

MUNSTER AIR AMBULANCE NEEDS MILLION EURO LIFT-OFF



A new community air ambulance service, due for lift-off later this year, will serve a population of one million people in the Munster region from its base at Cork Airport. John Kearney, co-founder of Irish Community Air Ambulance, tells Olivia Kelleher there's a "lifetime" of fundraising work ahead, but he's confident the public will support the lifesaving initiative.

(Pic: Courtesy of Jonathan Looby/UAV Media)

Irish Community Air Ambulance (ICAA) will provide a vital lifesaving service to the greater Munster area, offering fast access to advanced clinical interventions at the roadside by highly trained pre-hospital emergency care physicians.

ICAA will mirror successful models across the United Kingdom and other countries where geographically challenging terrain warrants an air ambulance. ICAA will complement the existing emergency services and the current Athlone-based Emergency Aeromedical Service (EAS) operated by the HSE National Ambulance Service in partnership with the Irish Air Corps.

John Kearney, co-founder of ICAA, says it has been proven that early access to world-class critical care and pre-hospital emergency medicine administered by trained, experienced and equipped medical personnel can save lives. This air ambulance service will offer gold standard care commencing at the roadside and continuing while on route to definitive care in hospital.

Kearney, who lives in Baltimore, West Cork, says people are dying unnecessarily due to the time it takes to receive critical care. "We're talking about that 'Golden Hour' when every minute of delay can be the difference between life and death."

An air ambulance service is operating very successfully in Wales – rural Wales is no different to rural West Cork. It is going to be phenomenal to have this operating this year. We already took the helicopter on a tour of Munster and South Leinster in late January; it took us 29 minutes to get to Wexford and 31 minutes to Dingle!"

QUICK TURNAROUND

With such a quick turnaround time the air ambulance crew will be able to bring patients to hospitals suited to their care



Irish Community Air Ambulance CEO John Kearney, Michael Martin TD and Pilot Captain Jamie McKenzie were in Cork in January for the announcement that €1m funding is sought for the new air ambulance service for Munster. (Pic: Provision)

rather than to the nearest hospital.

"However, a paediatric child may need to be transferred to Our Lady's Hospital for Sick Children in Crumlin rather than going to Cork University Hospital. So, we're trying to bridge the gap from the time of the incident to delivering the person to the hospital where they will get specific care suited to their needs."

John Kearney says the service will be built on the already successful model of Ireland's Rapid Response Service, which has been in operation since 2009, and uses volunteer doctors for pre-hospital emergencies.

Kearney founded the Ireland Rapid Response Service (IRRS) following the avoidable death of the six-year-old

ICAA ISSUES PLEA FOR PUBLIC TO PLEDGE THEIR HELP

ICAA is calling on members of the public to organise a range of events in their communities, such as pub quizzes, raffles, sponsored walks, or coffee mornings in order to raise funds to help get this new charity up and running.

They can pledge online at www.communityairambulance.ie or simply text the word 'FLIGHT' to 50300 to donate €4 to the cause.





As part of its promotional tour of Munster in January, the fully-equipped Eurocopter 135 touched down in Wexford. (Pic: Jonathan Looby/UAV Media)

daughter of a close friend, who died in transit to hospital.

VOLUNTEERISM AND DEDICATION

There are currently five level four clinicians and over 100 GPs with the service who have saved countless lives and improved care in its seven years. John Kearney says he has been heartened by the volunteerism and dedication of the medical personnel.

There are so many fantastic physicians giving of their time and I think that is mind blowing. It is encouraging. But our volunteers are over worked and we need many more.

“We ask our volunteers to do four things – volunteer, fundraise, donate and tell our story. People are so unselfish and they each bring tremendous skill sets.”

Meanwhile, Kearney says ultimately it is all about bringing advanced skills to acutely ill and injured people throughout a specific catchment area. “It will offer a mobile intensive care unit by air which will allow us to safely transport patients faster



Chief executive of Wales Air Ambulance, Angela Hughes, who has given John Kearney “invaluable advice” about getting the service off the ground, pictured with WAA chairman Dave Gilbert with the H145 model which the charity is leasing out this year.

to a major hospital, saving time and lives. This is a service for Munster so we need the support of the people of Munster to donate, fundraise or volunteer.”

WELSH SUPPORT WELCOMED

“We need to raise €1 million to take off and €2 million every year to keep it airborne thereafter, which is a huge ask but in our view it’s achievable. Communities in Cork have sustained our land-based Rapid Response doctors.

“Now we’re calling on the people of Munster to support an air ambulance. Just €2 per person per year in our province will do it. Basically it boils down to what value do you put on a life?”

He expressed his gratitude for the support of the chief executive of Wales Air Ambulance, Angela Hughes, whom he said has given him “invaluable advice” about getting the service off the ground. “She started her own service with just a mobile phone and now has 97 members of staff. She has made a massive impact on lives in Wales. Angela is wonderful.”

Now in its 15th year the community-funded Wales Air Ambulance service operates four helicopters with doctors on board, and provides an annual service to over three million and completes around 2,000 missions a year.

COMPLEMENTARY SERVICE

The Irish service will be delivered using a twin engine Eurocopter EC135 aircraft, which has a top speed of around 260kph and a range of up to 620km.

The new chopper, to be crewed by a pilot, a consultant in emergency medicine and a paramedic, will be based at Cork Airport. It can be in West Cork in less than 20 minutes, in Wexford in 29 minutes, in Limerick in 17 minutes, and in Dingle in 31 minutes.

Ireland is the only country in the EU without a dedicated air ambulance service, all of which are funded voluntarily, with the exception of Scotland. The new service will complement the Emergency Aeromedical Service (EAS) operated by the HSE National Ambulance Service, in partnership with the Irish Air Corps.

LIFETIME OF WORK AHEAD

The CEO of the ICAA says there is a “lifetime of work ahead” in terms of fundraising, but he is confident the public will support the service.

ON YOUR BIKE FOR WEST CORK CHARITY CYCLE!

Irish Community Air Ambulance (ICAA) joins three other charities – MS Ireland (West Cork Branch), Bantry Tidy Towns and Durrus Men’s Shed – all four are set to benefit from the Wild Atlantic Mizen Cycle, to be rolled out by the West Cork Emergency Services on Saturday 8 July.

Starting and finishing in Bantry, the cycle will cover three routes – 130km, 100km and 65km – along the Wild Atlantic Way, taking in the stunning scenery of the Mizen Peninsula and also around the Sheep’s Head Peninsula.

About the other charities

***MS Ireland (West Cork Branch):** The voluntary branches are primarily run by people with multiple sclerosis (MS) and their families. They are governed by an elected committee to organise the activities of the branch including all the services and fundraising activities. Voluntary branches work very closely with the regional offices, and each branch provides local support and services to people and families with MS in their own communities.

***Bantry Tidy Towns:** The charity hopes to upgrade existing features within Bantry and create additional enhancing features to visually improve the overall appearance of the town. They have several projects earmarked this year, including redesigning flowerbeds etc. Bantry Tidy Towns meets weekly on The Square from April to October each year to pick up litter from all over the town.

***The Durrus Men’s Shed:** This is the local branch of the national men’s shed network (a community-based, non-commercial organisation which is open to all men where the primary activity is the provision of a safe, friendly and inclusive environment). It enable men to gather and/or work on meaningful projects at their own pace, in their own time and in the company of other men and where the primary objective is to advance the health and well- being of the participating men.

For further information visit www.wildatlanticmizencycle.com/ or email wamcycle@gmail.com. Follow on www.facebook.com/wamcycle or www.twitter.com/wamcycle



“We’re signing a contract for the helicopter in March and there are a lot of logistics to sort before we get going. But it is rewarding that so many people are willing to help.

“That is what motivates me to get in the morning. We will take great satisfaction in seeing the service up and running. It will be just such a satisfactory milestone to get it off the ground.”