




Speech By  
**Curtis Pitt**

**MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE**

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## ADJOURNMENT

### Mulgrave Electorate, Oral Health Services

 **Mr PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (5.34 pm): I table a non-conforming petition presented to my office by Mr David Anning expressing the views of 211 residents of the Babinda area for the establishment of a local dental clinic.

*Tabled paper.* Non-conforming petition regarding the establishment of a dental clinic for the residents of Babinda [[3454](#)].

Poor dental health is closely associated with poor physical health generally and with elevated risk of bacterial infection. The people of Babinda have been without a dental service since the last private dentist left four years ago. There is no public outreach service from Cairns and the nearest private practice is in Innisfail. Many residents are on low incomes without private health insurance and are unable to pay the high costs for travel and private dental treatment. The James Cook University Dental Clinic has the capacity to take patients from the wider Cairns region, providing free treatment for those with a health care card and fees for other patients at 50 per cent of those charged in private practice. Unfortunately, the Queensland Health Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme does not cover the cost of getting to the JCU Dental Clinic. Recent reductions to staff and services at the Cairns North Community Health Service, where the public dental clinic is located, have meant longer dental waiting lists and more limited services.

While the benefits of fluoridated water to prevent tooth decay is well documented in combination with good diet and regular dental hygiene, the people of Babinda need access to affordable dental treatment. I am not holding my breath that an Abbott federal government will support an expansion of public dental care. What is also clear is that the LNP government is seeking to rapidly reduce its responsibilities for health care and community services. People in Far North Queensland are not unlike other communities in rural and regional Queensland where primary health care services, taken for granted in Brisbane and some large regional centres, are not available at all or are unaffordable for people on low incomes. Both the Premier and the Minister for Health have stated clearly that they are not in the business of providing primary health care—a breathtaking admission of failure. It is a failure of vision and a failure of the state government's responsibility to ensure a coordinated health system that meets the needs of our communities. I assume the premise of the Premier's view is that Medicare funds general medical practice services, that general practice is the sum total of all primary health care, and thus primary health care is totally a federal responsibility.

This demonstrates the Premier's ignorance of the experience of people who do not live in the affluent inner city suburbs of Brisbane. In many small communities there are no general practices so people rely on health services provided by Queensland Health. Often where there is a local GP, the fees charged beyond the Medicare schedule are a significant barrier to families on a low income accessing essential health services.

Tablelands Safer Communities wrote to me expressing their concerns about the lack of bulk-billing GPs in their region. People are accessing care through the emergency departments of the Mareeba and Atherton hospitals as they cannot afford the co-payments charged by some local GPs.

Similarly, residents in my hometown of Gordonvale have also expressed concern that the closest full bulk-billing practice is at Edmonton. Cutting and closing health promotion and chronic disease prevention services are a false economy that will actually increase future health costs and hospital admissions. Minister Springborg's attempt to palm primary health care services off to Medicare Locals may have had some hope with a supportive federal Labor government, but an Abbott Liberal government has already flagged its intention to review Medicare Locals as a prelude to their closure. Our health system must continue to be one that provides health care not just to those who can pay but also to those most in need.