



Speech by

**Shane Knuth**

**MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE**

Hansard Wednesday, 19 May 2010

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## **CHARTERS TOWERS, DENTAL SERVICES**

**Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—LNP) (9.59 pm): Today I tabled a petition of 1,294 signatures regarding the lack of public dental care in Charters Towers and the surrounding district. The petition calls upon the government to provide permanent public dental care for residents of the Charters Towers district and to reinstate the school dental van, which is inoperative because of a lack of qualified staff.

**Mr Lucas:** What have you done about taking the petition up with the federal opposition? Nothing.

**Mr KNUTH:** The Charters Towers district covers an area of 60,000 square kilometres. It has a massive ageing population. It thrives on the back of the education industry, with three long-established private colleges, school of distance education, three state primary schools, a state high school and four other primary schools throughout the greater Charters Towers region. It is paramount to reinstate the school dental van, which should cater for thousands of waiting students requiring access to dental care. I suppose we should call on Tony Abbott to provide that.

It should never have got to this situation where now residents who need dental treatment are forced to wait months for an appointment with local private dentists or attend clinics in other major cities. At this point I wish to acknowledge the extraordinary efforts of the private dentists in Charters Towers who accommodate significantly large numbers of public dental patients who require emergency dental treatment. These private dentists are doing an amazing job under very stressful circumstances, without any support from the present state government.

Many patients are forced to travel a round trip of 260 kilometres, with patients in the greater Charters Towers area requiring an overnight stay in Townsville just to get a tooth fixed. Coupled with the absence of the patient travel subsidy, the lack of public dental care in Charters Towers and beyond has become a cause of immense frustration, suffering and financial strain to residents who need public dental treatment.

Charters Towers is a city, and it is unacceptable that residents and school students do not have access to public dental care and a school dental van. We call on the minister to take action, heed the petitioners and provide appropriate public dental care that the community deserves.