




Speech By
Glenn Butcher

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

Record of Proceedings, 22 October 2019

MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Gladstone Electorate, Health Services

 **Mr BUTCHER** (Gladstone—ALP) (2.21 pm): I rise to speak about one of the most important issues in my electorate: health services. Delivering health services is complex and challenging work that is made even more challenging when you are faced with obstacles such as a serious shortage of general practitioners in regional areas such as mine and a federal government that is abandoning its responsibilities. As the state government, we are committed to improving health services. We are working to overcome the challenges and to improve health service delivery in Gladstone, but that will not happen overnight and we cannot do it alone.

The Palaszczuk government has invested more in the Gladstone Hospital in the past few years than has occurred in previous decades. When I first nominated to represent the people of Gladstone, the No. 1 issue raised with me was upgrades to the Gladstone Hospital. People were sick and tired of health funding being allocated somewhere else. The Palaszczuk government listened and, over the past four years, we have delivered a \$42 million commitment to a brand-new accident and emergency department, which is set to be the best in regional Queensland by far. We have delivered a \$4 million step-up step-down facility in my electorate, a \$1.25 million upgrade to our maternity ward in the hospital after the closure of the Mater hospital and we have recently announced \$1.1 million for a new specialist outpatient department. We are now calling on the people of Gladstone to tell us what they would like in that facility.

Beyond that capital investment, staffing numbers have also increased and are continuing to improve. In the past five years, we have increased doctor numbers from 18 to 50, nurse and midwife numbers from 198 to 275, and total staff numbers at the hospital from 347 to 498. Our reliance on locum doctors has drastically reduced, which has been no small feat.

Only the Palaszczuk Labor government is serious about improving health care in Queensland and only this government is delivering the investment that is needed for our hospitals. All this is happening while the federal government has cut \$316 million to Queensland hospitals in this year's budget. Not only is our hospital facing increasing demand and treating more people than ever before; it is also expected to do more with less from our federal government. While Ken O'Dowd and his LNP mates keep cutting the health budget, the Palaszczuk government has stepped up and is doing the heavy lifting in Queensland when it comes to building and funding our hospitals.

To make matters worse, the federal government has recently declared that Gladstone is no longer a priority area for general practitioners. Tell that to anyone who has tried to get an appointment with their local GP, let alone tried to be bulk-billed! The GP shortage in Gladstone is serious and now the federal government has made it even more difficult to attract GPs to clinics in areas of regional Queensland such as Gladstone. That means that people in my community are not able to access the primary care or the preventive health care that they need, and they are unable to adequately manage ongoing medical conditions. Instead, they are presenting to the Gladstone Hospital to have their needs met.

The federal government must be kidding if they think that we have a health workforce that is meeting community needs in Gladstone. The Palaszczuk government has stepped up and also has plans for this. Following the establishment of the specialist outpatient department, in 2022 we will be opening the Central Queensland and Wide Bay medical school. That is an incredibly important step, because we know that when medical practitioners train locally they stay locally. We need to grow our own medical professionals in the Gladstone area if we want to begin to address the skills shortages that we see right across regional Queensland.

Finally, I say this to the people of my electorate: I acknowledge your community sentiment and I acknowledge your passion, because I too am passionate about improving services at the Gladstone Hospital. We are on a journey and we have come a long way, but there is still further to go. The investments secured since I have been the state member for Gladstone demonstrate that I am a strong advocate for the hospital. I know there is certainly more work to be done, especially in the area of patient experience and increasing communication to the community. Patients rightly expect their health needs to be met with compassion, professionalism and competency.

I will certainly continue to work with the Minister for Health and the Central Queensland Hospital and Health Board to ensure that this occurs. In conclusion, I acknowledge that the board of the Central Queensland Hospital and Health Service has three members from the Gladstone area. Huge kudos goes to the members of that board.