



TODAY'S NEWS

Sunday, 22nd March 2026

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **[The Sunday Telegraph](#)** (page 10) reports the Royal Flying Doctor Service is developing contingency plans to preserve fuel and manage skyrocketing supply chain costs. Federal Minister for Health and Aged Care Mark Butler has committed to working with the organisation to ensure the national fuel crisis does not compromise the delivery of essential primary healthcare and aeromedical services to remote communities.
- **[The Sunday Age](#)** (page 1) reports at least 13 infant deaths and 11 lifelong brain injuries have been linked to unassisted freebirths since 2021, prompting the RANZCOG to call for the Federal Government and state territories to legally restrict birth management to registered practitioners. An AHPRA spokesperson confirmed the watchdog is developing new guidelines for midwives to clarify professional responsibilities when interacting with unregulated birth workers.
- **[The Sunday Canberra Times](#)** (page 1) reports the NSW government has expanded access to free Japanese encephalitis vaccines until June 2026 for residents and visitors of high-risk areas including the Yass Valley, citing concerns regarding severe neurological illness spread by mosquitoes.
- **[The Sun Herald](#)** (page 1) reports a Black Dog Institute study identified poor sleep and domestic adversity as primary predictors of declining mental health in Australian teens. Professor Aliza Werner-Seidler noted that these findings highlight a need for the Federal Government to

prioritize early intervention and sleep hygiene education through schools and Primary Healthcare Networks to mitigate risks of self-harm and clinical insomnia among adolescents.

- **The Sun Herald** (page 4) reports researchers are developing a generative AI tool designed to provide safe and secure mental health support to young people between clinical appointments.
- **The Sun Herald** (page 8) reports an Australian-led study into a blood test has achieved a 100 per cent detection of early-stage ovarian cancer in initial trials at the University of Queensland.

MINISTER BUTLER

Struggle to keep RFDS in the air

Sunday Telegraph, General News, 22/03/2026, Harrison Finlay, Page 10

The Royal Flying Doctor Service has been forced to create contingency plans to preserve fuel, amid skyrocketing costs and supply issues. [...] NSW Health Minister Ryan Park and federal counterpart Mark Butler said they will work with RFDS to "support health needs of rural, regional and remote communities".

Also reported by: [Sunday Territorian \(Darwin\)](#), [Sunday Mail Adelaide \(Adelaide\)](#), [Sunday Mail Brisbane \(Brisbane\)](#).

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Fight for medical funding heats up

Sunday Times, General News, 22/03/2026, Hannah Cross, Page 14

Medical Research Minister Stephen Dawson and a powerhouse delegation of researchers will fly to Canberra next week in a bid to drive home why Western Australia deserves a bigger share of national research funding. [...] Federal Health Minister Mark Butler and National Health and Medical Research Council boss Steve Wesselingh are the delegation's two main targets, Mr Dawson said.

Also reported by: [West Australian \(Online\)](#).

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AGEING AND AGED CARE

The pension changes that could cost you thousands

Sunday Telegraph, Business News, 22/03/2026, Noel Whittaker, Page 38

Deeming is back in the news with a further increase to the deeming rates from March 20, in parallel with the automatic indexation of the pension. Deeming is a major issue for retirees it doesn't just affect income-tested pensioners, it also determines eligibility for the Commonwealth Seniors Health Card and plays a major role in calculating aged care fees.

Also reported by: [Sunday Tasmanian \(Hobart\)](#), [The Courier Mail \(Online\)](#), [Sunday Herald Sun \(Melbourne\)](#), [Sunday Mail Adelaide \(Adelaide\)](#).

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MP slams 'bullying' at closing aged care home

Sunday Tasmanian, General News, 22/03/2026, Sue Bailey, Page 2

A Tasmanian MP has accused a major aged care provider of bullying and pressuring residents to leave Rosary Gardens, which is set to close in June, and the home has confirmed many residents have already moved out. The daughter of a resident, who did not want to be named, says staff at the New Town aged care home, run by Southern Cross Care, also have been left in limbo over the closure.

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When a loved one becomes a stranger: the lonely road of dementia care

The Senior, Other, 21/03/2026, Donna Sharpe

I need to talk about a personal battle that I know many of you are also fighting in silence It's about my mother, Joy. [...] Dementia is now the leading cause of death for women in Australia, and the statistics in our state are a sobering reminder of the "grey tsunami" we face.

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DISABILITY AND CARERS

Building a safe chatbot to support young people

Sun Herald, General News, 22/03/2026, Angus Thomson, Page 4

Australian researchers will spend the next two years building an AI model capable of providing safe and effective mental health support to young people, amid growing concerns that existing chatbots are fuelling delusions and isolating the most vulnerable. An increasing number of young people are turning to generative AI platforms such as ChatGPT for companionship, reassurance and mental health advice.

Also reported by: [Sydney Morning Herald \(Online\)](#).

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PRIMARY CARE

Doctors slam 'guinea pig' plan for Qld maternity units without onsite specialists

Daily Telegraph Australia, Other, 21/03/2026, Jackie Sinnerton

Queensland women and babies would be the guinea pigs in a new, experimental maternity model that would allow birthing in units without an obstetrician, paediatrician or anaesthetist on site. As Premier David Crisafulli made an election promise to reopen all closed maternity services, all eyes are on the controversial plan to introduce the new Level Two model into regional areas for the first time.

Also reported by: [The Mercury \(Online\)](#), [Adelaide Now \(Online\)](#), [The Courier Mail \(Online\)](#).

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POPULATION HEALTH

Smoking rates fell for decades. But that's changed

Sunday Age, General News, 22/03/2026, Marta Pascual Juanola, Page 7

As Australia's top thinkers on organised crime gathered in Canberra last week, one topic hijacked the conversation: what to do about Australia's worsening illicit tobacco problem. Experts fear the booming black market trade, which has funnelled billions of dollars into the hands of criminal syndicates, is driving up smoking rates for the first time in decades, reversing years of public health policy that had placed Australia among the countries with the lowest rates in the world.

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The real reasons we are in a global fertility freefall

The Australian, Other, 21/03/2026, Stephen Lunn

Next time you're in your local shopping strip, try a small experiment. [...] In Australia's case, as recently as 1991 more than 40 per cent of new mothers were aged 24 or under, compared to 16 per cent in 2022, data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare shows.

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Quarter of Tasmanian police family violence orders issued against women, with fears victims are being misidentified

ABC Online, Other, 21/03/2026, Scout Wallen

More than a quarter of police family violence orders were issued against women last year in Tasmania, as advocates warn the pattern of these orders doesn't align with the evidence of family violence. [...] According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 27 per cent of Australian women had experienced family and domestic violence since the age of 15, compared with about 12 per cent of men.

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CHRONIC CONDITIONS AND SCREENING

Testing solution to 'silent' killer

Sunday Herald Sun, General News, 22/03/2026, Will Paige, Page 8

An Australian-led study has been launched to develop a potentially world-leading screening test for ovarian cancer. Known as the "silent killer" because of the disease's high mortality rate and it frequently

showing no early warning signs leading to diagnosis at an advanced stage there is no standard screening test for ovarian cancer despite less than half of women surviving beyond five years after diagnosis.

Also reported by: [Sunday Tasmanian \(Hobart\)](#).

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Plea to stop the suffering

Sunday Telegraph, General News, 22/03/2026, Kate Kyriacou, Page 21

State governments have overwhelmingly called on federal Attorney-General Michelle Rowland to fix a cruel legal technicality preventing the terminally ill from accessing voluntary assisted dying. A section of the Commonwealth Criminal Code that makes it illegal to use the phone or internet to counsel or instruct on suicide inadvertently prevents VAD doctors from conducting remote consultations with patients.

Also reported by: [Sunday Mail Brisbane \(Brisbane\)](#), [Sunday Herald Sun \(Melbourne\)](#), [The Mercury \(Online\)](#), [Daily Telegraph Australia \(Online\)](#), [The Courier Mail \(Online\)](#).

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Rowland must fix assisted dying glitch

Sunday Mail Brisbane, Editorials, 22/03/2026, Page 60

State governments across the country have backed calls for changes to federal legislation that would give regional and remote Australians the same access to voluntary assisted dying as those who live in the city. Attorneys-General and health ministers from both sides of the aisle say a legal technicality in the Commonwealth Criminal Code needs amending to allow fairness and end the suffering of terminally ill patients.

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Drama over tobacco drift

Sunday Times, General News, 22/03/2026, Claire Sadler, Page 20

Health campaigners are launching a fresh focus on the dangers of second-hand smoke drifting into homes, criticising the delay of a review that is at least eight months behind schedule. [...] Cancer Council WA has launched a campaign to push for the second phase of consultation to go ahead, with cigarette and vape smoke drifting into people's properties remaining unaddressed by current laws.

Also reported by: [West Australian \(Online\)](#).

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The cost of living after surviving childhood cancer

Sunday Times, General News, 22/03/2026, Angela Pownall, Page 31

Climbing through his cubby window, Luca Kitson looks like any five-year-old playing happily outside. But his smile and agility belie his ordeal of childhood cancer that began two weeks before his second birthday.

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More Australian children are beating cancer, but four-in-five have lifelong health issues

ABC Online, Other, 21/03/2026, Lauren Roberts

Maya Oldroyd was three when she was diagnosed with stage 4 neuroblastoma, a rare and aggressive cancer that had developed in her nerve tissue. Eighteen months and multiple surgeries later, Maya was declared cancer-free. But the vigorous therapies that saved her life also left Maya with complex, lifelong health issues.

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How a Geelong mum diagnosed her own debilitating pain after doctors gave up

Geelong Advertiser, Other, 21/03/2026, Tessa Hayward

What do you do when you are in excruciating and debilitating pain and are told it's all in your head? [...]

Pudendal nerve entrapment (PNE) was the potential diagnosis – a chronic, painful condition caused by compression or irritation of the pudendal nerve, often between pelvic ligaments.

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Renewed bowel screening push

Sunraysia Daily, Other, 21/03/2026, Allan Murphy

Fewer than half of all eligible Mildura residents are taking up the offer of a free bowel cancer screening test. Residents aged 50 to 74 are automatically sent the test through the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program every two years, yet most are opting not to undertake the potential life-saving procedure.

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MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION

Revealed: Secrets to happy teens

Sun Herald, General News, 22/03/2026, Kate Aubusson, Page 1

Bad sleep and trouble at home can set adolescents on a trajectory towards depression and anxiety, says an Australian-first study aimed at predicting and protecting the teenagers at greatest risk. But strong friendships and feelings of belonging in those first years of high school can be powerful inoculators against mental health problems, the Black Dog Institute's Future-Proofing Study found.

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Tired teens need mental health support

Sun Herald, Editorials, 22/03/2026, Page 26

Teenagers have never been known for having excellent sleep habits. But more than being a nuisance for busy parents trying to get them out the door to school each morning, as the Herald's health editor Kate Aubusson reports today, poor sleep can have concerning consequences for teenagers' wellbeing.

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Despair and the decency of choice

Sun Herald, General News, 22/03/2026, Palme McGuinness, Page 27

Australia is doing policy all wrong. Measures designed to help young people are causing them harm. [...] Recent studies have found that young people in Australia and other developed countries are more miserable than any other age group.

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IMMUNISATION

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HEALTH SYSTEMS STRATEGIES

Fallacies hit organ donation

Sunday Herald Sun, General News, 22/03/2026, Kristy Symonds, Page 31

Widespread myths about organ donation are preventing eligible people from registering as many wrongly believe health conditions and old age rule them out. About 1.5 million Australians over the age of 18 have ruled themselves ineligible to be organ donors, according to DonateLife.

Also reported by: [Sunday Mail Brisbane \(Brisbane\)](#), [Sunday Telegraph \(Sydney\)](#), [Sunday Territorian \(Darwin\)](#)

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Too late for a change of heart

Sunday Mail Brisbane, General News, 22/03/2026, Jackie Sinnerton, Page 12

Bec Allen died on the organ transplant wait list. [...] Queensland placed a link to the DonateLife website registration page on the Department of Transport website in 2024 but just one in every 100 people clicked on the link and went through the process.

Also reported by: [Daily Telegraph Australia \(Online\)](#), [Adelaide Now \(Online\)](#), [The Courier Mail \(Online\)](#)

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FIRST NATIONS HEALTH

Coroner finds Worimi woman's death at Lightning Ridge hospital was preventable

ABC Online, Other, 21/03/2026, Genevieve Blandin de Chalain & James Paras

A coroner has found that a mother of three could have been saved if a transfer from a remote hospital had been ordered sooner. Eve Brown, 42, died at the Lightning Ridge healthcare facility on July 2, 2021 while awaiting transfer to Dubbo.

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Rural doctor missed vital call in Indigenous death

National Indigenous Times, Other, 21/03/2026, Tom Wark

The family of a woman who died in an under-equipped rural clinic say her death is an example of the health inequities still experienced by Indigenous Australians. Warrimay woman Eve Brown died of shock on July 2, 2021, after an undiagnosed spleen rupture at Lightning Ridge Multi-Purpose Centre in northwest NSW.

Also reported by: [SBS \(Online\)](#)

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HEALTH WORKFORCE

Curtin University social work students learn to navigate regional health landscape in Kalgoorlie-Boulder

West Australian, Other, 21/03/2026, Isabella Davis

A group of Perth-based social work students are learning what it's like to work in regional health as part of a Curtin University placement program in Kalgoorlie-Boulder. Students Jaden Delaney, Radha Sivasankaran, and Myfy Walster-Jones are working at headspace and South Kalgoorlie Primary School to rack up the 525 practical hours they need to complete for the year.

Also reported by: [Kalgoorlie Miner \(Online\)](#).

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MEDICARE BENEFITS AND DIGITAL HEALTH

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BENEFITS INTEGRITY

At least 13 babies dead after home freebirths

Sunday Age, General News, 22/03/2026, Henrietta Cook, Page 1

At least 13 babies have died following so-called freebirths in Victoria over the past five years, while a further 11 have suffered potential lifelong brain injuries. The data, which was obtained from multiple high-level sources in the health sector, highlights the catastrophic consequences of women choosing to have an unassisted birth without any registered medical or midwifery professionals.

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Hospital docs show dying 27yo tried to invoke Ryan's Rule

Daily Telegraph Australia, Other, 21/03/2026, Carlie Walker

A gravely ill 27-year-old tried to invoke Ryan's Rule and had been taken off antibiotics despite suspected sepsis in the lead up to his hospital death. These are just some of the revelations grieving Hervey Bay mother Carol Spiteri has been confronted with after she paid Queensland Health \$65 for access to documents relating to her son's care from the time he was admitted to Gladstone Hospital to when he was transferred to Brisbane's Wesley Hospital almost two weeks later.

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AUSTRALIAN CDC

Mozzie menace

Sunday Canberra Times, General News, 22/03/2026, Lucy Arundell, Page 1

Areas surrounding the ACT are on alert for a potentially deadly disease spread via mosquitoes as the NSW government offers free vaccines. Easter holidaymakers from Canberra heading to popular camping spots such as Wee Jasper have been warned to protect themselves.

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