




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

Record of Proceedings, 18 October 2018

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Bundaberg Region, Health Services

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (2.08 pm): We have just had a great announcement in Bundaberg: residents now have access to local cataract surgery in addition to a private day hospital. It is a great partnership and it is thanks to the public-private partnership between Wide Bay Hospital and Health Service and a private day hospital. I commend the CEO of the hospital, Adrian Pennington, for delivering this service for the people of the Bundaberg and the greater Bundaberg region.

Those receiving cataract surgery are often elderly and sometimes frail, and the journey to Hervey Bay for surgery regularly takes a huge toll on their health. They have to find their own way down the coast—something they find hard—they have to stay overnight to recuperate and they then have to make the long journey home. It is a huge relief for many in the region to know that they do not have to go on an arduous 250-kilometre round trip to receive a specialist service. I want to thank the Minister for Health and ask why a similar public-private partnership cannot be arranged for the many people in Bundaberg and Burnett who are suffering from chronic pain. Why can the state government agree to a specialty service for eyes in the region but not for our chronic pain sufferers?

I recently tabled a petition in this place with 600 signatures asking for the state government to fund a pain management clinic in the region. Despite seeing hundreds of signatures in support of the clinic and the pleas from residents who are in unbearable pain, Minister Miles ignored the petition, instead stating that the Sunshine Coast HHS provides a chronic pain service as a hub for the area, which includes the Bundaberg region. This is simply not good enough.

Many constituents have raised the idea of seeing a visiting specialist in the region, and we see that as a great possibility. Unless you are a sufferer of chronic pain, you will never truly understand the trials and difficulties that come with living daily with pain. One constituent has been brave enough to speak out and she tells me that a simple touch on the shoulder is a real problem. Members can only imagine how awful and unbearable a more than 300-kilometre round trip for some of these patients would be. I am calling on the minister not to simply close his eyes and turn his back on these people and the region. Many are in so much pain that the thought of travelling for hours is unbearable.

I am asking the minister to reconsider his reply and look at enacting a public-private partnership to see a chronic pain specialist come to the Bundaberg region. Chronic pain sufferers are crying out for help so, please, Minister Miles, listen to them. The 600-signature petition is something we should not ignore in this place. The 600 signatures from pain sufferers shows that this is a significant issue within the region. Chronic pain sufferers should not need to travel to the Sunshine Coast regional hospital to gain those vital connections with a specialist.

In closing, I ask members to imagine what it means for people who have to travel those hundreds of kilometres in excruciating pain just to see a specialist to give themselves some quality of life. All of us should have some sympathy and empathy. More importantly, our government should show real leadership and provide chronic pain management to people in the Bundaberg region.