

Question on Notice
No. 751
Asked on 29 October 2013

MR HOBBS asked the Minister for Health (MR SPRINGBORG)-

QUESTION:

Will the Minister advise how the long-standing problem of dental waiting lists in Queensland is being addressed and in particular, how the waiting lists are being addressed in the Warrego Electorate?

ANSWER:

I thank the Honourable Member for Warrego for his question.

I am pleased to provide advice on significant achievements in addressing the long-standing problem of dental waiting lists in Queensland. There has been a long history of excessively long waiting times for dental examination and treatment for public patients.

When Queensland partnered with the Federal Government and signed the National Partnership Agreement on Treating More Dental Patients on 27 February 2013, the Government sought to address the issue of long dental waiting times.

Following an initial contribution in 2012-2013 of \$13.5 million by the Federal Government, the Queensland Government has committed an additional \$39 million in 2013-2014 to support the objectives of the National Partnership Agreement and ensure continued funding for Queensland under the Agreement.

When the National Partnership commenced in late February this year, there were 112,000 people waiting for a check-up on public dental waiting lists across Queensland. 62,000 of these people had been waiting for longer than two years. By the end of September, the number of people waiting for a check-up fell to around 60,000, with approximately 14,000 people waiting for longer than two years.

While there is still considerable work to go to reduce waiting times to an acceptable level, the public dental system is on track to further reduce the numbers of people waiting longer than the recommended time.

The primary strategy that Hospital and Health Services have employed in order to quickly ramp up services for public dental patients with their extra funding has been to pay for eligible patients to receive dental treatment at private dental practices. Between March and September this year, vouchers for private treatment were sent to more than 57,000 people, including 31,000 people requiring urgent care, 24,000 people waiting for a check-up and 1,500 people waiting for a denture. So far, 83% of these people have completed their treatment to the value of approximately \$20 million. During this period, 17% of publicly funded dental treatment has been delivered in partnership with the private sector, compared with less than 2% in recent years.

Some Hospital and Health Services have also increased the capacity of their own public dental services through extended hours for existing staff or by employing additional clinical staff.

In relation to the Warrego Electorate, this region primarily encompasses the South West Hospital and Health Service. I am pleased to say that there are relatively few people on public dental waiting lists in this area, however the Warrego Electorate does face the ongoing challenges of many rural and remote communities to recruit and retain dentists in the public dental service, as well as having limited capacity in the private sector.

As such, the additional dental funding allocated to South West Hospital and Health Service is being used more broadly to improve access to services, and in doing so will help address waiting lists.

Despite the limited availability of private dentists, South West Hospital and Health Service have an arrangement with the local private dental practice in Roma to treat eligible public dental patients. This has created an opportunity for extra waiting list patients to be treated. In addition, South West expects two dental rural scholarship holders to commence with the public dental service in St George and Roma from early 2014. This will go a long way to boosting services in these areas.