



Speech by

KEN TURNER

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

Hansard 20 October 1998

REHABILITATION AND ACUTE SPINAL UNITS, NORTH QUEENSLAND

Mr TURNER (Thuringowa—ONP) (7.23 p.m.): I am glad to see that the Minister for Health is in the House. Since 1990, the Paraplegic and Quadriplegic Association has been lobbying for a rehabilitation unit and an acute spinal unit in north Queensland. The association has more than 1,500 members throughout Queensland, some of whom have been identified as currently having personal and lifestyle assistance needs. Currently, people with disabilities and their families have to reach crisis situations before there is any likelihood of assistance being provided. Most of the families in crisis receive no support. When families do try to cope without assistance, they often become more and more isolated from assistance and services, leading to extreme stress and family breakdowns.

Although the recent changes to the Medical Aid Subsidy Scheme have improved its selection of aids and appliances to the consumer, the funding for such equipment for replacement and backup are scant or nonexistent in some regions. The introduction of preventive equipment, such as standing frames and exercise equipment, needs to be examined to reduce the heavy cost of readmission to hospital. That type of equipment has the capacity to reduce hospitalisation and reduce the large cost to the health system.

State Government funding policies, particularly capped hour limits for personal and lifestyle assistance, do not recognise the difficulty of recruiting workers who live 200 kilometres or more away from the client. Urban service models are not appropriate for rural and remote areas. The only spinal injuries unit in Queensland is in Brisbane, necessitating families outside of Brisbane being separated for months at a critical time in their lives. A spinal injuries unit located in Townsville would alleviate the stress of long-term dislocation for north Queensland people and would enable health-care services to be accessed prior to crisis point.

Members of the Paraplegic and Quadriplegic Association have been promised a rehabilitation unit in north Queensland for the past six years, and still they are no closer to gaining that type of unit. In November 1995, the then Minister for Health announced the acceptance of the recommendations by the consultants reviewing the need for a rehabilitation unit in north Queensland. Capital funds had been allocated to the project to commence in August 1997. It appears that even if space is allocated to a rehabilitation unit and an acute spinal unit at the Kirwan site, those units will not be operational until well after the new Townsville hospital is completed. In spite of the acceptance of the recommendations by the consultants and the allocation of capital funds by previous Governments, there are no hard signs of any progress towards the development of a physical rehabilitation and an acute spinal unit in north Queensland. With the construction of the new Townsville hospital already under way, now is the perfect time to finalise that long, ongoing issue. A physical rehabilitation unit and an acute spinal unit are desperately needed in north Queensland now. If the Minister for Health were listening, she would take note.
