



Speech by

BONNY BARRY

MEMBER FOR ASPLEY

Hansard 25 November 2003

NURSING HOME BEDS

Ms BARRY (Aspley—ALP) (6.53 p.m.): It is with a degree of certainty and a measure of real concern that I am prepared to tell the House today that the current available vacancies for a bed in a nursing home in Brisbane's north is zero. That is, nothing is available. I am fairly certain that should I or a constituent of mine commence the sometimes distressing and heartbreaking job of looking for a nursing home bed as a matter of urgency we would be faced with no-vacancy signs at every turn.

Mr Purcell: Shame.

Ms BARRY: I take that interjection. If I was to seek the assistance of a service such as the Aged Care Network, an online tour of aged care facilities on the Internet, I would find that a search of available residential high-care beds for north Brisbane would yield the result that it could not find any suburbs with available beds matching the criteria. I know that because I did that search as late as today.

If I was to try to help constituents find emergency places for loved ones who are in desperate need to move from an acute hospital bed at Prince Charles, Royal Brisbane or Redcliffe hospitals or indeed to find a place for a parent or a family member who is in desperate and sometimes unsafe circumstances in their own home, I would have no success. In fact, on the very rare occasions that I have had success, without the assistance and the extraordinary efforts of the staff of my local state government nursing homes or a number of local nursing home directors of nursing who are indeed compassionate and understanding enough to listen to my constituents' distress and concerns and then to seek help where they can—I thank them for that help—I know that I would not have been able to get anybody into such emergency circumstances. I know that these directors of nursing often go to extreme lengths to help out my constituents.

This is in my view a hidden tragedy in our health care system—one that not only is ignored by the federal government but also has been created by it. It is true that over 400 people eligible for nursing home beds are currently in our public hospitals—people who quite properly should be receiving expert care in aged care facilities. I do not wish to criticise those facilities in any way, but they would be the first to acknowledge that aged care, in particular dementia and high-care residents care, is a unique specialty that requires the expertise of staff found in aged care.

The reality of those people who are unable to access a nursing home bed is that many of them will never access appropriate care in their lives. The reality is that the average length of stay in a high-care facility is only three months. Many people entering a nursing home are indeed close to the end of their lives and they require expert palliative care given by expert aged care nurses. The tragedy for many of those seniors is that they are left languishing on a waiting list or in a hospital bed where expert care is, quite frankly, limited. This is simply because of a federal government outdated planning formula that provides inadequate funds to fund nursing homes. It is a situation that is disgraceful.