



AHP Second Anniversary

Celebrating Collaboration and Partnership



Two years ago in July 2019, PNG Sustainable Development Program (SDP) launched its Aerial Health Patrols (AHP) initiative in Western Province. Following careful research, consultation and planning efforts, a proof-of-concept trial was launched from our Balimo base.

We wanted to complement and supplement the existing health system with an outreach program that delivered primary health care to remote rural communities. The keys to success, we felt, were efficient logistics and regular, frequent visits to each community.

We designed a patrol team comprising 7 health professionals with a mix of skills to deliver an effective service (immunisation, maternal & child health, family planning, outpatient clinics, and WASH). The idea was to fly the team into a remote community where they would stay for four days before returning to base. Each community was to be revisited every 6 weeks in keeping with a tightly managed regular schedule.

We adopted a “do, learn, do” philosophy with this first patrol team visiting a handful of communities. Aside from their medical responsibilities, they focussed their energies on community engagement, meeting regularly with the people and their leaders to explain the concept and address any concerns.

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Through these initial efforts, the concept was tested and modified. This whole process evolved into a “grassroots” rather than a “top down” approach.

Taking the time to listen and understand specific situations provided valuable feedback that helped shape our policies and procedures. It also enabled us to build trusted community relationships which in turn fostered the idea of shared responsibilities for the service, as distinct from the all-too-common handout mentality. The communities we visit feed and house our teams, and maintain their airstrips without expecting any payments. The service has become a joint effort.

AHP partnered with MAF (Aviation), Sago Network (WASH program) and Marie Stopes (family planning) to bring their expertise and strengthen the program.



On Saturday evening, the AHP team gathered on the banks of a lagoon close to the Aramea River, to quietly celebrate AHP's second birthday and reflect on what has been achieved. More importantly, it was a time to reflect on what has been learned and what the future holds by continuing to build our partnership model.

Since those early days, AHP has grown to become a significant player in the Western Province health system. We started with 10 staff and now deploy 63 health professionals and support staff. Our geographic coverage has increased from 10 to 24 airstrip communities and we have plans to extend this to 44 communities over the foreseeable future.

We also work in close collaboration with WPHA. The benefits of this can be seen in the very impressive Western Province response to the COVID-19 challenge. The WPHA CEO Dr Niko Wuatai, brought together Provincial and District Health, OTML, SDP and others in a carefully co-ordinated vaccination effort. The results speak for themselves.

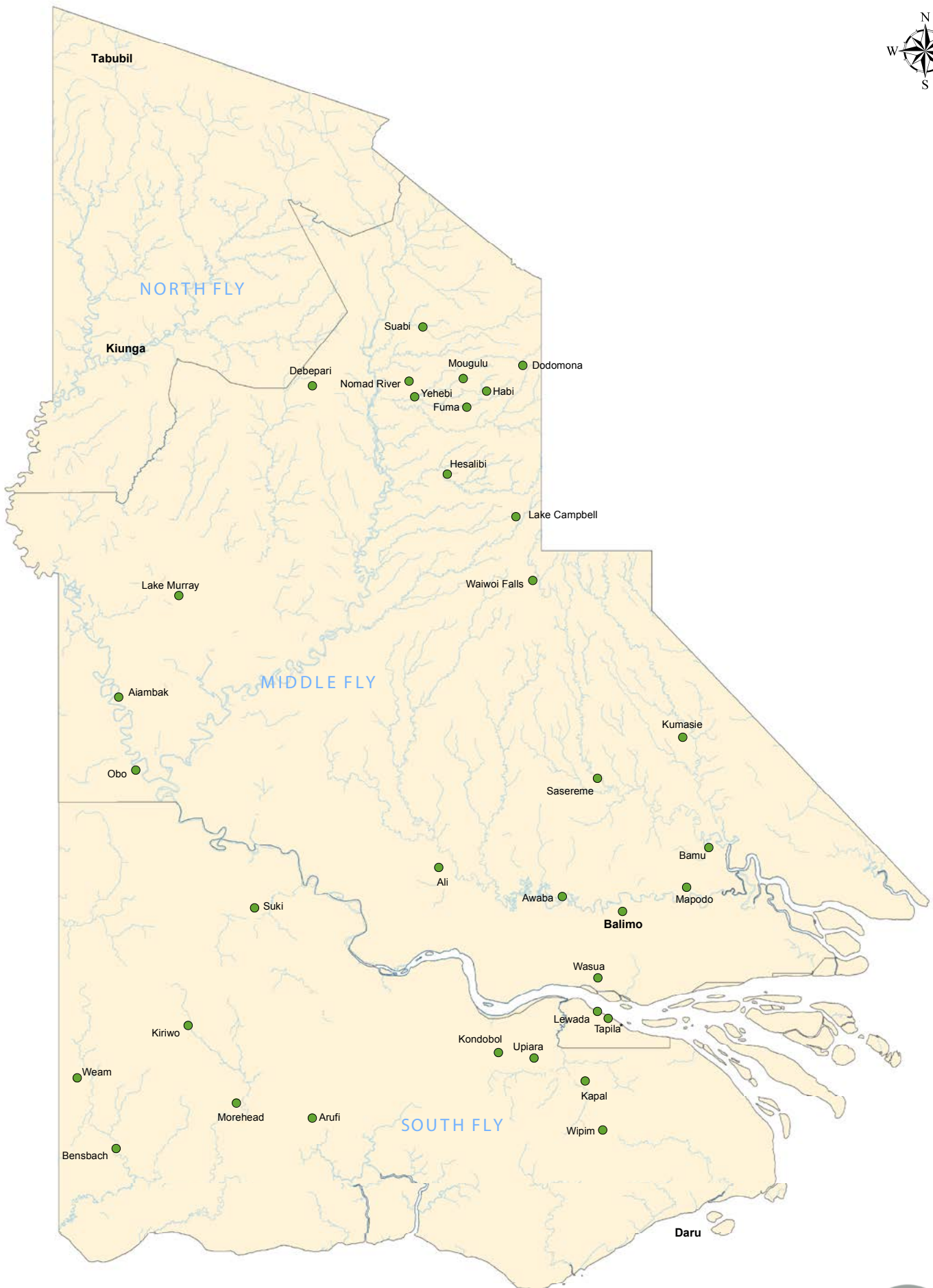
As of 14th July, Western Province had administered 8,320 vaccinations, the second highest number following NCD with 20,678 and ahead of Morobe with 7,752 and ENB with 3,726. These results are even more impressive when adjusted to a per capita basis. When looked at in this way, Western Province is clearly outperforming its peers having vaccinated 3 per cent of its population. NCD has vaccinated 0.7%; Morobe 0.3%; and ENB 0.1%.

AHP has delivered a quarter of all the administered COVID 19 vaccinations in Western Province and has done so by concentrating on remote rural communities.

Dr. Niko Wuatai said, "We have very good collaboration here in Western Province and it is this which has enabled us to become a leading player in terms of PNG vaccination rates. I think the vaccination rollout here is really, really good and we've now vaccinated close to 9,000 people. Our AHP partners are doing so well also. We have our regular weekly collaboration meetings where we update each other on where we are. We are actually working together as a team....it's just great team work."

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Geographic Coverage – AHP’s COVID Vaccination Rollout



*Tapila includes the villages of Kanapus, Kawiapo and Maolari

