



Speech by

# Hon. Stephen Robertson

MEMBER FOR STRETTON

Hansard Tuesday, 5 June 2007

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## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### Indigenous Health

**Hon. S ROBERTSON** (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Health) (10.17 am): In congratulating Dr Ross Cartmill on his election as President of the AMA, I note that he has indicated that he intends to put the spotlight on Indigenous health issues. I welcome his attention, because improving the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is one of my passions and a formidable challenge facing Australia today.

In Indigenous communities, extreme poverty and social disadvantage are drivers of poor health. Residents have limited access to timely health services and experience poor nutrition and problems accessing good food and fresh water, and have health issues that are often exacerbated by alcohol abuse. Indigenous Queenslanders are nearly five times more likely to suffer chronic disease and have three times the rate of heart disease and seven times the rate of diabetes. This is scandalous. We in the Beattie government are committed to doing something about this sorry situation.

I have instructed Queensland Health to elevate responsibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health directly to the office of the director-general. My director-general will be taking a hands-on approach to pushing reforms and improvements in this important area of health service delivery. We are already delivering an additional \$90 million worth of improvements over four years through the Health Action Plan. The focus here is on chronic disease prevention and intervention; child, youth and family health; improving environmental health, and strengthening our response to alcohol and substance misuse. But we can do better, and we will for Indigenous Queensland communities.

By working in partnership with Indigenous communities, we are already beginning to see some major improvements. We have a fantastic army of Indigenous health workers providing services in remote communities. Our metropolitan hospitals are running outreach services to rural and remote communities to tackle cardiac problems and ear health in children. We have specific programs targeted at addressing diabetes and other chronic diseases like improving access to affordable, nutritious food in remote Indigenous communities.

If the solutions to Indigenous health problems were straightforward they would have been addressed long ago. Unfortunately, they are not. But natural justice and compassion demand we do whatever we can to bring the health of Indigenous Queenslanders in line with the rest of the state.