



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR CUNNINGHAM

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TOOWOOMBA HOSPICE

Mr COPELAND (Cunningham—NPA) (12.18 p.m.): As the Health Minister would be aware, the Toowoomba hospice is a community-based project that is of profound importance to the people of Toowoomba and the Darling Downs regions. The hospice will be a facility for those people in the community who have a short life expectancy of three to six months and who cannot suitably be cared for at home. It will be available for people of all ages and will offer a very home-like environment set in beautiful gardens so that they are able to spend their final months of life with the greatest possible comfort and dignity. It is very important that a dying person has the highest level of support, both professionally and from family and close friends. The Toowoomba hospice will facilitate this support by providing dedicated, 24-hour professional nursing staff. It will also allow a person's family to visit whenever they like and play a major part in caring for their loved one with the provision of overnight accommodation. The hospice will provide support for the dying person's family during this time of emotional upheaval, ensuring that the family's last months with their loved one are as positive and comfortable as possible.

Toowoomba is the major health centre for people across regional south-west Queensland and the Darling Downs, as well as being a popular place for retirement. However, there is currently no specific facility available that cares for the terminally ill and provides support and respite to carers and family. The Toowoomba hospice will meet this very important need.

The hospice fundraising effort has been a truly community achievement, with numerous donations from local businesses, community groups and individuals. This massive fundraising drive has united the Toowoomba community, and it has raised a total of \$1 million. Through this process the community has developed a real ownership of the hospice project, and there is a passionate interest in its timely development.

When the hospice committee approached the Minister for Health last year, the minister advised it to go away and raise the money—and that is exactly what it has done, to the tune of \$1 million. The Heritage Building Society was the main supporter, putting in \$100,000 and then promising another \$100,000 in dollar-for-dollar contributions from the community, which was raised in the period of six weeks, with the assistance of the *Toowoomba Chronicle* and other local media. The Toowoomba City Council has donated the land upon which the hospice will be built, and many other organisations have made either financial contributions or goods-in-kind donations.

Consequently, it came as a significant blow when the state government announced recurrent funding of only \$300,000. This fell well short of the \$490,000 requested and required for the annual running costs, and paled in comparison to the amount received by the Ipswich hospice, which provides a similar service and on which the Toowoomba hospice has been modelled. The Toowoomba Hospice Association will now have to find the extra \$190,000 annually. The result of this shortfall is that the development could be delayed substantially and may now need to be planned on a far smaller scale. Obviously, the \$190,000 increased annual cost is a huge burden to bear.

This is a vital project which will benefit a wide spectrum of the Darling Downs community. People in the final stages of life and their families need the high level of support, care and dignity that the Toowoomba hospice will provide. I pay tribute to Graham Barron and the other members of the Toowoomba Hospice Committee, who have spent so much time and effort on this project and are absolutely committed to seeing the project go ahead. Sister Frances Flint, who has been a power in liaising with many community organisations, is also one to be commended. The Heritage Building Society, which is as good a corporate citizen as any city could want, has been unbelievable in the support it has given and the contribution, financially and in terms of moral support, it has made to the

Toowoomba Hospice Committee and to seeing this project go ahead. Obviously there has been a great contribution on the part of the Toowoomba City Council also.

There are many other organisations that have contributed to the hospice appeal, but most importantly I pay tribute to the people of Toowoomba, the people of south-west Queensland and the people of the Darling Downs, who have taken this project to heart and have contributed so generously so that the committee has been able to raise that \$1 million already.

I strongly urge the Minister for Health and this government to reconsider the decision to cut the funding allocation to the Toowoomba hospice, show that they really care for the needs of regional Queensland and find it in their hearts to make available the required recurrent funding for this most important community project.
