




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR HILL

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PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENT

Regional Queensland, Health Services

 **Mr KNUTH** (Hill—KAP) (2.25 pm): Health services and access to GPs in regional Queensland have been declining rapidly. There were loud announcements over the record health budget recently; however, there was nothing to stop regional areas from losing GPs or to make it easier to access basic health services. GP practices are closing at an alarming rate; people are being turned away from hospital emergency departments; and there is a lack of nurses, extended waitlists for vital surgery and a lack of life-saving dialysis equipment. All this is not an illusion. A mum on the Tablelands recently spoke out about her experience. She said—

Today we needed to get an appointment with a GP for our 4-month-old. With the recent closure of our regular clinic, I called every other GP on the Atherton Tablelands trying to get an appointment to get a script. There was not a single clinic available to take our baby as a new patient. Over half the clinics I called recommended to either drive to Cairns to see a doctor, or visit the emergency department at the hospital. Two clinics at Atherton cannot cope. The hospital won't cope, the other surrounding doctors won't cope. Someone needs to do something please.

It angers me to see that we will spend billions on the Olympics, which will only benefit the south-east, while basic health services in smaller regional centres are heading for disaster.

To make matters worse, the Rural Doctors Association has expressed deep concern about the federal government's proposed changes to the distribution priority area. Currently, overseas GPs are required to work up to 10 years in regional centres before they can work in a larger regional city, but this change means that GPs can instead go straight to outer metro or larger regional cities. Our state government should be kicking down doors to fight this change but are mute on this issue.

Money must be spent to ensure regional hospitals are fully equipped and staffed to meet demands. The state must also work with their federal buddies to increase Medicare bulk-billing rebates, with the increase only available for GPs who work in rural and regional centres. Investment on targeted packages and programs to provide greater incentives to GPs to relocate to smaller regional centres and for school leavers to study medicine and return to their region must be a priority. The government must get its priorities right and fix the health crisis in rural and regional Queensland.