




Speech By
Hon. Dr Steven Miles
MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

Record of Proceedings, 19 May 2020

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Coronavirus, Health Update

 **Hon. SJ MILES** (Murrumba—ALP) (Deputy Premier and Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services) (10.01 am): It has been 111 days since the virus then known as the novel coronavirus reached Queensland, 111 days since a state health emergency was declared here, 111 days since our Chief Health Officer was given special powers to help fight the virus. In the last two weeks, we have recorded only one case of COVID-19 in Queensland that was not imported from across the borders or seas. Today we have recorded zero new cases of COVID-19 here in Queensland; in fact, we have had several zero days if you exclude old cases of Queensland residents reported late by other states.

However, many Queenslanders have been directly impacted by the virus: 1,057 Queenslanders have fallen ill with COVID-19; 1,039 cases have recovered and 12 remain active; four Queenslanders remain in hospital because of COVID-19; and just one Queenslander is in the ICU and ventilated. Sadly, six Queenslanders have lost their lives to this disease. Initial modelling showed Queensland's death toll due to COVID-19 could have been more than 30 times greater than the number of total cases we have seen. The global death toll is now at 317,566 and the global case number is more than 4.7 million. Queensland's position and hold on the virus comes down to the hard work of each and every Queenslanders. They listened to the health advice, they listened to the calls to stay home and they looked out for each other. It has been 111 restless nights thinking about the impact this pandemic could have on Queensland families, their friends and their communities.

The Palaszczuk government has put the health and lives of Queenslanders as our top priority since day one. It was Queensland's early action that prepared us to respond effectively to the virus. We injected \$1.2 billion into public hospitals to double intensive care and triple emergency department capacity. We ordered more personal protective equipment and brought forward a \$25 million order of medicines, gloves and masks. Since November, we have invested \$70 million in our PPE supplies. We boosted testing capacity, including Panther machines and 35 GeneXpert machines and serology testing, bringing to five the number of testing platforms available.

We employed 1,375 extra staff, including doctors, nurses and paramedics, and ordered 110 new ventilators. We boosted protection of workers by introducing big fines for people who deliberately cough, sneeze or spit on public officials and workers including shop assistants. We announced an additional \$28 million to support non-government organisations delivering critical mental health care and drug and alcohol services across the state. There are 18 mental health support organisations and seven other community services already helping Queenslanders. We even announced we would purchase an additional hospital, the Gladstone Mater Hospital in Central Queensland.

I do believe we would not be where we are today if it were not for our health heroes on the front line who every day go to work to save Queensland lives. When the pandemic hit 111 days ago, our amazing staff put on their gowns and masks, pulled on their gloves and did what they do best: keep

Queenslanders healthy and safe. Pathology staff performed 158,641 tests in Queensland, with 2,986 conducted in the last 24-hour reporting period. Fever clinic staff screened 77,611 patients who presented to one of the 17 state-run fever clinics. Allied health and nursing staff have answered 25,772 COVID-19 related calls to 13HEALTH since 21 January. Public health officials issued 60,934 self-quarantine notices.

Those health heroes are responding right now to a potentially catastrophic situation in Rockhampton. In just a matter of days, they have tested hundreds of people—all thankfully negative so far. They are doing an incredible job of contact tracing and protecting the Rockhampton community—just like we saw in Cairns, where their public health unit tested hundreds of staff in response to a pathology worker who confirmed positive. In that hospital, they have now screened over 3,100 staff, and fortunately there are no further cases.

I have spent eight days as the Deputy Premier of Queensland, 889 days as the Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services and 1,935 days in this government since it was elected. In the days ahead, my focus will be on tackling this virus but also championing the system that has so successfully protected us. It has shown us how vital our world-class, free universal healthcare system is. Our health system and our response to the pandemic is the envy of many countries around the world. Without a strong, public healthcare system, we would be in the same situation as countries like the United States—trying to manage the spread of this disease with a disjointed system where the wealthy are prioritised instead of those who need care the most. Public health care has never, ever been more important, and I will fight any attempts to undermine it. As important as it is to the outbreak, it is also crucial to our recovery. The Palaszczuk government is currently building 173 new or upgraded health facilities across this great state, providing jobs for Queenslanders right now and into the future.

This shutdown has also highlighted our health in other ways, some of them positive. Iso life has seen so many Queenslanders choosing to exercise more and cook at home more. I hope that with the help of Health and Wellbeing Queensland we can help more people around the state start and keep a good habit—help them take better care of their mental and physical wellbeing. If Queenslanders keep up their incredible efforts, we will beat this virus. I want to thank Queenslanders for their efforts and support of our health workers as we have faced one of the biggest challenges of our lifetimes.