



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

Record of Proceedings, 20 August 2024


APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL

APPROPRIATION BILL

Consideration in Detail (Cognate Debate)

Appropriation Bill

Health, Environment and Agriculture Committee, Report

 **Ms LAUGA** (Keppel—ALP) (7.55 pm): When my grandmother was sick with pancreatic cancer before I was elected to parliament and she had to travel to Brisbane every few weeks for treatment, I saw firsthand how difficult it was for her. It was then that I vowed to work to improve access to health care closer to home. I am proud to be part of the Miles government, which is investing in improved health services right across the state.

We have a record health budget year in and year out, delivering more frontline healthcare workers, delivering more services right across the state. I am particularly passionate about making sure there are improved services for regional, remote and rural Queenslanders so that we can deliver the best quality health care no matter where people live in Queensland.

I am particularly pleased that construction is about to start on the brand new \$90 million 32-bed Rockhampton Mental Health Unit, which is included in this year's budget, and also the \$28 million cardiac hybrid theatre. That means that more patients will be able to get that treatment closer to home. It will also reduce the number of flights that people have to take to Brisbane to get that treatment. Work is also due to be completed on the \$10 million new renal dialysis unit at the Capricorn Coast Hospital by the end of this year, meaning dialysis patients will no longer have to travel to Rockhampton multiple times a week for treatment.

I am also pleased to report that 59 additional healthcare workers have been recruited to Central Queensland through the Miles government's Workforce Attraction Incentive Scheme. This involves an incentive payment for healthcare workers to relocate to regional and rural Queensland. I recently met two new anaesthetists who have started at the Rockhampton Hospital, having relocated from New Zealand and Namibia. Since 2015, I am proud that we have delivered over 104 additional doctors, 482 nurses and 169 healthcare workers to our Central Queensland Hospital and Health Service.

The Rockhampton Medicare Urgent Care Clinic also continues to see many patients with urgent, non-life-threatening needs. This free clinic is open every day from 8 am to 8 pm and is treating patients without the need to present to the emergency department. It is critical that we are creating these

diversions for people to avoid having to go to the emergency department so we can reduce the congestion at the emergency department so that people can get the treatment they need without having to wait for hours on end in an ED.

Queensland Health has also recently launched the \$27 million Queensland Virtual Emergency Care Service, where you can get access to free telehealth treatment for non-life-threatening conditions. I am so excited about this service, particularly as a mum. I know that sometimes in the middle of the night when you have a sick child the hardest thing is getting them into the car to go and find a doctor or a pharmacy or someone who can help or the ED. This service is open online, free every day from 8 am to 10 pm and can be easily accessed by typing 'Queensland Virtual Emergency Care Service' into your search engine. Within two days of the service opening, over 110 people had been treated.

Also, people should not forget that the flu vaccine is still available free for all Queenslanders over six months of age at all GPs and pharmacies. Hormonal contraception and UTI antibiotics are also available over the counter at participating pharmacies, saving the need to visit a GP.

I am really pleased that this record health budget is delivering for Queenslanders right across the state. We are doing what we can to reduce congestion at our emergency departments. We are backing our frontline healthcare workers. We are incentivising and attracting new healthcare workers from right across the globe. The majority of those who have taken up the Workforce Attraction Incentive Scheme are from interstate. We are so pleased, particularly in regional Queensland, to welcome those specialist doctors, surgeons, allied health professionals and nurses to our rural, regional and remote communities. We have been desperately crying out for these healthcare workers for a long time. This Workforce Attraction Incentive Scheme is a real game changer for regional communities. Two anaesthetists have started work at the Rockhampton Hospital. Surgeries cannot happen without anaesthetists. It does not matter how many surgeons or specialists we have; unless we have anaesthetists no surgeries happen, so welcoming those two anaesthetists was incredibly important. Those nurses and doctors who provide support services to frontline healthcare workers are absolutely critical, and I know that right across Central Queensland we are welcoming all of those frontline health care workers with open arms. I thank the health committee for their work. I thank the health minister for an excellent Miles government budget, and I commend the report to the House.