



Speech by

Hon. ANNA BLIGH

MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Health Services

Hon. AM BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Premier) (9.43 am): Mr Speaker, nowhere in the world will you find an organisation that provides the range of free, quality health services across a more widely dispersed population than Queensland Health. Nowhere in Australia does any state government fund more public health services than here in Queensland. But our public health system is under great pressure. It is under pressure because of a rapidly growing and ageing population, and it is under pressure because of an increase in preventable chronic illness caused in part by our increasingly unhealthy lifestyles.

My government wants to continue to provide world-class health services to Queensland with record investment of an extra \$10 billion in areas like public hospitals, mental health care and Indigenous health. But we cannot do this alone. We need the Commonwealth to step up to the mark.

Under the former Howard government, the Commonwealth share of public hospital funding to Queensland fell to just 35 per cent of the full costs of our healthcare system. In fact, over a number of years the Commonwealth share has fallen from 50 per cent to 35 per cent. That means that Queensland was short-changed by \$2.6 billion worth of Commonwealth funds. You can do a lot with \$2.6 billion. You can build and rebuild hospitals, upgrade emergency departments, employ more doctors and nurses and allied health workers, and provide greater access to health services for regional and rural communities.

The Queensland government has moved to compensate for the retreat of the Commonwealth government, but there is a limit to how long this can continue. That is why our submission to the Commonwealth's recently established National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission has proposed that the Australian government should consider moving back to a fifty-fifty funding arrangement for public hospitals. That is why we have asked the federal government to fully fund primary care such as GP services and specialist outpatient services.

I am not sure that all Queenslanders understand and realise that in Queensland we pay for more outpatient services, such as physiotherapy to help people recover from accidents and consultations for orthopedic surgeons before health replacements, than any other state in Australia. This has been part of Queensland's free hospital system for decades. In other states, the federal government effectively pays for outpatient services through the Medicare system or individual patients bear the burden of the cost through their own healthcare arrangements. We believe that it is time, in the context of the Health and Hospitals Reform Commission's work, for the federal government to take full responsibility for outpatient services in Queensland.

We also want the federal government to take full responsibility for aged-care services. When the Commonwealth government fails to properly fund aged-care services, as we have seen over the last 12 years under John Howard, frail aged people who really need a nursing home bed instead end up in our public hospitals. In fact, every day across Queensland we have around 450 aged-care patients who have been waiting in our hospitals for 35 days or more occupying acute care beds in our public hospital system. Our submission to the Health and Hospitals Reform Commission proposes that, where the state

government continues to provide these hospital beds for patients assessed as aged-care patients, the federal government should pay the full cost of that acute care bed. We believe that this would create a new imperative in the system to ensure that wherever possible the service matches the need of the patient in whatever health setting is being considered.

It is the interface between primary acute and post-acute care that the dysfunctional aspects of Commonwealth-state relations can be best seen. It is those interfaces that we believe have to be tackled in the context of the Commonwealth health reform work. Our submission also advocates that states remain responsible for public hospitals. To meet our target of making Queenslanders Australia's healthiest people, we need every level of government to play its part. In this new era of cooperative federalism, we have a real chance to make a difference, and through the COAG forums we will be taking every opportunity to do just that.