




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA

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MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Coronavirus, Health Response

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (2.48 pm): I want to start by thanking our incredible nurses, paramedics, midwives, doctors and all the staff who have been working tirelessly in both our public and private hospitals to keep us safe, save lives and safeguard our health. As we have seen in media reports today, zero cases overnight on two of the last three days is a testament to the job that Queenslanders have done in suppressing the spread. You are all health heroes and Queensland appreciates everything you do.

As a nurse of almost 40 years and someone who is from a strong nursing family background, I will always stand up for our health staff and ensure that they have the support they need to save lives and, importantly, to prioritise patient care. That is why I have put the call out for staff working at the Gold Coast University Hospital and indeed across Queensland hospitals to have free car parking or at least a reduction in the massive car parking cost throughout this global health pandemic. I think it is the very least the government can do to recognise the contribution of our health heroes. It has been disappointing to say the least that the health minister has not even replied to my correspondence on this issue.

The rapid containment of the coronavirus disease is down to two main factors: the efforts of Queensland in adhering to social distancing measures and other suppression measures to contain the spread of the coronavirus and our amazing hospital and health staff who have gone above and beyond and done us all proud. Now is not the time to be complacent, but we must start looking at what needs to be done to restart parts of our health system while being ever vigilant in ensuring there is no spike in the coronavirus case numbers. As the Prime Minister said yesterday—

... we are still very much in the middle of combating this terrible virus, as we're seeing all around the world. But here in Australia, we're doing better than most, better than many, and we need to keep doing that. And so we thank Australians for the great support and the efforts that they're putting in as we go through these very difficult times.

The LNP strongly backs the call of national cabinet yesterday to restart elective surgeries in our private hospitals and we understand that will be gradual. The plan is working and we all need to work together. No-one wants to see the scenes like those in the US at the moment where people are protesting in the streets to end restrictions.

In relation to elective surgeries, as a nurse I know that, while we cannot be complacent, now is the time we should be restarting surgeries to focus on better patient care. Labor's surgery waiting list had already significantly blown out prior to the coronavirus. Queenslanders on these waiting lists are suffering and if there is capacity in our private hospitals we need to open them back up.

As of February this year, there were almost 56,000 Queenslanders waiting for surgery, but we expect that to be a lot higher now given the extra capacity that was needed to respond to coronavirus. There is no point having empty hospital beds in private hospitals when Queenslanders are waiting for

surgery. The LNP has long advocated for a partnership with the private sector to improve patient care, and we need that now more than ever. Private hospitals were there to help support the public system during this crisis, and there is no reason why this partnership needs to end now.

The cost per minute of surgery in private hospitals is about half that compared with public hospitals, so the system is more efficient as well. Some regional areas have had zero or very few cases of coronavirus for a number of days, so a scaled up response should be considered to help Queenslanders get the health care they need. Any surgery restart needs to be done in consultation with clinical specialists and private hospital operators, but I would urge the Palaszczuk Labor government to move quickly.

We also need to make sure sufficient personal protective equipment is available to protect all clinical staff and patients for any surgery scale-up. Non-emergency elective surgeries and vitally important cancer screenings should come back online as quickly as possible. In relation to PPE, which has been a very topical issue and for good reason, what we need to see is appropriate local stock levels ready and available in each HHS, not at a central warehouse or distribution centre, of which I understand there are two. We also need clarification about what PPE is being made locally and whether there are enough N95 masks or just standard plastic gowns and standard surgical masks. We need to see more transparency when it comes to locally available PPE levels at relevant hospitals.

I, too, would also like to take the opportunity to congratulate Laura Gerber, the new LNP member for Currumbin. I had the pleasure of interacting with Laura on a daily basis during the campaign. She was a terrific candidate and she will make an amazing member of parliament. Once again, the Gold Coast rejected Labor and the Trad-Palaszczuk Labor government.