




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (3.31 pm): I will make a short contribution on this report. I have some good news: I will not be critical. In fact, I will talk about the importance of our committee system and about how it can work. I thank the chair, the deputy chair and all the members of the health committee, because we were looking to address a problem that had been a big problem for us for a long time in rural and remote areas: the discharge of patients from rural and remote areas. They fly out of Longreach, Boulia or Tambo and end up in Rockhampton or Toowoomba. Basically, we found that, because there was no discharge plan, those patients were discharged with no way of getting home.

When someone has a heart attack or has an emergency and they go to the ED in rural and remote areas, they are normally rushed into hospital. Then a decision is made by the excellent doctors, nurses and medical professionals that this person needs to go to Rockhampton to get that required surgery. Basically, if it happens at night, they probably turn up in their pyjamas. They have no toiletries and probably do not even have a wallet, or any personal items. They are flown out by the Royal Flying Doctor Service, which does a fantastic job, into Rockhampton. They get their treatment and then are discharged. Basically, they are sitting on a park bench at 12 o'clock at night in Rockhampton or wherever they are with no way of getting home. It is not easy to get from Rockhampton back to Boulia. There are no flights from Rockhampton straight into Boulia.

We are not talking about people with lots of money. They may be pensioners or retirees just living day to day. When we visited Longreach, we were able to sit down and have an honest discussion with some nurses and medical professionals in terms of finding a way around this in our health system right across Queensland. When people come from a rural and remote area, they need a discharge plan before they leave hospital or at least a way for them perhaps to find a motel room where they can stay for a couple of days while we try to work out how to get them home. It is not that easy when people travel from Boulia or Winton and drive all the way to Rockhampton in terms of getting nan, grandma or grandad home.

In terms of recommendation 7 of the committee's report, we are looking at this and there has been a response from the government that it is a serious issue that we need to address. It shows that with this committee system, while we in parliament are adversarial, both sides of parliament and the crossbenchers actually do some good things. I am absolutely thrilled. This is an issue that has affected me ever since I came into parliament. I am sure it affected Vaughan Johnson, the former member for Gregory, while he was in parliament. We would get a phone call that nan was in hospital, has been discharged but is sitting on the bench outside the hospital at 12 o'clock at night in the middle of winter and there is no way to get home. We need to make sure that we follow up on recommendation 7 to ensure that we put in place a discharge plan for anybody from rural or remote areas. The simplest way would be a little armband on a person's wrist that says, 'This person comes from a rural or remote area. Before discharging this person, please find a way they can be accommodated and get back home.'

Finally, this health committee report talks about aged care. I congratulate a very dear friend of mine and a brilliant servant of aged care in the Blackall district for over 40 years, Owen Stockwell OAM. Owen started the Blackall aged-care facility group, I think, back in 1974. We now have put another 10 beds into Blackall, on top of the pre-existing 30 beds. It is probably one of the best aged-care facilities in a rural and remote area. Only last week we visited Blackall to open those 10 beds. There is a bust of Owen Stockwell out the front of the Blackall aged-care facility. That demonstrates how much hard work and how much money he put into it and his dedication. He made sure that, if you are going into an aged-care facility and if you are getting to that age, you can retire in a place like Blackall, because that is where your family and friends are. I congratulate the LNP federal government on putting \$600,000 into it; the rest was raised. I pay tribute to Owen Stockwell OAM, a true man of Western Queensland.