



Speech by

# Hon. Stephen Robertson

MEMBER FOR STRETTON

Hansard Wednesday, 18 April 2007

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## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### Health, Funding

**Hon. S ROBERTSON** (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Health) (10.04 am): It is time the Commonwealth got fair dinkum about restoring the balance to health funding in Australia. Funding for public health under the Australian Health Care Agreement between Canberra and the states is supposed to be a straight fifty-fifty split. Unfortunately, Queensland public hospitals are being short-changed by Tony Abbott to the tune of some \$2.6 billion under the current agreement. That is because Commonwealth health funding has not kept pace with the extra \$10 billion we in Queensland are investing in health. In fact, Queensland will have contributed 65 per cent of health funding and the Commonwealth only 35 per cent over the life of the current five-year Australian Health Care Agreement. The extra \$2.6 billion we are owed by Canberra would pay for a lot more doctors, nurses, allied health professionals, beds and surgery in our public hospitals.

Instead of negotiating a fairer funding deal, Tony Abbott is too busy lining the pockets of the private health funds. In the past eight years private health insurance premiums have risen 47 per cent under the Howard government. At the same time, Commonwealth funding for Queensland public hospitals has increased just 31.3 per cent. This imbalance can only place further pressure on our public hospitals in terms of staffing, beds and surgery waiting times. Increasingly, Queenslanders who can afford private health cover will opt instead to seek free treatment in public hospitals rather than go to the private sector. Already, nearly half of the patients admitted to Queensland public hospitals who have private health insurance do not actually use it. That is about 38,000 patients each and every year and that is unsustainable.

Mr Abbott must take action now to urgently restore the balance between funding for the public health system and the private sector. He cannot afford to wait until after the federal election to start negotiations with the states for a new Australian Health Care Agreement, and patients cannot afford to wait while Tony Abbott helps the private health funds get richer at the expense of public hospitals. We need a fairer funding deal now that restores the balance and ensures our public hospitals have the funding they need to meet the challenges of a growing and ageing population.