinical guidelines for transfusion and training of hospital and blood bank staff in transfusion practices and policy. The nationally coordinated blood service also benefited from accreditation self-assessments, gap analysis, and work plans, along with extensive training and support for accreditation, quality systems, and donor care.

### **Conclusion**

There is an opportunity for the Australian Government to partner with Lifeblood and Pacific Island nations to identify the needs and challenges of individual blood services and at the regional level. This would be a critical first step to inform the assistance needed to support the growth and development of the local blood and health service workforce, to ensure access to a safe and sufficient blood supply in Pacific Island countries and the region. Lifeblood would welcome the opportunity to further discuss such an initiative. Lifeblood can provide further information as required.