

Question on Notice
No. 2020
Asked on 7 October 2010

MR WETTENHALL asked the Deputy Premier and Minister for Health (MR LUCAS)-

QUESTION:

Will the Minister advise how the availability of aged care services impacts on the availability of acute hospital beds at Cairns Base Hospital?

ANSWER:

I thank the Honourable Member for Barron River for his question.

There is currently an acute shortage of low level care, high level care and dementia specific beds aged care beds in Cairns and far north Queensland.

These services, which the Australian Government is responsible for funding and regulating, are in shortage across most of the nation.

This shortage means that aged care patients, who might otherwise be cared for in facilities tailored to their needs, end up occupying acute hospital beds at Cairns Base Hospital.

The hospital will not turn away a patient who needs a bed if there is no appropriate alternative care available. That means, however, that acute beds – which are intended to provide a high level of care to patients with acute illnesses and injuries- are not available for patients who need them.

Across Queensland, on any given day, around 300 acute hospital beds are occupied by aged care patients who could be cared for in aged care facilities, due to the shortage of aged care beds. 300 beds is the capacity of a medium-sized hospital.

The Queensland Government is working with the Australian Government to help them to solve this problem. To expedite the movement of aged care patients into permanent nursing home placements the Cairns Base Hospital has contracted a local nursing home to provide 10 aged care beds so that patients can be moved out of the hospital.

However, ultimately it is the responsibility of the Australian Government to ensure funding of aged care services ensures that supply of aged care beds is adequate.