




Speech By
Hon. Cameron Dick

MEMBER FOR WOODRIDGE

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Sexual Health

 **Hon. CR DICK** (Woodridge—ALP) (Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services) (9.49 am): I am very concerned about the current rates of infectious syphilis in Queensland. There have been an increasing number of notifications across parts of North Queensland since 2010. These rates are now the highest they have been in five years, especially among females and young people aged 15 to 24.

What I am particularly concerned about are the rates among Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The majority of notifications in these areas are for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The issue is not, however, isolated to discrete Indigenous communities.

Following the recent World STI and HIV Congress in Brisbane, which I opened, I announced that I had asked Queensland medical experts to design a new sexual health strategy to deal specifically with syphilis. A comprehensive, long-term regional strategy is now currently being developed to lower the rates of sexually transmitted infections across the impacted Queensland regions. An amount of \$3.5 million has been allocated from the Department of Health to improve sexual health in these regions. This includes providing dedicated support to the impacted hospital and health services. The Townsville, North West, Cairns and Hinterland, Mackay and Torres and Cape hospital and health services are now working together to develop the strategy.

We need to better identify and address local needs and a regional strategy will deliver this by having input from staff who have strong local experience. The local community will also be involved and will inform the strategy and, of course, there will be input from experts in the field. At the core focus of the strategy will be service delivery, public health support for monitoring and advice and education of the health workforce and the public about sexual health. I anticipate that the strategy will be finalised by April next year.

This government is committed to working with the local communities and stakeholders to get a handle on the rising rates of infections. A regional strategy allows solutions and approaches to be developed that meet the needs of the local health services and affected communities. I look forward to seeing the outcome of this strategy—a set of sustainable actions and capacity in North Queensland to improve sexual health in these regions.