




Speech By
Hon. Yvette D'Ath

MEMBER FOR REDCLIFFE

Record of Proceedings, 20 April 2023

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Townsville University Hospital, Audiology Testing

 **Hon. YM D'ATH** (Redcliffe—ALP) (Minister for Health and Ambulance Services) (9.48 am): The chief executive of the Townsville Hospital and Health Service yesterday announced that a proactive investigation into paediatric audiology services delivered by Townsville University Hospital is currently underway. The health service was alerted to a pattern of 'unexpected findings' in the assessment of babies referred for diagnostic audiological testing after their screening at birth. As a result, the health service has been working systematically with Children's Health Queensland through the Healthy Hearing Program to conduct a full audit of 341 test results conducted on babies who were born after 1 January 2020. Although the audit is continuing, due to the results so far, the Townsville Hospital and Health Service has made the decision not to wait for the review to be finalised but instead to contact affected families in parallel with the audit. So far, 91 cases have been reviewed with eight infants requiring urgent follow-ups.

Townsville HHS has also taken proactive steps to look at cochlear implant programming in children at Townsville University Hospital, following recent cases in South Australia where cochlear implants have been mapped incorrectly. Since 2014, 59 children have received cochlear implants in Townsville. So far, 31 cases have been reviewed, with concerns around six. This review is complex and must be done on a case-by-case basis and is expected to be complete by June. Families of affected children began being contacted yesterday, and that process is ongoing. I want to assure families whose children have been fitted with cochlear implants that the health service is prioritising this investigation.

The health service has also taken steps to ensure that the ongoing delivery of paediatric audiology services for North Queensland children has the highest levels of scrutiny and governance. I can confirm two staff members have been stood down at this time while an investigation is conducted. It is important we do not pre-empt the investigation's findings.

The health service and Children's Health Queensland are well aware of the impact this could have on the development of these young Queenslanders, and their priority is now focused on giving these young patients and their families all the support they need. Families whose child has been fitted with a cochlear implant and have concerns for their child's care can contact (07)44337902. All other families who did not require a follow-up assessment following a routine hearing screen are not impacted. Those that are will be contacted by the health service or Queensland Health. However, families who still have concerns can contact 13HEALTH.