



Speech by

Hon. Stephen Robertson

MEMBER FOR STRETTON

Hansard Tuesday, 7 August 2007

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Health System

Hon. S ROBERTSON (Stretton—ALP) (Minister for Health) (12.17 pm): When it comes to health, Queenslanders do not need the Howard government to pork barrel handpicked marginal seats to deliver improved funding of public health services and they do not need a Canberra takeover of state-run hospitals. Queenslanders just need the Prime Minister to face up to the responsibilities the Commonwealth already has. If he were really serious about health, Mr Howard would immediately address his government's funding shortfall for public hospitals. Under the Australian Health Care Agreement, funding public health services, including hospitals, used to be a fifty-fifty split between the states and the Commonwealth. Mr Howard has trashed that partnership so that now for every dollar going into public health services in Queensland the Beattie government invests 65c while the Howard government's contribution is a pathetic 35c.

By the end of the current agreement, which expires next June, Canberra will have underinvested in the health of Queenslanders to the tune of \$2.6 billion. Calculated on a district level, over the last five years Mr Howard has short-changed Cairns by \$150 million, the Sunshine Coast by \$152 million, Brisbane's north side by \$270 million, the Darling Downs by \$139 million, Townsville by \$194 million, Ipswich and West Moreton by \$129 million and central Queensland by \$97 million. The other major failing of the Howard government which impacts on the day-to-day operation of our hospitals has been aged care. On average, every single day our public hospitals are forced to care for around 468 patients who should not be there. That is 468 acute care beds that should be available to our emergency departments to address real problems like ambulance ramping and EDs going on bypass because they cannot access the beds they need in our hospitals.

Every day our hospitals admit an average of 7,718 patients, but we could admit more Queenslanders in need of hospital treatment if finally the federal government opened up more nursing home places. It is blatant cost shifting by Mr Howard which is clogging one in 20 acute care beds in our public hospitals. If the Prime Minister really wanted to make a difference in health, he could do so literally overnight. All he needs to do is accept the need identified by the Australian aged-care sector to properly fund high-care places in nursing homes, which would have a real and immediate impact on how our hospitals can cope with ever-increasing demand.