

Question on Notice
No. 748
Asked on 23 May 2007

MRS CUNNINGHAM asked the Minister for Health (MR ROBERTSON)—

QUESTION:

With reference to Question on Notice No. 548 and the Minister's reply and given the elevated incidents of chronic lymphoid leukaemia and cancer (all types) reported for the electorate of Gladstone—

Will he investigate and identify what contributing factors there are locally to cause this increased incidence?

ANSWER:

Queensland Health takes the issue seriously, and is undertaking an appropriate investigation to determine whether or not the increase may be the result of chance or whether it is possible the people diagnosed with this condition may have something in common that may explain it, and thus whether the excess of one person per year in Gladstone may be an excess of public health importance.

This investigation will look at relevant factors such as duration of residence in the area, occupational history, family history and past medical history. Once gathered all available evidence will be reviewed in accordance with current guidelines to determine the appropriate departmental response. The information will also be independently reviewed by an expert external to Queensland Health.

It is important to restate that the leukaemia that is most strongly linked to occupational or environmental causes is acute myeloid leukaemia (AML). AML is sometimes associated with exposures to agents such as benzene, ionising radiation and certain types of cancer treatments. If there was an environmental link, we would expect the rates of AML to be elevated. In Gladstone, the rate is the same as the Queensland average. In addition, the international research conducted during the past four decades investigating possible causes for CLL has failed to identify any clear contributory environmental factors.