



Speech by

Shane Knuth

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

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APPROPRIATION BILLS; ESTIMATES COMMITTEE E

Mr KNUTH (Charters Towers—NPA) (2.37 p.m.): I want to firstly thank the Minister for Emergency Services for making the effort to meet with me during his visit to Charters Towers to discuss the need for an LAC coordinator as promised previously at the recent budget estimates hearing. It is encouraging to know that we both have the wellbeing of our constituents at heart. In my relatively short time as shadow minister for communities and disability services I have spoken with many constituents regarding many issues relating to the portfolios of Disability Services and Communities. As a shadow minister, I am slowly coming to understand some of the major problems currently facing constituents.

I urge the Minister for Disability Services to work with the Minister for Health in relation to an issue which has been drawn to my attention, as this is a difficult issue which crosses over several portfolios. The current rate per kilometre for the patient transport subsidy is 10c a kilometre. Constituents would like to see this rate increased and the paperwork involved with claiming the subsidy cut drastically. It seems unfair that the elderly and the infirm are expected to run around town and make several trips to hospitals and doctors to claim their 10c per kilometre. I will give the House a quick example of the process these people go through. They get an appointment with a doctor, who refers the patient to a specialist, usually in a metropolitan area. They then go to the hospital and get a form to claim the patient transport subsidy. They then go back to the doctor to get the form signed by the GP. They then have to take the form to the specialist and get the specialist to sign the form and verify treatment clinic visits. They then have to take the form back to the local hospital to submit the claim. There has been no increase in the kilometre rate paid by the patient transport subsidy scheme for years. With petrol costs now at \$1 a litre, I believe that the time has come for the government to reassess the paperwork involved and the rate per kilometre received by claimants.

I would also like to raise an issue that I am sure the minister is familiar with. This is an issue that also crosses into the Justice portfolio. I acknowledge the hard work done by the Adult Guardian, but I need to draw to the attention of the minister the fact that there has been a great deal of disquiet from constituents with regard to some matters involving disabled people who are in the care of the Adult Guardian. I am more than happy to work with the minister and the Adult Guardian to address any areas of concern to ensure the best possible quality of life for those people with disabilities.

On other matters, I have been encouraged by the minister's commitment to provide support and programs for adults and children diagnosed with autism. However, I have a concern in that currently autistic-specific services are available only in Brisbane. If people live outside the capital city and have an autistic child, they have to travel over 1,000 kilometres to access professional services. That makes it terribly difficult for those people who have to travel such long distances with children or family members who require these services. I can only imagine the amount of anxiety that a parent would have to go through just to get a young autistic child to Brisbane to see a specialist, let alone the financial burden involved. The minister has already acknowledged that this is an area that requires attention. I believe that priority should be given to establishing an autistic-specific facility or service in north Queensland as soon as possible.

Respite care is a big issue. I would like to have further discussions with the minister on this matter as he may be aware of the high number per capita of people within the Charters Towers electorate who need respite care. I believe that my electorate needs an emergency respite care centre. I also would like an update on the process of getting EFTPOS facilities in QGAP offices.