

Media Release

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Santos Foundation and SHPHA Flying Care to Unreachable Places

Amid the endless folds of mountain ranges and the shimmering ribbons of winding rivers in the remote Kagua-Erave District of Papua New Guinea's Southern Highlands, life flows with the rhythm of mountains, rivers, and tradition. But today, the hum of helicopter blades breaks the quiet, bringing joy, relief, and hope.

"Chopa kam, chopa kam!" (The chopper is coming!)

Children shout, barefoot and beaming, as they race to the grassy clearing that doubles as a landing pad.

"I always smile when I hear the chopper," says Selina Temo, a mother in Tiri village. "It means help is coming, that someone cares enough to reach us."

Reaching the Unreachable

The sound of help is the helicopter, part of a quarterly medical patrol to hard-to-reach (HTR) areas made possible through a partnership between the Santos Foundation and the Southern Highlands Provincial Health Authority (SHPHA). These patrols deliver essential healthcare to communities like Tiri, Waposale, Mt Tawa, and Sopose places where even a packet of aspirin, or the nearest health centre, can be a week's walk away.

During the upcoming helicopter drop, off to remote villages, Waposale Patrol Team Leader Timon Arufi and Sister Lilian Yamo will be among those on board, continuing their mission to deliver essential health services to communities with limited access to formal care.

Alongside Tiri Patrol Team Leader Jethro Janget, their mission is simple yet profound: to provide basic healthcare to people who would otherwise go without. From treating malaria and tuberculosis to administering vaccinations, antenatal care, and family planning, these patrols offer more than just medicine they bring dignity, connection, and critical care to those who need it most.

Driven by Purpose

Tiri Patrol Team Leader Jethro, shares what motivates him:

"I became a health worker in 2019, inspired by the loss of my mother the year before. Through these HTR patrols, I now help deliver essential medical care to these remote communities — ensuring people receive the treatment they need, no matter where they live. It's about strengthening access and improving health outcomes for those who need it most."

Since 2020, Jethro has joined 14 patrols. He recalls villagers walking five to six hours to reach the patrol site, mothers carrying babies through mountains, rivers, and swamps.

While Jethro is dropped off at Tiri, the helicopter returns to Santos Moro Camp, where a dedicated Santos team from Aviation to Field Operations, stands ready to ensure the safe transport of another dozen health workers and critical medical supplies to the remaining Mt Tawa, and Sopose villages where hundreds of people will be served during this patrol cycle.

Breaking Myths, Saving Lives

Tuberculosis (TB) Coordinator with the Ialibu District Hospital Sister Lilian Yamo, reflects on a career defining moment in Waposale village.

"In 2024, we discovered TB in Waposale. Locals had many myths to try to define the symptoms being seen, but with Santos' support, we collected sputum samples and confirmed it to be a TB outbreak. We treated over 300 patients and gave awareness on how to prevent its spread. Today, it is contained, and people are more aware."

Mobilising Impact

Local mobilisers play a vital role in spreading the word to surrounding villages, ensuring people know when and where to come. Their outreach helps prepare communities for each patrol, which begins with health awareness sessions led by trained health workers.

"It's great to see the community effort when we're there," says Timon. "Mobilisers ensure news of our visit reaches as far as they can go. I'm honoured to be part of something that brings care to the most remote communities."

He adds, *"This work is made possible through the support of Santos and the team that ensures we can reach these places and return safely."*

The Stakes Are High

Tiri Ward Member Jim Aiyeye explains the stakes: "To access proper healthcare, we must walk a full day. There are threats, snakes, wild animals, bad weather. We've lost family members along the way."

"Chopa ino save kam tumas long hia, tasol mipla save makim 3 mun taim. Mipla save olsem chopai kam yet, karim marasin na nes."

(Helicopters don't usually come here, but we count the three months. We know it brings medicine, medical support, and hope.)

A Partnership That Delivers

Each quarterly Hard-to-Reach patrol is a significant undertaking made possible through critical funding and technical support from Santos, delivered via its Santos Foundation in coordination with SHPHA. These patrols are part of a broader partnership supporting health systems strengthening, facility upgrades, capacity building, and pandemic response, all aligned with the National Health Plan 2021–2030.

In 2024 alone, Hard-to-Reach patrols enabled 1,087 children under 5 years old to receive vaccinations. SF supported the PHA to deliver 5,018 outreach clinics, and reached 69 health facilities across the Southern Highlands, Gulf, and Hela provinces.

SHPHA's Expanded Program on Immunisation Manager, Alphonse Sambai, reflects: "Reaching these remote communities is a powerful reminder of the barriers many still face. The first airlift into areas unaware that support is coming is deeply moving and symbolic of the transformative impact and consistency of this partnership."

A Partnership with Purpose

Jodie Hatherly, Chief Executive Officer of Santos Foundation, affirms Santos Foundation's commitment:

"We are dedicated to creating opportunities and empowering communities where Santos operates. Supporting health patrols in remote areas is one way we ensure our partnerships deliver real impact where it's needed most."

Vision 2040 in Action

As the helicopter lifts off from the rugged terrain of Kagua — Erave, it leaves behind more than footprints, it leaves healing, hope, and a reminder that no community is too remote to be reached.

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Through the Santos Foundation and SHPHA's partnership, care is not just delivered, it's flown in with purpose, compassion, and commitment.

This is Santos Vision 2040 in action: creating a better world, one flight, one life, one village at a time.

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