



Speech By  
**Stephen Bennett**


**MEMBER FOR BURNETT**

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Record of Proceedings, 31 October 2018

**MOTION**

**Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services**

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (5.42 pm): I rise to support the private member's motion condemning the health minister and I start with the Palaszczuk government's decision to cut the Indigenous Diabetes Eyes and Screening van, putting Indigenous Queenslanders' health at risk. Labor urgently needed to step up and restore this funding, with patients' health being put at risk by this funding cut, but we were dismissed and even had the questions we raised in this place ignored. Our pleas were ignored. I remind the House that during question time I asked the Premier—

Given the importance of closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage, why have we seen the continuation of funding cut from the Indigenous Diabetes Eyes and Screening service, the IDEaS Van, that delivers vital mobile diabetes screening services for Indigenous Queenslanders ...

The Premier did not even have the decency to answer the question. Instead, the Premier elected to play politics and the blame game and showed no empathy at all. The response proved that this government had absolutely no idea about the issue or the government's actions which contributed to the demise of this critical local service. What further highlights this minister's policy failures and incompetence is the fact that the health minister has been so arrogantly dismissive of the plight of Indigenous Queenslanders. He was kicked out of parliament that day and left the Premier to continue the arrogant and dismissive attitude on his behalf, all at the expense of those most vulnerable.

If Labor is committed to closing the gap it would restore funding to the IDEaS van and just get on with it. Since 2013 this van has travelled 200,000 kilometres and helped save the eyesight of thousands of Indigenous Queenslanders, but this work is being put at risk by this heartless decision by Labor not to continue this vital funding. The health minister has made it clear that he has no intention of even looking at it or restoring the funding. With a Health budget of some \$18 billion, surely there is room to set aside a little bit so this van can continue to help Indigenous Queenslanders. Cutting funding for this service will have a real impact on the ground, as highlighted by IWC manager Wayne Mulvany. I thank him and his staff for continuing to take the fight up to this incompetent government. While every day and in every way those opposite criticise the policies of the federal government, the only government with a heart and empathy that restored the service was the federal coalition and I acknowledge our federal member Keith Pitt in righting this insidious state Labor decision to cut this funding.

The current Labor government has abandoned people in rural and regional Queensland in their time of need, and the dysfunctional Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme is a good example. I have called out the Minister for Health in this place many times for ignoring the Queensland Ombudsman and its investigation into the administration of the PTSS. I have called on him to ensure that this service is eligible from Agnes Water to Bundaberg. People have to travel this trip of 250 kilometres many times a week, yet they are no longer eligible. Changes in 2015 by this government have made a complete mockery of regional Queenslanders' access to world-class health.

Despite four reviews and audits since 2010 of the PTSS by the Queensland Ombudsman and numerous recommendations for change, Queensland Health continues to do nothing. The only changes in 2012 were by the LNP when we doubled the allowances and made other serious reforms. These people are not well. The state government is not doing anything to help them get better either. I call on the Minister for Health to take up the cause—listen to what the Ombudsman said—for all Queenslanders in all electorates. Let us get this right. I call on the minister on behalf of those sick people in my electorate to make it a priority to implement the recommendations of the Ombudsman, and the PTSS needs to be a priority.

If there was not enough evidence that this motion is justified, I highlight a further example of the complete arrogance and incompetence of this state Labor government by highlighting the horrendous issue of those suffering with severe pain and the consequences of their access to adequate pain management. Residents in the Bundaberg region have to find their own way to the Sunshine Coast now—something they find hard. They have to stay overnight to recuperate and then they have to make the long journey home. It is a huge relief that sometimes we can do public-private partnerships to ensure specialist services are delivered. I ask why a public-private partnership or recruitment of a pain specialist cannot be a reality for the people in Bundaberg and the Burnett region who suffer from chronic pain. The government has known about this for four years and still we see people suffering in our region with the complete arrogance and the dismissive nature of this minister. Why can the state government agree to a specialty service for eyes in our region but continue to ignore those with chronic pain?

I recently tabled a petition in this place with 600 signatures asking for the state government to fund a pain management clinic. Despite seeing these signatures Minister Miles ignored the petition, instead stating that the Sunshine Coast is now the hub. It is simply not good enough. Many constituents have raised the idea of seeing a specialist in the region. They just want this government to show leadership. Can members imagine how awful it would be to travel a 300-kilometre round trip in severe pain just because we cannot get the minister to acknowledge how important this is? I am asking the minister to reconsider his reply and look at enacting a public-private partnership. We need a chronic pain specialist. We need the minister's leadership. He needs to listen to the people of the region. Some 600 signatures should not be ignored in terms of those suffering pain and all of us should have sympathy and empathy. More importantly, our government should show real leadership and provide chronic pain management to the people of the Bundaberg region. We need a minister with some leadership skills.