




Speech By
Hon. Dr Steven Miles
MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

Record of Proceedings, 8 September 2020

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Mulherin, Hon. TS; Coronavirus, Health Services

 **Hon. SJ MILES** (Murrumba—ALP) (Deputy Premier and Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services) (9.51 am): At the outset I endorse the words of the Premier and you, Mr Speaker, in acknowledging the sad passing of our dear friend Tim Mulherin. You both acknowledged his contribution to the parliament and the community. I also would like to acknowledge his contribution to the Mackay Hospital and Health Service. He was a fantastic advocate for that community and that health service in the period of time that I was the health minister and I am sure the Treasurer would say the same about his time as health minister.

There has been one new case of COVID-19 overnight—a returned overseas traveller who was and is in hotel quarantine. There are now 25 active cases in Queensland, bringing our total to 1,134. Globally, though, there have now been 27 million cases and 890,000 deaths. Queensland Health continues to aggressively contact trace and quarantine close contacts connected to the latest cluster. I am pleased to say we have conducted 7,660 tests in the last 24 hours. It is that strong response that has allowed our economy to remain open and businesses to remain open, keeping people in jobs. Queenslanders are uniting behind our plan to recover for health and for jobs.

We continue to expand health services for Queenslanders and those from other states. Queensland's specialist COVID-19 Healthcare Support Service launched on Friday. The service, available via a new hotline, is designed to ensure thousands of interstate residents who access health care in Queensland each month are supported when they enter the state. So far they have fielded 231 calls since Friday. The new team will also provide a unique case managed approach to those entering mandatory quarantine who have complex healthcare needs. Nurses, doctors, social workers, paramedics and representatives of other key state government departments are all part of the new service. Every exemption request relating to medical needs will be assessed by a clinician.

While our border restrictions have been in place in some way since March, we have always allowed interstate residents to enter the state for medical care. Anyone can enter Queensland by road, rail or air for emergency health care without an exemption. People can also continue to receive essential health care in Queensland where they have an ongoing relationship with a healthcare provider or if the health care cannot be provided close to their home. After all, our border restrictions are in place for one reason alone: to save lives and prevent harm. In fact, we have continued to treat people from outside our borders throughout this pandemic.

The hospital and health services closest to the New South Wales border—Gold Coast, Metro North, Metro South, Children's Health Queensland, West Moreton and Darling Downs—treated more than 9,700 interstate residents in the last two months as inpatients, outpatients or emergency patients. Some 75 per cent of these patients are New South Wales residents. That is more than 900 New South Wales patients treated in our hospitals each and every week. QAS transfers have increased this year compared to last. We facilitated 167 transfers from northern New South Wales to Queensland from June to August 2019 and in the same period this year we have facilitated 219 transfers.

We are very aware of how hard the quarantine process can be for those who do not get granted an exemption. That is why we also have a pilot program in place to make quarantine easier for people with existing medical needs or disabilities and those caring for very young children. As part of the new targeted care accommodation program, selected hotels or alternative accommodation will have additional health and social support on site or close by. Stage 1 of the program is being conducted with those in quarantine and currently COVID-19 negative by Metro South Hospital and Health Service in conjunction with Queensland police. Those who may be suitable for the additional support will be identified by various Queensland government and community services teams. This process will be further strengthened by the new special healthcare support service.

Our border restrictions are keeping Queenslanders safe and preventing the introduction of COVID-19 into the state. These new initiatives will help people with a genuine need to navigate these restrictions. As always, these services are run by clinicians who will make decisions based on medical need and risk, not on politics. I want to thank the Chief Health Officer for everything she does, including for briefing those opposite on Friday and answering their questions on these matters.