

**Question on Notice**  
**No. 782**  
**Asked on 30 October 2013**

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

QUESTION:

With reference to population projections recently made by the Office of Economic and Statistical Research indicating a sharp increase in the population aged 65 years and older in Queensland in the coming decades—

Will the Minister detail the government's plan to address the worrying trend that some seniors may not be receiving health care when they need it because they have been forced to cut their spending due to cost of living pressures?

ANSWER:

I thank the Honourable Member for Yeerongpilly for his question.

I and the Queensland Government share the Member for Yeerongpilly's concerns regarding seniors delaying or not receiving the health care they need because of cost.

The estimated resident population of Queensland in 2011 was 4.47 million people. In the five years to 2016, the Queensland population is projected to grow by 13.8 per cent to 5.09 million people. This equates to a change of 2.7 per cent per annum, which is approximately 107,000 people per year.

The age structure of the population will also change. People in the older age groups will make up a greater proportion of the population in 2016 than in 2011, with the proportion of those aged 65 to 84 years increasing from 11.4 per cent in 2011 to 12.9 per cent in 2016 and those aged 85 years and over increasing from 1.6 per cent to 2 per cent over the same period.

Under the Medicare principles, the Queensland Government provides free public hospital and health services to eligible persons. This is consistent with one of the key principles of Medicare: to provide health care based on clinical need rather than the capacity to pay. Through its public hospital and health services, the Queensland Government provides elective surgery, emergency department, outpatient and community health services (such as mental health and dental health services) that are free at the point of delivery.

Planning for health services takes into account both the growing population as well as the changing age structure within the population to determine estimated future activity. This estimated future activity is used by the Department of Health to guide the planning of health services to ensure that these best meet the needs of the population into the future.

Funding and policy responsibility for primary health care, general practice and aged care (people 65 years and older and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50 years and over) rests with the Commonwealth Government. The Queensland Government notes that of the people who visited a GP in Queensland in 2011-2012, 7.4 per cent delayed their visit due to cost (compared to 7.2 per cent nationally), though it is not known how many of these are

seniors. The Queensland Government would welcome any Commonwealth Government initiatives that would reduce cost barriers to Queenslanders, and especially Queensland seniors, accessing primary health care services.

The Queensland Government is committed to lowering the cost of living, which is one of five pledges through which the Government will secure Queensland's future prosperity. As part of this pledge, the Queensland Government committed to several initiatives to lower the cost of living, many of which will benefit seniors. In 2013-2014, the Queensland Government will continue its commitment to managing the cost of living, providing almost \$5.2 billion in concessions to vulnerable Queenslanders. Of this, \$223.6 million relates to concessions administered by the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, through Smart Service Queensland, to assist pensioners, seniors and veterans with cost of living expenses. These concessions are designed to help Queenslanders reduce the cost of regular household bills, access essential services, and maintain a healthy, active lifestyle.

To address rising electricity costs, the Queensland Government has doubled the budget for the home energy emergency assistance scheme for low income households to \$10 million as at 1 July 2013. The Electricity Rebate, the Electricity Life Support Concession and Medical Cooling and Heating Electricity Concession Schemes have also increased in 2013-2014, in keeping with the recent changes to electricity tariffs. The Electricity Rebate and Medical Cooling and Heating Electricity Concession Schemes each increased by \$52 per annum and the Electricity Life Support Concession increased by \$107 per annum for users of oxygen concentrators and by \$73 per annum for users of kidney dialysis machines.

The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services also provides assistance through one-off payments and rebates to assist low income households that are unable to pay their current electricity or reticulated natural gas accounts in the event of a crisis or unforeseen emergency where they are at risk of disconnection. The Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services also provides pensioners in the South East Water Grid with a rebate of \$120 per annum and through the Pensioner Rate Subsidy Scheme a subsidy equivalent of 20 per cent (up to a maximum of \$200 per annum) of gross rates and charges for freehold properties.