



Ronald McDonald House Charities

Enabling family-centred care by supporting ill or injured children and their families throughout their health care journeys



Ronald McDonald
House Charities®
Australia

Federal Budget Submission 2025-26

Executive Summary

When a child is diagnosed with a serious illness or sustains an injury it can have a devastating effect on families. On top of the uncertainty and fear, there's added emotional and financial stress for families who don't live close to the medical care their child needs.

Ronald McDonald House Charities® (RMHC®) is an independent charity that cares for families with children who are ill or injured by providing essential services that remove barriers, strengthens families and promotes healing when children need healthcare. We do this through a range of programs, including Ronald McDonald Houses, the Ronald McDonald Learning Program, Ronald McDonald Family Rooms, Ronald McDonald Family Retreats and Ronald McDonald Hospitality Carts.

These programs have become an essential part of the healthcare infrastructure in Australia. Families rely on us during some of the most stressful periods of their lives, and the hospital system relies on us to help them focus on treating the children in their care.

Last year alone, our programs supported more than 60,000 families across every state and territory in Australia.

Our Chapters across Australia are currently experiencing increased demand as the population grows and families face growing financial pressures due to the cost-of-living crisis, which means each day families in desperate need are being turned away.

To allow Australian families navigating serious injury and life-threatening illness to access the health care needed for their children, we are asking the Federal Government to commit **\$37.5 million over 4 years** in the 2025-26 Budget to invest in essential infrastructure across Australia.

This Federal Budget proposal is broken into **six priority projects**:

Project 1: An investment of \$2m in 2025-26 towards the development of an internal Ronald McDonald House at the Children's Hospital Westmead in Sydney.

Project 2: An investment of \$3 million over three years to establish a Ronald McDonald House at Campbelltown Hospital, NSW.

Project 3: An investment of \$2m over two years towards an expansion of the existing Ronald McDonald House supporting the John Hunter Children's Hospital in Newcastle, NSW.

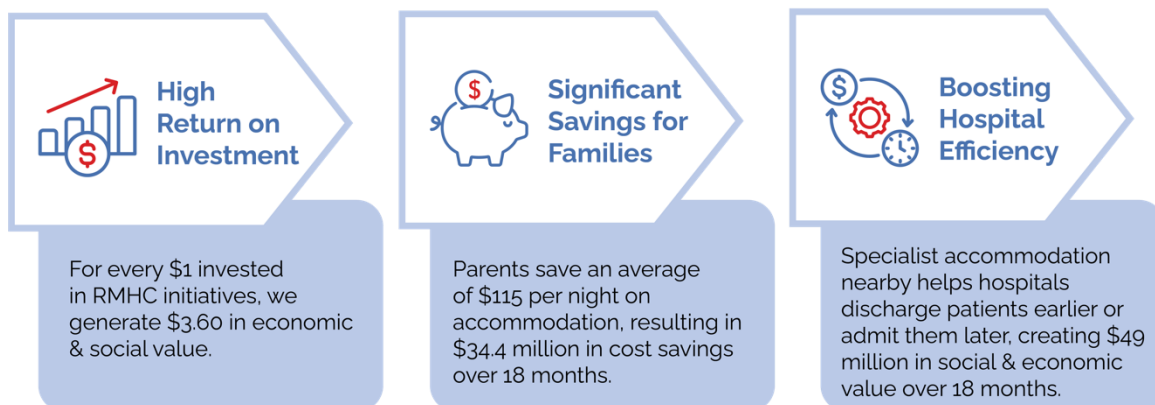
Project 4: An investment of \$1m in 2025-26 to support the establishment of the first Ronald McDonald House in Geelong, VIC.

Project 5: An investment of \$4.5m over two years to support the refurbishment of 52 rooms at the Ronald McDonald House in Herston, QLD.

Project 6: An investment of \$25m over four years towards the expansion of the Ronald McDonald House at QEII Medical Centre, Nedlands, WA supporting Perth Children's Hospital and King Edward Memorial Hospital.

This commitment from the Australian Government would allow RMHC's local Chapters to finalise essential health infrastructure to meet the growing demand of families in need, bringing wide-ranging social and economic benefits by reducing financial burden on families, improving the health outcomes of sick children, supporting the wellbeing and cohesion of their families, and boosting local jobs.

Currently, RMHC's programs are largely funded by individual donors, corporate sponsors, and our mission partner, McDonald's Australia. Further funding is now required by the Australian Government to ensure that families, irrespective of geography and financial circumstance, can access medical care and enable family-centred care when they need it the most.

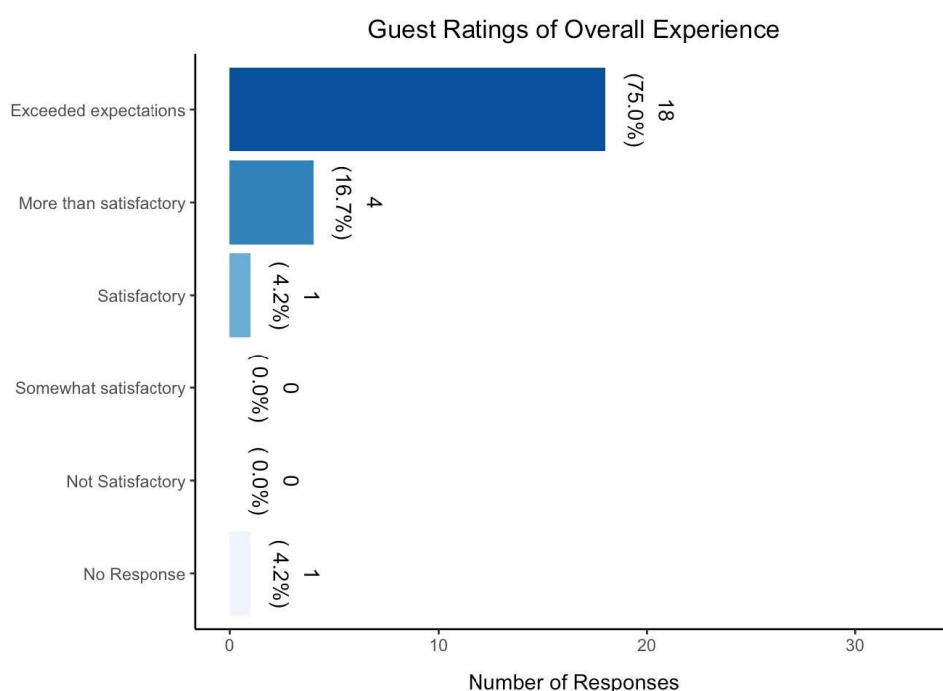


Why is this important

The accommodation and support services RMHC provides to the families of children who are both inpatients and outpatients of the hospital system are not only beneficial; they are essential to high-quality and effective health care.

A growing body of evidence shows that keeping families both physically and emotionally close to the place where their child receives medical care improves the quality and experience of the care of the child and the well-being of the family, while reducing the family's stress, sense of isolation and financial burden.

Research has also shown that access to a Ronald McDonald House program reduces the emotional and physical stress associated with being away from home through a child's treatment, reduces the risk of PTSD, and even shortens hospital stays and improves recovery.



Source: Ronald McDonald House Exit Surveys, August 2024

Each year more families reach out for support from RMHC beyond our capacity. In Western Australia, modelling based on data from the WA Department of Health has identified that our main facility, Ronald McDonald House at QEII Medical Centre, needs to expand and triple its capacity by late 2028 to ensure no family that needs us is turned away. In New South Wales, 951 families were turned away in 2023 due to a lack of accommodation. And it is likely the level of unmet need is much higher than this, given many families are aware there is a shortage of accommodation and do not approach RMHC as a result.

There is therefore, a growing gap between the services Australian families require and hospitals rely upon, and the ability of RMHC to meet these needs.

RMHC's programs are especially critical for families living in rural and regional Australia, who may not have access to the specialty treatment their child needs in their local community and who face unique challenges on their healthcare journeys due to their geographic location. When the necessary care is not available near home, transportation and accommodation uncertainties, challenges, and costs can become sources of extreme emotional and financial stress for families.

Patients and their families from regional areas are faced with unfavourable barriers that hinder their ability to receive the health services they need in an equitable and accessible way.

Who will benefit?



Sick children experience an improved clinical journey as a result of physical and emotional proximity to the family.

RMHC's suite of programs enable a family-centred approach to caring for sick children from the time they are in hospital to transitioning back to school and everyday life.



Parents and family members feel better connected and less stressed, improving their capacity to focus on supporting their child through treatment.

RMHC's Programs remove major stressors, and help families spend time together in family-friendly environments.



The health system is strengthened as RMHC's programs enable the delivery of cost effective, accessible support and care services for seriously ill or injured children and their families - that otherwise would not be there.



Hospitals experience a reduced mental load and save on resources.

RMHC's Programs have become a vital part of the hospital infrastructure. Hospital staff can discharge patients to a nearby location and are therefore able to serve more people. Hospital staff also experience reduced mental load and are better able to focus on clinical outcomes when families are well rested and less stressed.



The education system avoids some of the costs associated with students who miss significant periods of school.

Ronald McDonald Learning Program helps government and schools avoid the cost of students repeating school, and avoid the lifetime costs associated with students not completing school.

About us

RMHC believes that when a child is seriously ill or injured, the entire family needs comfort and support to remain strong and cope better. Our programs are essential to enabling parents to be physically and emotionally involved in the care of their child and be fully supported along the child's healthcare journey. We have a national footprint (see Appendix A) and in 2023 alone, served 64,178 families across Australia. Our initiatives provide significant benefit to the emotional, financial, and cultural wellbeing to the diverse communities we serve, including First Nations families, families from regional and remote communities, and our Pacific Island neighbours.

Our initiatives

Our Houses enable family-centred care for families with a seriously ill or injured child. The Houses reduce the mental load on parents and hospital staff, help ill or injured children and their families feel less anxious and stressed, and help families feel connected and focus on the recovery of their child. From the \$45.1m investment, the program has generated \$150.6m in social and economic value (SVA 2020, p18).

While this Federal Budget proposal focuses on funding asks to support the growing demand for our Houses, RMHC runs four additional initiatives that contribute to our ecosystem of care and support for sick children. These include:

Our Learning Program supports children at risk of falling behind in school and help an average of 1,100 kids per year stay engaged in their education – saving \$3.1m in government expenditure due to improved education attainment. The \$7.3m investment has led to \$33m in social and economic benefit (SVA 2020, p20).



Our Family Rooms support the physical, emotional, and practical needs of families during their child's hospital stay, better equipping families to support their child's clinical journey. The family-focused design has led to significant improvements in emotional wellbeing (up 87%). From the \$4.1m investment, the Family Room generates \$19.9m in benefits (SVA 2020, p22).



Our Family Retreats create an environment for family members to connect and care for each other and to adjust to changes in life circumstances – which leads to improved physical and emotional wellbeing for the vast majority (81%) of families. Most importantly, our Retreats give sick kids the space and time to 'feel normal', which has positive effects on their recovery and overall wellbeing. From the \$1.2m investment, the program has generated \$3.2m in benefits (SVA 2020, p24).



Our Hospitality Carts provide bedside comfort and essential items for families on the NICU and Children's Wards. The Hospitality carts offer practical support and comfort to families who have a seriously ill or injured child receiving treatment by offering activities such as books, craft and entertainment; learning activities and resources with a patient focus, to help reduce the educational impact of missing learning milestones; practical care items such as toiletries and comfort items; and snacks and beverages.



Budget Recommendations

RMHC provides essential services to families during their most challenging times. However, as the Australian population grows, and the financial pressure of the cost-of-living crisis is felt across the nation, we need to grow our service offerings in areas of critical need.

This Federal Budget proposal focuses on funding asks to support the ever-increasing demand for Our Houses and the vital ecosystem of care and support they provide seriously ill or injured children and their families. Our Houses are critical infrastructure that provide:

- **Beds for ill or injured children** before, during or after treatment, that allows them to be with their families while also being near their hospital.
- **Accommodation for their families** to stay together, care and support their child and each other; and
- **Relief for our pressured health system** that enables ill or injured children who would otherwise need to remain in hospital, to recover in our Houses nearby.

To align with the Government's ambition to better equip the nation to meet the current and future health needs of Australians, we recommend the Government invests **\$37.5 million over four years** to help fund critical social infrastructure to support the health and wellbeing of Australian families.



Project 1: \$2m in funding towards the development of an internal Ronald McDonald House at the Children's Hospital Westmead in Sydney.

About

RMHC provides essential services across NSW. In any given year our Ronald McDonald House Program can service almost 4000 families annually offering 36,670 nights of comfort and care.

Importantly, we provide a critical and valued service to regional and remote communities. In fact, while families came to our Sydney Houses from nearly 200 postcodes across the country, most commonly these families came from regional NSW including Dubbo, Orange, Wagga Wagga, Bathurst, and Tamworth.

The Project

There is an identified need for internal hospital accommodation for the families of the sickest children in NSW, following the re-development of the Children's Hospital Westmead.

This Ronald McDonald House will support families with children who are being treated in the Paediatric Intensive Care unit at Children's Hospital Westmead. Families accessing the facility will be able to focus on their child's needs, being mere meters away from their bedside while they look after themselves. The accommodation facility will include 10 bedrooms, a kitchen, communal lounge and dining areas and a laundry, all of which help reduce stress parents face in these extreme circumstances.

Outcome

The completion of this project is due in 2026 and will see an additional 10 families per night provided with accommodation, which has the potential to support an additional 3,650 bed nights. Families who live close to the hospital or far way in remote areas of the state will benefit from the support this House will provide.



Priority 2: \$3 million in funding over two years to establish a Ronald McDonald House at Campbelltown Hospital.

The Project

Campbelltown Hospital has completed stage 2 of its redevelopment, which is focussed on health services for women and children, as well as facilities for more complex illnesses and trauma.

Campbelltown is one of the fastest growing regions in NSW, with 58% more people expected to reside in the area by 2031.

Given the significant expected population growth in this southwest corridor, we can expect there will also be an increase in the number of children and their families requiring health care services at the Hospital.

The new Ronald McDonald House will provide accommodation for children and their families from areas such as Wollondilly, Camden, Campbelltown, and the wider southwestern Sydney community.

Outcome

The completion of this project will see the development of an 8-12 unit house on the Campbelltown Hospital campus, which is expected to accommodate over 4,000 nights and over 400 families per year.



Project 3: \$2m in funding towards an expansion of the existing Ronald McDonald House supporting the John Hunter Children's Hospital in Newcastle, NSW.

The Project

The John Hunter Hospital in Newcastle is currently completing an \$800 million dollar expansion to increase and enhance its services.

There is an increasing need to accommodate the families of sick children across the northern NSW region that have travelled over 100kms to have specialist care at the John Hunter Children's Hospital.

Currently, RMHC operates an 18 unit Ronald McDonald House in the grounds of the hospital. Statistics gathered by RMHC NSW show that our House currently operates at 91% occupancy and turns away an average of 6 families with sick children every day. This equates to over 2,200 nights for families that are unmet and over 300 different families who not supported across a calendar year.

Outcome

The completion of this project will see an additional 11 self-contained units added to our existing 18 unit Ronald McDonald House in the grounds of John Hunter Hospital. This will allow us to provide an additional 3200 nights of accommodation for families with sick children addressing our current unmet need and providing for the future.



Project 4: \$1m investment to support the establishment of the first Ronald McDonald House in Geelong.

About

RMHC VicTas services and impact reach across two states, from the far northeast of Victoria to the bass strait. These services include 105 accommodation rooms available for families each night, with 3 Houses located in metropolitan Melbourne, a House located in Hobart Tasmania and a Family Room with 2 overnight rooms located in Wodonga. Our accommodation services are currently operating at 80% occupancy with over 2700 families supported each year. Our support for families also extends into our Learning Program, an educational support service with 260 students each year.

The Project

Barwon Health with its Women, Children and Families Services is the largest regional health service in Victoria. With a new \$500 million facility in this service area due for completion 2029, that will significantly expand the care that Barwon Health provides into the future. Currently there is no dedicated accommodation services for families of paediatric patients in the Geelong area and Barwon Health is wishing to partner with Ronald McDonald House Charities to provide this important service for their families. Currently the lack of accommodation supply is providing significant challenges for the Health Network and families. Barwon Health has identified an existing property that could suit the accommodation needs of families, with additional refurbishment work required to convert the site into the model of care and support of a Ronald McDonald House for families. A Ronald McDonald House and program presence would provide a critical support service to help meet the current and future needs of families receiving care in the Barwon Southwest region of Victoria.

Outcome

The completion of the project will see the renovation of an existing property to establish a 4 unit Ronald McDonald House, including a communal area to allow families to come together.



Project 5: \$4.5m in 2025-26 towards the refurbishment of 52 rooms at the Ronald McDonald House in Herston, QLD.

About

For over 25 years Ronald McDonald House (RMH) Herston has provided support to families experiencing high risk pregnancies and those who have a baby receiving care in the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital Special care nursery. The provision of this support allows women who would otherwise be confined to a hospital bed to be treated as outpatients. This not only vastly improves their experience of care but also frees up much needed maternity beds. Post birth, RMH Herston provides ongoing support to families often for extended periods while their baby receives specialist inpatient care.

The development of the new Queensland Cancer Centre will also result in increased delivery of paediatric oncology on the Herston campus, with the provision of proton therapy treatment being available within Queensland for the first time. Families experiencing a cancer journey require longer term and bespoke accommodation to ensure the best healing environment for their family. However, Ronald McDonald House Herston is aging and requires significant refurbishment to ensure that it is safe and appropriate accommodation for guests. Major plumbing, disability access works and reconfiguration are required to meet the increased demands for services and needs of guests. A reconfiguration of smaller spaces will be required to meet the needs of immunocompromised and longer stay guests.

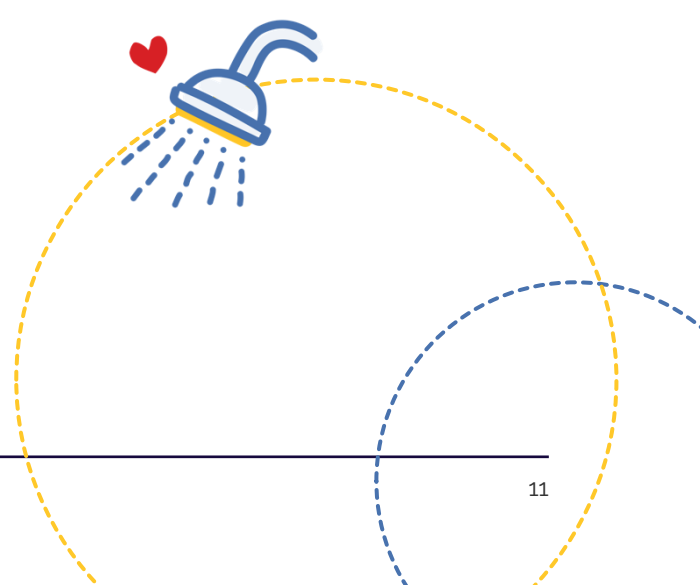
The Project

The project will refurbish 52 rooms at Ronald McDonald House Herston to enable bathroom upgrades and the expansion of rooms, along with creating more inclusive family spaces in preparation for the establishment of the Queensland Cancer Centre and to better support women who require treatment away from home both pre and post-birth.

Outcome

The refurbishment of Ronald McDonald House Herston will ensure that rural and remote women across Queensland have full access not only to accommodation but to wrap around support services. Often isolated and alone, these women face lengthy periods away from their homes both before and following the birth of their babies. RMHC is uniquely positioned to provide additional supports such as food, social engagement, and peer connection that are not available in commercial accommodation providers.

The refurbishment will also ensure that children and families accessing cancer treatment at the Queensland Cancer Centre will have access to essential and appropriate accommodation and support.



Project 6: An investment of \$25m over four years towards the expansion of the Ronald McDonald House at QEII Medical Centre, Nedlands, WA supporting Perth Children's Hospital and King Edward Memorial Hospital.

About

RMHC WA provides essential accommodation, care, and support to families each day, every day of the year.

We support children and families from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. Importantly, 30% of children and families accessing our services are First Nations, and we are proud to offer such an important service to these communities, reducing some of the barriers to accessing essential healthcare and support (RMHC WA 2022).

The Project

In recent years, the State Government has advanced regional patient accessibility to medical care closer to home through various system and infrastructure initiatives. However, for regional paediatric inpatients and outpatients with critical or complex diagnoses, there remains a critical need for continued access to paediatric medical specialists centrally located at the Perth Children's Hospital, with many regional paediatric outpatients that come to Perth likely to have a serious or complex condition that requires one or more specialists at Perth Children's Hospital. .

The current Ronald McDonald House at QEII has 47 bedrooms and is located steps away from the Perth Children's Hospital. Currently, the demand for RMHC WA support is beyond our capacity.

The WA State Government has funded the development plan and business case to support the expansion of the existing Ronald McDonald House (\$2.5m). The next phase of the project will involve the delivery of a 75-room extension. There is a critical need to have the House expanded and operational by late 2028 to seamlessly transition support of patients and families from the temporary House facility to the Nedlands House.

Ronald McDonald House at QEII Extension Development Plan is being co-designed, particularly with First Nations communities, to understand the diverse needs of communities across the state.

Outcome

Expanding RMHC WA's House capacity can positively impact Perth Children's Hospital's patient flow by enabling timely access for patients and families relying on cost-free accommodation in Perth. Additionally, it can contribute to efficiencies in the hospital's bed occupancy rate can by receiving and support early discharges of regional inpatients to outpatients. The expansion will increase the current House room capacity, to support 136 regional maternity, child and adolescent patients and their families per day by 2028.



Financial Implications

Project	2025-26 (\$m)	2026-27 (\$m)	2027-28 (\$m)	2028-29 (\$m)	Total (\$m)
Ronald McDonald House Westmead, NSW	2	-	-	-	2
Ronald McDonald House Campbelltown, NSW	1	1	1	-	3
Ronald McDonald House John Hunter Hospital, NSW	1	1	-	-	2
Ronald McDonald House Geelong, VIC	1	-	-	-	1
Ronald McDonald House Herston, QLD	2.5	2	-	-	4.5
Ronald McDonald House at QEII Nedlands, WA	7.5	7.5	5	5	25
Total	15	11.5	6	5	37.5

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the preparation of the 2025-26 Budget. We appreciate your consideration on funding these important initiatives across Australia.

For further information about this submission, please contact:

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References

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Ronald McDonald House Charities Western Australia (RMHC WA) (2022), *Annual Impact Report 2022*, <https://www.rmhcwa.org.au/annual-impact-report/>

Social Ventures Australia (SVA) (2020), *Social Return on Investment (SROI) Report*, March 2020, <https://www.rmhc.org.au/sites/default/files/2020-07/RMHC%20Social%20Return%20On%20Investment%20%28SROI%29%20Summary%20Report.pdf>

Appendix A: Our National Footprint


Ronald McDonald House Charities in Australia

Our Mission: We provide essential services that remove barriers, strengthen families, and promote healing when children need healthcare

Queensland/Northern Territory

-  Ronald McDonald House
South Brisbane – 87 Rooms
Queensland Children's Hospital – 10 Rooms
Herston – 47 Rooms
Townsville – 25 Rooms
-  Ronald McDonald Family Room
Queensland Children's Hospital
Townsville University Hospital – 2 O/N Rooms
Mackay Base Hospital – 2 O/N Rooms
Gold Coast University Hospital (NICU) – 2 O/N Rooms
Gold Coast University Hospital
-  Ronald McDonald House Family Retreat
Palm Cove
-  Ronald McDonald Learning Program
-  Ronald McDonald House Hospitality Cart
Mount Isa Hospital
Townsville Hospital
Royal Darwin Hospital
Mackay Base

Western Australia

-  Ronald McDonald House
Ronald McDonald House at QE11 – 47 Rooms
Ronald McDonald House on Park – 50 Rooms
Perth Children's Hospital – 14 Rooms
-  Ronald McDonald Family Room
Perth Children's Hospital
Peel Health Campus
Fun on Four, Perth Children's Hospital
-  Ronald McDonald House Family Retreat
Mandurah
Bunbury
Busselton
-  Ronald McDonald Learning Program

South Australia

-  Ronald McDonald House
North Adelaide – 20 Rooms
-  Ronald McDonald Learning Program
-  Ronald McDonald House Hospitality Cart
Adelaide Women and Children's Hospital

New South Wales / ACT

-  Ronald McDonald House
Randwick – 31 Rooms
Westmead – 60 Rooms
Orange – 8 rooms
Canberra – 10 Rooms
Wagga Wagga – 4 Rooms
Tamworth – 5 Rooms
Newcastle – 18 Rooms
-  Ronald McDonald Family Room
Sydney Children's Hospital – 2 O/N Rooms
Royal North Shore Hospital
John Hunter Children's Hospital (NICU) – 2 O/N Rooms
John Hunter Children's Hospital
Centenary Hospital for Women & Children
Wollongong Hospital
Wagga Base Hospital
Gosford Hospital
-  Ronald McDonald House Family Retreat
Forster
Batemans Bay
-  Ronald McDonald Learning Program
-  Ronald McDonald House Hospitality Cart
Nepean Hospital
Centenary Hospital for Women & Children
Dubbo Hospital
Campbelltown Hospital

Victoria

-  Ronald McDonald House
Parkville – 52 Rooms
Monash – 15 Rooms
North Fitzroy – 25 Rooms
-  Ronald McDonald Family Room
Wodonga Hospital – 2 O/N Rooms
Sunshine Hospital
Monash Children's Hospital
-  Ronald McDonald Learning Program

Tasmania

-  Ronald McDonald House
Hobart – 11 Rooms
-  Ronald McDonald Learning Program



Appendix B: Family Stories of Our Houses



Ronald McDonald
House Charities®
Australia

Kobi Family Story

Kobi (2 years), Felicity, Renee and Charlie (9 months)

We had a three week holiday planned and just before we were about to leave Kobi's left eye started to look a little bit red and bloodshot. We quickly got a referral to an ophthalmologist and Kobi was diagnosed with retinal blastoma at 21 months old.

We were completely shocked, we were away from home, and to be told then and there so suddenly, it was just heartbreaking. He was booked into surgery. When he came out of theatre, he had a big patch over his left eye. It was about five days later that we got a phone call to say that unfortunately, cancer cells were detected in his optic nerve, which is a direct line to the brain. So it was imminent that Kobi needed to start chemotherapy.



I think a lot of people don't know that houses are available for long term stays too. When we spoke with Ronald McDonald House, and they told us we could actually stay here full time free of charge, it was just welcome relief.

I don't know if Kobi actually remembers where we're from. We simply say it's getting to the end of the treatment, we're going to have to go home to Grenfell. He says I don't want to go home to Grenfell. I want to go home to Ronald McDonald House.

He's obviously got quite fond memories and thoughts about the place already. So this is home to him now.

We're just your normal average family with a sick little boy, and we're struggling like anybody else, but to have this available to us has just been so amazing.



We're from a tiny little country town called Grenfell, so logistically, it was going to be a nightmare traveling back and forth for Kobi's treatment.

We found out about Ronald McDonald House and made inquiries and they were able to accommodate us. It was just an absolute lifeline, and we've been staying here ever since.

To have our own little private space and so close to the hospital was a godsend. It's a straight walk across the road and through the gate. Renee can prepare home cooked meals and run them over. It's those little creature comforts that help make everything a little bit easier for him, and seeing his family every day.



To those who have donated, I hope you understand how far your generosity has gone. It goes beyond words. What the House does is really above and beyond, it's not just accommodation.

For more information visit www.rmhc.org.au