

# Australia steps up Ebola response

November 5 2014

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Australia stepped up its response to the Ebola crisis Wednesday in announcing Aus\$20 million (US\$17 million) to help staff a 100-bed British-built treatment centre in Sierra Leone.

It is the first targeted help Canberra has agreed to give to fight the outbreak in West Africa where the [deadly disease](#) has killed almost 5,000 people, although it has previously donated cash.

Despite increasing domestic political pressure, Canberra has until now refused to send medical professionals to tackle the epidemic, arguing there was no way to get them home safely.

Prime Minister Tony Abbott said the government would not directly deploy [health workers](#) to west Africa but would contract a private medical services firm, Aspen, to staff the centre. Some of those working for Aspen are expected to be Australian.

He said Australia had won assurances that Britain would help if any Australian becomes infected.

"The government has said consistently that it would not deploy Australians to Ebola-affected countries without a credible plan for their treatment or medical evacuation," Abbott said.

"In recent weeks, the government has discussed the evolving situation, including measures to treat health workers, with the United Kingdom, the United States and others.

"Australia has now received credible assurances for in-country treatment and [medical evacuation](#) for Australian volunteers who provide health care in West Africa."

Abbott also announced plans to further ramp up Australia's domestic preparedness, including extra screening at airports of people arriving from west Africa.

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