The Henderson Government is failing in its responsibility to provide adequate health options for people living in remote parts of the Northern Territory.

Shadow Health Minister, Matt Conlan, said the drawn-out process of finding a permanent replacement for Pearl Aviation to deliver the aeromed service has created a climate of uncertainty over the state of remote and regional health care.

“The Government says it’s committed to providing comprehensive health services in rural and remote areas, but this isn’t backed up by the facts,” Mr Conlan said.

“In a media release last year, Health Minister Kon Vatskalis said Labor would provide four fixed-wing aircraft for the aeromed service – with two based in Darwin, one in Katherine and one in Gove.

“Mr Vatskalis said:

“This additional resource will continue until the completion of the tender process and the start of the new provider’s operations.”

“However on ABC Radio this morning, the Health Department spokesman said there were now three fixed wings operating.

“The Government should identify the whereabouts of this missing plane.

“Experienced remote area physician, Dr Peter Fitzpatrick, says patient lives are being put at risk as a result of delays providing aeromed retrievals to the bush into Royal Darwin Hospital.

“This is obviously unacceptable and should signal a serious breakdown in the service being provided by aeromed.

“Reports that patients are being forced to wait for up to 24 hours for transport to arrive to take them to hospital are of utmost concern.

“The fact that aircraft still cannot land at night at the Tindal RAAF Base in Katherine several years after wallabies were declared a safety risk is nothing short of ludicrous.

“Also of concern is the time it’s taking to finalise the permanent aeromed contract, which was put out for tender in December last year and still hasn’t been finalised.

“It is unacceptable that Territorians living in rural and remote areas are missing out on the same health services as those provided to patients in the major centres.

“If the Minister is satisfied three fixed wing aircraft are enough, why did he promise four?”

Further comment: Matt Conlan 0408 805 338