



Speech By  
**Hon. Yvette D'Ath**


**MEMBER FOR REDCLIFFE**

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## **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

### **Virtual EDs**

 **Hon. YM D'ATH** (Redcliffe—ALP) (Minister for Health and Ambulance Services) (9.56 am): Innovation and resilience have been the hallmarks of Queensland's world-class pandemic response. Throughout the pandemic our clinicians, under the leadership of the Chief Health Officer, have successfully adapted to the existence of a once-in-a-generation health challenge. There is no better example of this than a trailblazing initiative established by Metro North Hospital and Health Service in Brisbane during the height of the COVID emergency. I touched on this during the last sitting when I spoke about the new Queensland Ambulance Service clinical hub. Just like the significant expansion of the hub, we are also expanding the virtual emergency department.

Since April 2020, Metro North Health has been refining its virtual emergency department model, enabling patients to receive emergency treatment from home. I am pleased to announce that this initiative has proven so successful that it will now be offered to the state's other hospital and health services. The virtual emergency department service comes under the umbrella of the Connected Community Pathways initiative, a \$67.5 million commitment by the Palaszczuk government to improve clinical care. It offers telehealth treatment to people needing urgent but non-life-threatening care. It can be accessed through the clinical hub by GPs or directly by the public. This innovative new model of care is not only relieving demand on our busy EDs; it is providing a streamlined and comfortable service to patients in their own homes without the need for travel.

Our Queensland Health and Hospitals Plan identified the expansion of virtual models of care as a priority for our health system and we have delivered. Since April 2020, the service has averaged 526 referrals a week. One of the main benefits of this model has been to limit the number of people with contagious illnesses, such as COVID, from presenting at hospitals, protecting our hardworking health professionals and the patients they care for. The service, which has been operating seven days a week including weekday evenings until 10 pm, is being run by highly qualified emergency department staff, including experienced emergency nurses and senior emergency doctors. Those dedicated professionals triage and diagnose patients, make referrals for further treatment and prescribe medication as required.

Under this model of care, some of the most common conditions managed by Metro North include those that can be successfully managed via telehealth such as COVID-19, common respiratory illnesses, gastroenteritis, minor injuries, vertigo, high blood pressure and back pain. In addition to this, Queensland GPs and QAS staff will be able to access this model of care as it is rolled out across Queensland to provide real-time emergency medicine assessment and support. By providing expert clinical advice to our GPs and QAS staff, our virtual ED is able to prevent unnecessary presentations to our EDs. As we all know, there are reports in our communities about people who seek to access a GP but are turned away because they have an upper respiratory condition, whether they be children or adults. This will allow GPs to go directly online and access our virtual ED without sending people to emergency departments.

It saves on our ambulances and it saves pressure on our emergency departments. It is a great initiative. I am thrilled that it is being expanded across our state. Our virtual ED model is yet another sign of the Palaszczuk government's commitment to delivering quality health care for all Queenslanders no matter where they live.