




Speech By
Hon. Dr Steven Miles
MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Hospitals, Demand

 **Hon. SJ MILES** (Murrumba—ALP) (Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services) (9.42 am): In recent days, hospitals in South-East Queensland have experienced an unprecedented, unseasonal—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! Members, I can stand all day. I gave instructions yesterday that I will issue notices under the standing orders without warning. I do not wish to go to that place immediately but that is what I am being forced to do. You may not agree with the statements being made by the person on their feet but you will hear them without interjection.

Dr MILES: In recent days, hospitals in South-East Queensland have experienced an unprecedented, unseasonal surge in emergency department presentations, both public and private. Across South-East Queensland our emergency departments are 50 patients above normal capacity following an unexpected surge in patient presentations over the last several days. Yesterday alone, there were 2,582 triple 0 calls to the Queensland Ambulance Service. This is around 220 more than the yearly daily average.

This sustained summer surge culminated in a situation yesterday afternoon where our hospitals had no spare emergency department capacity in the system. To help manage this situation, the Palaszczuk government has approved an immediate capacity investment of up to \$3 million. I visited the PA Hospital and the royal Brisbane hospital this morning. I spoke with staff on the ground and I thanked them on behalf of all members of this parliament for their efforts. It is thanks to them that our hospitals have been able to treat so many unwell Queenslanders over the last few days and weeks. Queenslanders have played their part, too. After urging the public to please keep our emergency departments for emergencies, we saw numbers in some hospitals stabilise overnight. Thanks to these initiatives, no elective surgeries were cancelled at the PA Hospital.

The State Health Emergency Coordinating Centre is coordinating a response centrally. I will attend their SHECC meeting later today. I will chair that meeting and provide an update to the public after that meeting. We will continue to purchase temporary capacity from the private sector and look at other capacity-building options in our hospitals if demand levels continue.

The message remains to people in South-East Queensland: please keep our emergency departments for emergencies. Our hardworking ED clinicians are working to ensure people are treated and admitted where required in a timely manner, but non-emergency and less severe GP style presentations make that harder to do. The quality of care in our emergency departments is first class. Unlike GPs, our emergency departments are free and open 24/7, 365 days a year and people are generally treated inside of four hours, but if you turn up to an ED with one of those less severe GP style presentations you may have to wait. If you are waiting in an emergency department, it is because patients who are sicker than you, who are critically ill or injured, are being seen first.

I am advised there is at present no single identifiable reason for the rapidly increasing number of presentations, but what we do know is that influenza cases across Queensland so far this year are nearly three times higher than the five-year average. Queensland is experiencing a longer, hotter summer that is hitting our health system hard. Extended periods of higher levels of heat and humidity impact on underlying conditions.

As we speak, around 200 beds in our hospitals are occupied by patients who should be in an aged-care facility or being provided assistance through the NDIS. Yesterday afternoon we began conversations with the Commonwealth to urgently address these issues, which are their responsibility. Today I have asked Queensland Health to undertake an analysis of the cause of this extended summer surge. We need to understand the range of factors—whether that is elderly patients awaiting assessment for aged-care beds, NDIS recipients seeking proper care—and we need to understand the impact of sustained hotter summers on the health of Queenslanders going forward.

Queensland has learned the lessons from winter flu. We understand the higher admission rates and their impact on EDs. We understand that impact. We invest in extra winter capacity and we work as a system to manage it. We need to understand the lessons from an increasingly sustained summer surge and plan for them in a similar way. This work will help inform our approach for next summer. In the meantime, I want our staff to know that the government understands the tough pressures they are under and we are responding to them. I want the public to know that our emergency departments remain safe, but please be patient and look to other options if you do not have a genuine emergency.