




Speech By
Hon. Yvette D'Ath

MEMBER FOR REDCLIFFE

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Coronavirus, Vaccine; Public Hospitals, Demand

 **Hon. YM D'ATH** (Redcliffe—ALP) (Minister for Health and Ambulance Services) (9.54 am): Queensland's vaccination program is in full flight. We have now stood up 37 vaccination hubs across the state and administered more than 40,000 vaccine doses to Queenslanders. Thanks to the great progress we have made in administering vaccines to our phase 1a cohort, we have been able to commence our phase 1b vaccinations. This week the Commonwealth commenced its part of the phase 1b rollout. Overall, the Commonwealth is responsible for delivering vaccinations to more than 60 per cent of the Queensland population. Once CSL is able to ramp up onshore production of AstraZeneca, it is my hope that there will be greater certainty of vaccine supply to the Commonwealth and, by extension, states and territories.

This vaccine rollout is a joint effort, but Queensland's vaccine output will always be contingent on a steady and certain supply of vaccine doses, which is the Commonwealth's responsibility. Queensland will continue to stay the course on its vaccination rollout plan and work closely with the Commonwealth to ensure that we can continue to keep Queensland safe.

We know that keeping Queenslanders safe and healthy extends beyond the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine. Emergency departments across the state are seeing significant, sustained and unprecedented demand pressures. Between 1 July 2020 and 28 February 2021, there were over 1.58 million presentations, including fever clinic activity, to Queensland's emergency departments—an increase of 11.5 per cent. There are almost 60 beds being used—I think it is 60 today—for COVID patients, and that is close to the highest number since the start of the pandemic.

Almost 600 public hospital beds are taken up by patients who are awaiting placement in either aged-care or disability facilities. Just today I wrote to the federal ministers for aged care and disabilities to request federal government assistance in finding suitable accommodation for these individuals.

We have staff spread across hotel quarantine facilities. These hardworking staff are also managing fever clinics and vaccination hubs and clearing the elective surgery lists caused by COVID thanks to our \$250 million investment. We also know that COVID still requires ongoing significant resourcing to ensure we can react quickly to situations as they arise.

We know the flow-on effect is placing additional pressures on our Queensland Ambulance Service. However, patient off stretcher time in the year to February 2021 has declined from 73.6 per cent in 30 minutes to 70.9 per cent in 40 minutes when comparing the same period in 2019-20. Additionally, lost time has increased over 20 per cent from 51,931 hours to 62,676 hours in the same period.

However, the Palaszczuk government has a proud record of rebuilding Queensland's health system, helping Queenslanders in need, and we are not shying away from the challenges the health system is currently experiencing. On 12 February, Queensland Health approved an additional

\$25 million to open additional bed capacity across the system, with \$15 million already released to deliver an additional 130 beds. We are reactivating a successful campaign regarding what type of presentations are suitable for an emergency department. I remind the public that if it is not an emergency please go to your GP as opposed to coming to an emergency department.

I can announce that 50 additional paramedics will be employed in April, taking further pressure off the system. I will also be convening a meeting of the Patient Access Advisory Committee later this week, which will include representatives from the hospital and health services, consumer groups and unions to identify strategies to deal with these unprecedented pressures.

Our health system has weathered the seismic shock of the COVID-19 pandemic. We now face an unprecedented influx of demand in our hospitals. While there will inevitably be challenges, I am confident that with record funding and courageous and resilient staff, we will be able to continue providing world-class care to all Queenslanders.