



Speech By  
**Hon. Shannon Fentiman**


**MEMBER FOR WATERFORD**

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Record of Proceedings, 14 February 2024

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

**Health System, Performance; Syphilis**

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services and Minister for Women) (9.57 am): Over the past few weeks Queenslanders have seen several batches of data released about their health system. It is good news. I want to take the opportunity to thank our incredibly hardworking frontline doctors, nurses, midwives, paramedics, allied health professionals and all of our hardworking health staff. Because of them and their efforts, Queensland has been ranked the best in the country for elective surgery and treating patients within clinically recommended times. Our emergency department wait times are the second-best in the country.

**Mr Crisafulli** interjected.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** Just wait for it, Leader of the Opposition: the Queensland Ambulance Service has the best response times in the country. It is the only service that is free in mainland Australia and that will not change under this government. Ambulances are arriving sooner and patients are reporting better experiences.

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Member for Buderim and member for Everton, you will cease your interjections.

**Ms FENTIMAN:** You do not have to take my word for it, Mr Speaker; you can take the Productivity Commission's word for it. Through our Queensland Health big build, we are delivering thousands more hospital beds to keep up with our rapidly growing population. In fact, our 7.1 per cent increase in hospital beds is the envy of the nation, because New South Wales has gone backwards by three per cent and Victoria has grown by only 0.3 per cent in the same period.

Now that our satellite hospital data is being published through our Queensland Health performance website, Queenslanders can see firsthand what an impact they are having. Around 28,000 patients presented at a satellite hospital last quarter, resulting in a 13 per cent decrease in less urgent presentations at our emergency departments. Our satellite hospitals are working. Queenslanders are voting with their feet. The data is very clear: our doctors and nurses are helping to deliver one of the best hospital systems in the country. That is why we continue to back them with more staff, more beds and more health infrastructure to ensure they have what they need to continue caring for Queenslanders.

Mr Speaker, on a different note, I want to put three names to you: a genius German composer, a ruthless Chicago gangster and a legendary Irish poet and playwright. What do these men—Beethoven, Al Capone and Oscar Wilde—all have in common? Unfortunately, all of them were suspected of having contracted and in some cases dying of syphilis.

I know that STIs and sexual health are not topics we often like to discuss, but when public safety is at risk it is so important that leaders of our community engage in this conversation. That is our responsibility. The fact is that in Queensland we are seeing a concerning surge in syphilis cases, including a record 1,300 cases last year. In Queensland, notifications have increased from 200 cases in 2008 to 1,365 cases last year. If left untreated, syphilis can pose serious health risks. That is why the Miles Labor government is investing in a new five-year Queensland Syphilis Action Plan, backed by an initial \$1 million investment. The key aim is to eliminate congenital syphilis by 2028 and reduce syphilis across the state. Congenital syphilis is a devastating form of syphilis passed on to an unborn baby during pregnancy or at the time of birth and can result in miscarriage, stillbirth or serious health problems. Key actions of the plan include more resources for education and awareness, strengthening regional contact tracing to ensure faster identification and notification, and establishing dedicated positions to support women at risk through pregnancy. This will make a real difference to combating infections.

Queenslanders can play their part by remaining vigilant, practising safe sex and getting tested. Beethoven, Al Capone and Oscar Wilde once had to have their syphilis treated with mercury. Today it is just as easy as penicillin—because, if there is one thing you do not want to be giving your partner this Valentine's Day, it's syphilis!