



Speech By
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ADJOURNMENT

General Practice

 **Dr MacMAHON** (South Brisbane—Grn) (6.14 pm): In Queensland our primary healthcare system is in crisis. Nearly 40 years in, Medicare is failing. Queenslanders are waiting weeks to see a general practitioner, and that is if the GP in their town is even taking on new patients. Even where people can find a GP able to see them, they are paying hand over fist. Access to bulk-billing GPs in Queensland is becoming increasingly rare, leaving people to delay trips to the doctor. Combine this with inflation, stagnant wages and the skyrocketing cost of housing and people simply cannot afford a trip to the GP. The cost-of-living crisis is feeding directly into a healthcare crisis: with fewer and fewer people able to access primary care they are eventually ending up in our struggling emergency departments and hospitals.

Like patients, general practitioners have been hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic and now we are seeing a shortage of new GPs alongside too-low Medicare rebates, leading to GPs scrapping bulk-billing and charging patients higher out-of-pocket payments. Medicare rebates, which were frozen in 2013 by then Labor prime minister Julia Gillard, are still frozen today.

Recently we have learnt that Brisbane is the least affordable capital city for health care. Media reports this week showed that only 14 per cent of clinics surveyed offer bulk-billing, down from 32 per cent in 2018. Out-of-pocket costs for patients in mixed billing clinics have jumped by 13 per cent. Despite plenty of graduate doctors, we are seeing a severe GP shortage. Australia has a lot of doctors graduating each year—well above the OECD average—but medical and patient groups are warning that limited GP training opportunities, lower pay for GP registrars, higher patient loads and insufficient Medicare rebates are contributing to a GP shortage. The AMA has warned that by 2031 we will have a national shortfall of over 10,000 GPs. We need to incentivise these graduates to work as GPs, with pathways for training and opportunities to be employed by the state rather than being crushed by frozen rebates.

When our primary healthcare system fails, our entire health system goes with it. When people cannot get access to a GP or are delaying care, their health issues do not go away. Mental health issues do not go away. Physical health issues do not go away. Instead, people end up in emergency departments because they have not been able to access the health care they need.

Queenslanders need the state government to take some responsibility. In Tasmania, with a conservative government, in collaboration with federal Labor, they have started the first trial of a model where GP trainees are employed directly by the Tasmanian health service, working across hospitals, primary care practices and community health centres. Let us bear in mind that this was the original idea of Medicare—free universal health care provided by doctors employed by the state. The Greens have a plan for well-funded, state owned GP clinics right across Queensland, to increase the number of GPs in our system and to ensure patients across the state get the care they need.