




Speech By
Hon. Cameron Dick

MEMBER FOR WOODRIDGE

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Health Services

 **Hon. CR DICK** (Woodridge—ALP) (Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services) (9.57 am): As I have said in this House previously, one of the greatest challenges facing our health system—apart from the relentless funding cuts of the Turnbull government—is rising demand. The one thing we know about demand is that we cannot deal with it by ignoring it and we certainly cannot address it the way the Leader of the Opposition did when he was treasurer by cutting services and sacking the workforce. That is where the approaches of the Palaszczuk government and our predecessors differ most markedly. They cut; we build. That is why in our last budget we announced an additional \$112.2 million to begin planning and preparatory works for the expansion of the Logan, Caboolture and Ipswich hospitals, as well as undertaking major refurbishments at a number of regional hospitals, including at Kingaroy, through our \$180 million Enhancing Regional Hospitals plan.

One area that is experiencing acute demand from an increasing population is the Gold Coast. On 1 November, the renamed Varsity Lakes Day Hospital will welcome its first surgical patients as part of the Gold Coast Hospital and Health Service. This hospital, which the Gold Coast Hospital and Health Service is leasing from Healthcare Australia, will add to the surgical capacity on the Gold Coast. The hospital's six operating theatres will enhance the elective surgery capacity of the health service, which in turn will free up capacity at the Gold Coast University Hospital to deal with its emergency surgery demand without impacting on elective surgery waiting lists.

When fully operational, it is anticipated that the Varsity Lakes Day Hospital will perform around 15,000 elective procedures, including 3,000 endoscopies each year. That will not only increase bed availability and reduce patient length of stay but also support the Gold Coast Hospital and Health Service to continue to deliver quality services to Gold Coast residents in a timely way. As at 1 October this year, there are no patients waiting longer than clinically recommended on the Gold Coast for elective surgery. Acquisitions such as the Varsity Lakes Day Hospital will make a significant contribution to sustaining that performance.

Arrangements of this kind provide useful solutions to the problem of rising demand for health services. The decision to lease this purpose-built, privately operated facility reflects our commitment to ensuring that Queenslanders have access to the high quality health services they deserve. It also reflects our understanding that you do not build a better health system by closing large sections of it down, that better health care requires better access delivered through innovative thinking.

The success of the government's specialist outpatient strategy in reducing the list of those waiting longer than clinically recommended for a specialist outpatient appointment by more than 60 per cent naturally puts pressure on our elective surgery capacity as patients move through the system more quickly. Despite that increasing demand pressure, the list of those waiting longer than clinically recommended for an elective surgery procedure across Queensland fell to just 99 in June—the lowest number ever recorded.

Increasing our capacity through the acquisition of facilities like the Varsity Lakes Day Hospital will further support that performance. It is yet another example of the Palaszczuk Labor government's commitment to the provision of front-line services.