

Question on Notice
No. 636
Asked on 19 April 2007

MR ELMES asked the Minister for Health (MR ROBERTSON)-

QUESTION:

With reference to the Noosa Dental Clinic which has been without a dentist since January 2007 and as I am advised that a dentist, that is just one new dentist, will not start until May 2007—

- (1) If there were three dentists at the clinic on 7 December 2006 how could this allocation reduce to zero dentists just a few weeks later in January 2007?
- (2) Why hasn't the Government introduced practicable contingency plans for community dental services as they now have with the new Surgery Connect initiative?

ANSWER:

- (1) One permanent full time Dentist went on leave in mid-December and resigned during that period. In early January 2007, the locum dentist at Noosa also resigned. The Senior Dentist at Noosa was on recreation leave but was recalled in early January to continue clinical services.

It is difficult to recruit locum or permanent staff over the Christmas period, however following a period of active recruitment the district recruited a new locum Dentist who commenced on 11 April 2007. Another full time Dentist has been recruited and after 21 May 2007, the Noosa Dental Clinic and School Dental Services will have a full complement of three Dentists.

- (2) Queensland provides the most comprehensive free public dental service in Australia for eligible adults and school aged children.

Queensland Health provided free dental care to more than 1.2 million eligible Queenslanders last year.

The State Government is investing a record \$138 million in public dental services this year.

This is an excellent result in an environment of oral health workforce shortages throughout Australia.

Over the last 40 years there has been considerable improvement in the oral health of Queenslanders. The proportion of children with decayed, missing or filled teeth has fallen dramatically and the proportion of adults with no teeth has also decreased. The increasing rate of tooth retention provides a greater pool of teeth within the community requiring dental care.

Queensland has the broadest eligibility for public oral health services of any state or territory. Holders of Pension Concession Cards and Health Care Cards and their dependents, Commonwealth and State issued Seniors cards are eligible for free oral health services: approximately one million people.

Queensland Health competes with the private sector for dentists, therapists, hygienists, prosthetists and technicians. Retention of staff has become increasingly difficult in light of private sector salaries.

Partnerships between public and private sector do exist in some areas where there are ongoing difficulties recruiting dentists and patients are provided with vouchers to receive urgently needed treatment at participating private dental surgeries.

The combination of increasing demand for services, workforce issues and changing work practices is making the provision of oral health services increasingly challenging. In order to ensure the provision of a sustainable high quality service that best addresses consumer needs a comprehensive review of public oral health service delivery in Queensland has recently commenced.