

**Question on Notice
No. 114
Asked on 5 March 2014**

MR JUDGE asked the Premier (MR NEWMAN)—

With reference to Queensland's rapidly ageing population, with government statistics confirming that the largest percentage increase in population from 30 June 2007 to 2012 was among 65-69 year olds (32.1%)—

Will the Premier explain what action the Newman Government is taking now to prepare for the challenge of an ageing population into the future, especially in terms of securing and training doctors and preparing our public health system and aged care services?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for Yeerongpilly for this question and I acknowledge the challenges posed by an ageing population, particularly for the health system.

A well-resourced and sustainable health system, that is able to respond to challenges such as an ageing population, needs the support of a strong economy, and prudent management of public funds.

By growing Queensland's economy and reducing the \$80 billion debt left to us by Labor, the Government is better positioned to provide the services that all Queenslanders, including older people, need and expect. Providing funding for services is a much better use of taxpayers' money than paying interest on a large and growing government debt.

This Government is reforming the public health system so that it can respond to these challenges. The *Blueprint for better healthcare in Queensland* outlines our plans and actions for a state-wide healthcare system with new capacity, cooperation, transparent reporting systems, and financial accountability.

The blueprint identifies that Queensland's population will increase by one-third to 6.1 million people between 2011 and 2026 and that 1.1 million of these people will be aged over 65: an 83 per cent increase on 2011. The blueprint also acknowledges that continued double-digit growth in health expenditure is unsustainable, and that with a growing and ageing population, where chronic disease is prevalent, costs of care are escalating and consumer expectations rising, there is no choice but to change the way we do things in health

Examples of action being taken by this Government under the blueprint include:

1. Health Services focused on patients and people

The Government has established the *Healthier. Happier* campaign to make Queensland the healthiest state in Australia. By improving nutrition and fitness, we will be able to assist Queenslanders of all ages to get the most out of life and remain healthy. In doing so, we can better balance the health system toward prevention rather than treatment and avoid some of the costs associated with many chronic diseases that manifest themselves later in life.

2. Empowering the Community and our Workforce

This Government has established Hospital and Health Boards which have responsibility for ensuring that public health services meet the needs of their local communities and are accountable to the Minister for Health. Each Hospital and Health Service is required to contribute to and implement state-wide service plans. They are also required to develop and implement a consumer engagement strategy and to use their best endeavours to establish a protocol with primary health care organisations to promote cooperation in the planning and delivery of health services. These measures are designed to ensure that services, including those for older people, are better coordinated across the health sector.

As a result of changes to the governance and funding arrangements, Queenslanders treated in our public hospitals, including older people, are now having shorter stays in emergency departments and shorter waits for elective surgery.

3. Providing Queenslanders with value in health services

This includes developing partnerships with private and not-for profit organisations to deliver more efficient health care and introducing contestability and improved financial accountability. Contestability can produce cost savings and/or quality improvements in service delivery. We are also ensuring that clinicians are able to work to their full scope of practice and building clinical leadership thereby promoting a culture of respect for each other's knowledge and skills.

4. Investing, innovating and planning for the future

The Government has committed \$9 million to support the work being done by the Clem Jones Centre for Ageing Dementia Research to support the development of clinical applications for treating dementia including Alzheimer's disease.

The Queensland Government has also invested significant financial and human resources to build the capacity of the medical workforce in Queensland. Queensland has had a significant growth in domestic medical graduates in recent years, increasing from 280 in 2005 to 705 in 2014, and is projected to grow to 737 in 2017. The Government has committed to guarantee an offer of internship to all domestic medical graduates of Queensland universities.

The medical workforce is largely centred in the south east corner of Queensland. Historically, recruitment and retention in regional and rural areas has been more difficult compared to metropolitan areas. This is due to perceived difficulties with career advancement and work/lifestyle balance for families. To address this imbalance, the Government is involved in a range of medical workforce initiatives such as the state-wide vocational training pathways, including the Basic Physician Training Pathway and the General Medicine Advanced Training Pathway. The pathways provide a mechanism for coordinating training placements for the registrar workforce and support a more equitable distribution of the junior medical workforce across Queensland. The pathways enable trainees in regional Queensland to access specialty training placements in large tertiary hospitals to complete training requirements and to access educational and training sessions via videoconferencing.

Although aged care support is a responsibility of the Federal Government, the Queensland Government is one of the last remaining states to still run residential aged care services with the vast majority of residential aged care services in Queensland – around 95 percent – provided by non-Government organisations.