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'Grey nomads' urged to be more alert to their health needs

Many older Australians or so-called 'grey nomads' who hit the road north to escape winter's chill, may be poorly prepared for travel in remote Australia, where distances span thousands of kilometres.

A survey of 260 travellers to the Kimberley, Western Australia, published in *Australian Family Physician* in 2006 showed that many older visitors to the region had long term health problems. Almost 70 per cent of those aged over 65 had chronic health problems such as high blood pressure, heart disease, high cholesterol and diabetes and lung disease – and only half had enough medication to last their journey.

Australia Medic Alert Foundation chief executive officer, Sandra Turner, said that failing to take regular medication, changes in temperature, diet and activity levels and contact with different allergens, could trigger a sudden medical emergency.

"Quickly identifying a patient's underlying medical conditions can be vital to their survival in an emergency, particularly if they are camping in a remote location with limited access to specialist services or if travelling alone," Ms Turner said.

The survey also showed that only 19 per cent of travellers carried a list of regular medication they had been prescribed and fewer than 10 per cent had a summary of their medical health from their doctor.

"An individually engraved MedicAlert® emblem worn around the neck or on the wrist is instantly recognised by emergency personnel and other health care professionals right across Australia.

"Emergency healthcare providers can immediately check for key medical conditions, and quickly access more detailed information by calling the 24-hour emergency hotline number engraved on the emblem," said Ms Turner.

MedicAlert® members also receive a wallet card that gives more detailed information about their medical conditions, medications and emergency contacts.

Dr John Setchell, General Manager of Health Services with Royal Flying Doctor Service Central Operations (RFDS), said up to one quarter of the emergency aeromedical evacuations carried out by the RFDS each year are the result of city travellers who become ill or critically injured on their Outback adventure.

"People planning a winter escape need to take the precaution of having medical check-ups and filling prescriptions before leaving home," Dr Setchell said.

"Those with chronic disease should also carry a written health summary to assist local health service or RFDS personnel in managing their care, supported by wearing a MedicAlert® emblem to help ensure the best possible medical response."

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For more information or for comment, please contact:

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Australia Medic Alert Foundation is a non-profit organisation serving Australians since 1971 by providing a 24-hour personal medical emergency information and identification system. The authentic MedicAlert® emblem is instantly recognised by medical personnel in many countries and provides immediate access to important medical information that can be vital in an emergency.

Australia Medic Alert Foundation

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