



Speech by

SHANE KNUTH

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

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PATIENT TRAVEL SUBSIDY SCHEME

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (10.13 p.m.): As members may be aware, the electorate of Charters Towers is one of the largest electorates in the state. I can travel over 200 kilometres without seeing one single person. People drive a round trip of up to 800 kilometres just to get a tooth fixed or seek specialist treatment.

In the past 15 years, we have seen many of our health services removed. Many residents living in rural Queensland have to travel further to access those services. Country people do not have heavily subsidised public transport running to frequent schedules. They have no choice but to use their own cars to access specialist medical services. It is disappointing for many of those who use their own vehicles because the Patient Transport Subsidy Scheme pays just 10c per kilometre, as it did a decade ago. This level of subsidy is an insult when one considers that the cost of running an average family car is at least 50c to 60c per kilometre, as independently assessed by organisations such as RACQ.

The government shows little concern for country people who do not have heavily subsidised public transport running to frequent schedules as our city cousins do. It is time to show that we have the interests of Queenslanders and rural and regional Queensland at heart.

In the past 10 years, vehicle running costs including purchase, registration, insurance, fuel and maintenance costs have increased substantially. Yet country people who have to drive themselves to gain access to specialists are being paid the same rate as a decade ago.

I strongly support an increase in this subsidy. Many individuals and organisations have repeatedly asked that these types of subsidies be indexed to the consumer price index. In all fairness, the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme needs to be doubled to a minimum of 20c per kilometre and this rate should be linked to the CPI so that it keeps pace with rising costs.

I call on the minister to take this issue into consideration because we really need to bring this support in line with 2004 costs and keep it at relevant levels. The fact is there has been a very real and ongoing shrinkage of medical treatment available in regional Queensland, especially specialist treatment. This shrinking has impacted on the cost to all people who need to travel for treatment.

While it is clear that the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme mileage rate has fallen way behind the cost of running a vehicle, so too has the accommodation subsidy rate of just \$30 a night for spouses or family members who have to take other family members to large centres for treatment. The overnight rate for staying at a commercial motel is just \$30. For those who stay in non-commercial accommodation it is just \$10 a night. In any town the cost of staying in a motel is at least \$60 to \$70 a night.

Time expired.