

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Organisation

Entry ID: AWE0715

Australian Red Cross

(1914 -)

Born 13 August, 1914, Melbourne Victoria Australia

Occupation Humanitarian organisation, Voluntary organisation

Summary

The Australian Red Cross Society (ARCS) was formed just after the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, initially as a branch of the British Red Cross Society. Its first president was Lady Helen Munro Ferguson, wife of the then governor-general. Via a network of state branches and division, also presided over by women, the organisation extended its influence throughout the community of Australian women, urban and rural, to the point where women constituted the vast majority of its membership, as well as featuring prominently in its leadership. Although the organisation was involved in a range of activities, including the establishment of agencies overseas dedicated to supplying families in Australia with information about wounded and missing soldiers, it is probably best known for its success in mobilising volunteers to create the much appreciated and eagerly anticipated 'comfort' parcels that were sent to servicemen overseas. From the date of its inception until the armistice the ARCS dispatched 395,695 food parcels and 36,339 clothing parcels. Thousands of women contributed their time and money to make this possible

Details

The Australian Red Cross was founded on 13 August 1914 in response to the start of World War I, and was originally known as the Australian branch of the British Red Cross Society. Before the end of World War I it was being called the Australian Red Cross Society, although it was still considered to be a branch of the British Red Cross Society. In 1927, the Australian Red Cross Society gained recognition as an independent National Red Cross Society and ceased being a branch of the British Red Cross Society. In 1941 the Australian Red Cross Society was incorporated by Royal Charter, and in 1992 the Australian Red Cross Society decided to shorten its name for external audiences to Australian Red Cross, by which name it is known today (however, its legal name remains Australian Red Cross Society).

The Australian Red Cross was founded by Lady Helen Munro Ferguson, the wife of Australia's Governor-General, and she became the first President of the Australian Red Cross. In 1914, the Australian Red Cross immediately formed Divisions in each of the six States. The Divisional Presidents, who were the wives of the State Governors, were instrumental in the creation of the Australian Red Cross State Divisions. As these Presidents traversed the country, and launched appeals through local organisations and the press, the Divisions soon had a vast number of rural and metropolitan branches. Directly appealed to, women became the great majority of members, several high-ranking women were appointed to governing committees, and Australian women took leading positions throughout the organisation.

In 1914, the Australian Red Cross was largely involved with providing relief services to the Australian Defence Force, with Headquarters located in Melbourne which coordinated the international relief services. In later years, Australian Red Cross Divisions opened in the Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory, as well as other Australian territories such as Norfolk Island and Papua New Guinea.

As at 2004, the Australian Red Cross has a national office based in Melbourne and has offices in each of the six states and two territories. The Australian Red Cross State and Territory Offices manage all activities run within their own state or territory. The national office coordinates international activities with which the Australian Red Cross is involved, as well as coordinating Australian Red Cross activities that are managed on a national basis.

Today, the many and varied activities of the Australian Red Cross include International Tracing and Refugee Services, Youth and Education Services, First Aid, Health and Safety Services, Disaster and Emergency Services, the Australian Red Cross Blood Service, Community Care Programs, Aged and Home Care Services, International Humanitarian Law, and international development programs and aid.

Published resources

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Journal Article

The Best P.M. for the Empire'? Lady Helen Munro Ferguson and the Australian Red Cross Society, 1914-1920, Oppenheimer, Melanie, 2002

Resource Section

MacKinnon, Eleanor Vokes Irby (1871 - 1836), Abbott, Jacqueline Abbott, 2006,
<http://www.adb.online.anu.edu.au/biogs/A100306b.htm>

A Humane and Intimate Administration': The Red Cross' World War Two Wounded, Missing and Prisoner of War Cards, Ross, Fiona, 2017,
<http://blogs.unimelb.edu.au/archives/a-humane-and-intimate-administration-the-red-cross-world-war-two-wounded-missing-and-p>

Humane and intimate, how the Red Cross helped families trace the fates of WW2 soldiers, Ross, Fiona, 2017,
<https://theconversation.com/humane-and-intimate-how-the-red-cross-helped-families-trace-the-fates-of-ww2-soldiers-77395>

The AIF Malayan Nursing Scholarship, Twomey, Christina,
<http://blogs.unimelb.edu.au/archives/the-aif-malayan-nursing-scholarship/>

Archival resources

The University of Melbourne Archives

[Minutes of the Finance Committee](#)

[Control records for correspondence files, National Headquarters](#)

[Correspondence files, National Headquarters](#)

[Australian Red Cross Royal Charter, Rules of the Society](#)

[History, Role and Structure](#)

[Annual Reports of the Australian Red Cross](#)

[Minutes and Meeting Papers, National Council](#)

[Annual Reports of Red Cross Divisions and Blood Service](#)

[Records of Awards, Honours, Medals, Citations](#)

[Publications](#)

[Media Releases](#)

[Minutes and Meeting Papers from National Committees](#)

[Papua New Guinea - Division Records](#)

[AIF Malayan Memorial Nursing Scholarship](#)

[Posters](#)

[Audio](#)

[Photographs](#)

Australian War Memorial, Research Centre

[Red Cross House Badge](#)

Australian Red Cross Research and Information Service

[Records relating to community services, social work and welfare, and disaster relief provided by the Australian Red Cross](#)

[Publications - First aid, health and safety](#)

[Records of the Central Bureau for Wounded, Missing and Prisoners of War, and of the National Tracing Bureau](#)

Author Details

Noel Barrow and Penny Robinson

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