



Speech by

**Hon. WENDY EDMOND**

**MEMBER FOR MOUNT COOT-THA**

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Hansard 9 March 1999

#### HEALTH PORTFOLIO

**Hon. W. M. EDMOND** (Mount Coot-tha— ALP) (Minister for Health) (6.15 p.m.): I move—

"That all words after 'concern' be deleted and the following be inserted—

'the increased pressure placed on Queensland public health services by the decrease in private health insurance, an ageing population and increased expectations and also notes the range of new health services being provided in the record Queensland health budget by dedicated Queensland Health staff.'."

I thank the member for Maroochydore for moving the motion because it gives me another opportunity to remind Queenslanders that this Government introduced, and this Parliament has approved, a record Health budget. The budget of \$3.772 billion is \$128.8m—or 3.6%—more than the coalition's budget proposal for this year and \$288m—or 8.4%—more than the budget approved by the coalition last year. The new initiatives alone that we have introduced as part of this record spending are worth more than \$93.8m.

The motion today also gives me the opportunity, through my amendment, to remind Queenslanders that public health services in Queensland are under increasing pressure from a range of sources. How ironic that a coalition, which in Government could not come up with any new ideas or any new initiatives in Health, is now trotting out the same tired, old bleatings. In Health, the coalition was well and truly a never-never Government. It never did anything to improve the Statewide health situation. Possibly the only change the coalition made was replacing budget overruns with budget carryovers or negative carryovers. Some achievement! The coalition also never came to terms with the issues confronting health service delivery in Queensland.

We have seen the mathematically challenged member for Maroochydore trying to claim that the Commonwealth gave Queensland Health more than \$100m extra to reduce waiting lists this year. I wish the Commonwealth had done that. I do indeed wish that the \$103m in CUT money, to which she refers, could be divided by five years—because it is spread over five years—and that we would still get \$100m a year. Even on my mathematics that does not add up. However, it might add up under the coalition's mathematics.

Let us have a look at the facts. Last year's second Queensland Health budget—the one that was proudly brought down by Labor—was \$288m more than the previous year's budget brought down by the coalition, and \$129m more than the coalition's May budget. The increased funding brought down by Labor for this financial year has allowed us to proceed with a range of new initiatives that have significantly boosted health services across the State in palliative care, in accident and emergency, in parenting support, in adolescent health, in mental health and in surgery. These initiatives are all about increasing and improving health services for Queenslanders.

We also abolished the Horan health tax which would, over years, have sucked out the bulk of growth funding—\$2m this year, \$25m next year and up to \$80m a year for ever and ever thereafter. We have continued the elective surgery strategy started by Premier Beattie when he was Health Minister and which was taken up by the previous Minister, the member for Toowoomba South, and claimed as his own. He is someone who has never had an original thought in his head.

The difference is that we have been open and honest about it. What do the figures for waiting lists really show? We do not see the manipulated data that we used to see. This year we see that there

are half as many waiting as there were at the same time last year. More importantly—because this is what people want to know—more than 4,000 patients, or nearly 6% more, have had their surgery since the Labor Government came in compared with the same period in the previous year. Unlike the previous Government, we have full Treasury funding for the EB 3 agreement which is on the table at the moment. We are not going to cut any services in order to meet the increase in pay for our dedicated hospital workers. This is in contrast to the \$25m of unfunded commitment given by the previous coalition Health Minister. He gave the staff a rise but the hospitals were expected to cut services and staff to get it. Of course, they did not. They could not.

This is the money which we have had to find within existing budgets. But even after making adjustments for one-off payments we were still able to increase funding to every single one of the 39 health districts. Despite the inaccurate claims made by the Opposition earlier, this includes the Sunshine Coast with a 4.3% budget increase, the Gold Coast with a similar rise and Townsville with a 7.1% increase.

I remind members opposite that, in January 1998, 14 districts were foreshadowing budget overruns. This year, in January, 11 districts are forecasting budget overruns totalling not the way-out figures that the member opposite is saying, but the \$33m that I have indicated already, and of which \$25m appears to be the unrealised EB 2 savings.

However, that needs to be kept in perspective. With more than \$33.5m still to be allocated this financial year, there is no crisis. Of course, Health budgets are always tight. One could always spend more, but clearly the Health budget is far from any crisis situation.

Time expired.

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