




Speech By
Stephen Bennett

MEMBER FOR BURNETT

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ADJOURNMENT

Burnett Electorate, Health Services

 **Mr BENNETT** (Burnett—LNP) (8.36 pm): A serious health crisis is looming in Bundaberg due to a lack of heart doctors. Immediate action needs to be taken to prevent a disaster. It is acknowledged that there are a lot of reasons we do not have enough cardiologists. I am calling on all levels of government to do everything in its power to resolve this issue before more lives are put at risk.

A number of doctors and hospital staff have contacted me fearing people will be harmed or, worse, die unnecessarily if something is not done. Our local cardiology service has been reduced to two, with one cardiologist looking towards retirement. How can one person look after 204,000 people? I am hearing reports of overseas trained cardiologists being turned away due to bureaucracy. In the meantime our two remaining cardiologists are working flat out.

The lack of heart doctors will have a detrimental effect across all health sectors. With the Wide Bay's ageing population increasing, cardio support is needed and several surgical specialists in the pre-operative care and in-hospital stages are needed. There is no way one cardiologist can cope.

I acknowledge that these are hard issues and getting trained doctors is tough, but last year over 1,700 patients in the Wide Bay received cardiology care. With all of these issues we had three cardiologists and now it looks like we will only have one. I do not think it is fair that everyone has to be airlifted to Brisbane for heart issues. We can and we have done it before, but the cost alone will be astronomical, not to mention the lives put at risk, so we are looking for solutions.

This brings me to another looming health issue in the region. When it is already hard enough to get GPs, this week we have been hearing about potentially abandoning bulk-billing when there has been no increase for six years in the \$30 Medicare rebate subsidy. They face the prospect of going broke if they keep their bulk-billing patients and have to increasingly charge patients for a portion of their consultation.

For people on fixed incomes, this is a disaster. People on low incomes simply will not go to a doctor if they have to pay. In the Burnett the ageing population is hugely over-represented compared to the rest of Queensland—25 per cent of the population is over 65. As people age, their need for affordable, quality health care increases. We know that older people in the region with more complex health issues will suffer.

The shortage of GPs in the Bundaberg and Burnett region is on the record. We simply cannot attract GPs to locate to our region permanently. My fear is that if the doctors do get caught up in this issue of losing their bulk-billing capacity they will simply pack up and leave and head to the south-east corner.

Without having a relationship with your GP, we know how detrimental that can be and we will see more people presenting to the emergency departments at our hospitals. That is the main reason our EDs are inundated with people who should not be there. We need these services. We need more GPs appointed. More importantly, we need the Medicare subsidy for GP consultations to continue for people in the region who need so much more to be done for their declining health.