



Speech By  
**Hon. Cameron Dick**


**MEMBER FOR WOODRIDGE**

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**MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS**

**Flu Summit**

 **Hon. CR DICK** (Woodridge—ALP) (Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services) (11.08 am): This year Queenslanders have endured one of the worst flu seasons in many years. There have been more than 52,000 influenza notifications across the state—almost double last year's number. This has resulted in more than 5,600 influenza related hospital admissions, with 650 of those admissions resulting in patients receiving intensive care. On 14 August this year, the Queensland Ambulance Service set a new record for the number of calls for assistance, responding to 3,882 calls on a single day.

Our hardworking paramedics, clinicians and support staff, as usual, stepped up to the mark and did a wonderful job this winter. They have been able to step up to the mark because of the Palaszczuk Labor government's commitment to and investment in front-line services. This has included record funding for health services, with 4,400 extra nurses, an additional 1,300 doctors and a further 1,200 allied health professionals being employed since the Palaszczuk government took office. Our government will continue to take steps to ensure Queenslanders receive the health services they deserve. This is why Queensland Health has already started planning for next year's flu season.

Last week I convened a flu summit in Brisbane to look at this season's experience and to prepare for next year. I was interested to learn that immunising a significant population of younger people against the flu can lead to reductions in transmission throughout the community, including vulnerable older people. Following the summit, the Palaszczuk government was delighted to announce that it would make the flu vaccine free for all Queensland children from six months until their fifth birthday.

We will also push for a national approach to this matter through inclusion of the free flu vaccine for under fives on the National Immunisation Program. I have asked Queensland Health to work with other jurisdictions to consider how the example set by Western Australia and Queensland can be implemented nationally. A childhood immunisation awareness campaign next year will provide parents and carers with details about recommended vaccinations for children under five, including the free influenza vaccine program. To assist with faster diagnosis of influenza, we are making point-of-care testing capability available at an additional 15 hospitals throughout Queensland, taking the number of hospitals with this capability to 21.

Patients and clinicians will have a reliable influenza diagnosis in 30 minutes, replacing tests that currently take 24 hours or longer. Early diagnosis will assist clinicians to manage people with the flu, including by administering antiviral medication, which can mitigate symptoms and hasten recovery. This is part of a new \$1.3 million investment in technology, with \$600,000 to fund the rapid point-of-care testing and an additional \$700,000 for automated blood culture machines. By planning today for next year's flu season we can minimise the strain on our health system, as well as reduce the impact of influenza on the lives of Queenslanders.