



Official Release

Hawke's Bay's New Rescue Helicopter Takes Flight

For immediate release: Wednesday 29th July, 2026

A next-generation rescue helicopter enters service today, marking a major step forward for emergency care, and a powerful symbol of community support across the wider Hawke's Bay region.

The Airbus H145D3 Rescue Helicopter is now operational from Hastings, ready to respond to emergencies across eastern and lower North Island locations. It comes as the Wallace Foundation takes over the mantle as the service's new Principal Sponsor, replacing longstanding naming rights partner, Lowe Corporation.

Equipped with advanced technology and state-of-the-art safety features, the brand new aircraft boosts reliability, enhances patient care in remote or challenging conditions, and ultimately will help save more lives.

The H145 replaces Hawke's Bay's much-loved but ageing yellow BK117, which has served the region and beyond since 2018. It is one of nine new or near-new aircraft being introduced nationwide, with the purchases jointly funded by Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora and the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC).

What makes the service truly unique, however, is the deep public connection and sense of community behind its fundraising arm. Hawke's Bay Rescue Helicopter Trust remains grateful each year for local generosity sourced from: sponsorship, grants and thousands of community donations – from school sausage sizzles to bequests.

“This isn’t just a helicopter – the Hawke’s Bay Rescue Helicopter Trust is part of our community,” says Chair Blair O’Keeffe. “From gifts left in wills to the incredible support of our sponsors and local donors, it’s the community that helps keep this helicopter flying, day in and day out.”

The new aircraft offers a quieter ride, a larger cabin, and increased safety - especially important during night missions and in rugged terrain. In Hawke’s Bay, our crews on average conduct around 400 emergency missions each year, from life-threatening injuries and cardiac arrests to premature births and search and rescue operations.

“It’s a game changer for patients and crews,” asserts O’Keeffe. “In those moments when every second counts, this aircraft allows our team to work faster, smarter, and safer.”

48 year old father of five Andrew Sewell is one of thousands of people Hawke’s Bay Rescue Helicopter crews have helped since its first mission over thirty years ago. Airlifted to Wellington Hospital in the middle of the night in 2025 for urgent stent surgery quite literally saved Andrew’s life. “We can’t thank them enough - they are truly an outstanding team and a great asset to Hawke’s Bay.

"Seeing the rescue helicopter flying over your house, you often wonder what kind of emergency they’re heading to - but after needing their help ourselves, we’ve gained a whole new level of appreciation for the incredible service they provide.”

As the fleet and services are modernized, the costs continue to increase and both the government and community fundraising needs continue to grow with that. As a not-for-profit charged with closing the annual funding gap, Hawke’s Bay Rescue Helicopter Trust relies on the generosity of donors, funders, and sponsors to help keep the lifesaving service running.

“Thousands of local supporters and sponsors work together to fund essential costs including specialist equipment, training gear and more. We’re proud to put this new machine to work on behalf of the community,” says Chief Executive Andy Quayle.

The new helicopter is now officially in service, operating 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Hawke’s Bay Rescue Helicopter Trust (HBRHT) is part of a unified emergency air ambulance network delivering 24/7 coverage across central New Zealand. Operated by Search & Rescue Services Ltd. (SRSL) crew, HBRHT works alongside partner Trusts based in Wellington, Palmerston North, Hamilton, Taupō, Gisborne, Tauranga and Taranaki.

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