

Question on Notice

No. 199

Asked on 15 March 2023

MR S KNUTH ASKED THE MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND AMBULANCE SERVICES (HON Y D'ATH)—

QUESTION

With reference to the 4073 patients waitlisted, as at the end of December 2022, for elective surgery at the Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service alone, and with a significant number of surgeries cancelled or rescheduled during the past two-and-a-half years—

Will the Minister (a) outline exactly what strategies have been put in place to reduce waitlists and (b) advise if the government will invest in another 'blitz' on non-urgent procedures to reduce the long waitlist?

ANSWER

The Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service (CHHHS) is experiencing an ongoing high demand for elective surgery across a range of specialties. Challenges such as the deferral of non-elective surgeries and appointments arising from the 2020 National Cabinet decision and subsequent COVID-19 waves as well as a significant increase in emergency trauma cases which need to be treated urgently, continue to impact wait times.

Despite the challenges and the ongoing high demand, timely access to elective surgery continues to be a priority for the Health Service.

In the October – December 2022 quarter, the median wait time for elective surgery in the Cairns and Hinterland HHS was 33 days. For the most urgent category 1 elective surgery patients, the median wait time for elective surgery was 13 days, within the recommended 30-day period. Throughout the quarter, 79.2 per cent of elective surgery patients were treated within the clinically recommended time across all clinical categories. This outperformed the State average.

Notwithstanding this comparatively strong performance, there are a range of strategies and initiatives in place to address wait times.

The CHHHS completed an \$800,000 fit out to create a 12th operating theatre at the Cairns Hospital. This theatre is now operational commencing on 27 February 2023. This additional theatre has increased capacity for elective surgery.

Further, the 2022-23 State budget ensured that 45 additional beds would be provided through a leasing arrangement to expand sub-acute services in Cairns. The 45-bed Sub-Acute Unit has now opened and is being delivered through an agreement with Infinite Care as part of an expansion to Cairns Hospital's Older Persons Sub-Acute and Rehabilitation Unit.

On 20 February 2023, the new Surgical and Orthopaedic Assessment Unit (SOAU), a 32-bed unit, was commissioned with the space created by the expansion of sub-acute services. This will enable more patients to be admitted for elective surgery.

Further, I am advised the Cairns HHS is increasing its investment in the Surgery Connect program to deliver greater access to elective surgery in the region.

In addition, the Government committed \$250 million for the Cairns Hospital Expansion project. The Cairns Hospital Expansion project will deliver 96 additional beds by the first half of 2026 through a new state-of-the-art surgical centre with 32 beds, and a major refurbishment of the hospital that will provide 64 additional beds. This project will create additional capacity at Cairns Hospital for acute surgical and medical patients, therefore, lessening the pressure to allow for the most serious of cases. It will also deliver expanded capacity for elective surgery to meet the needs of our community into the future.

The Palaszczuk Government is providing record funding to Queensland Health and Hospital Services to assist them in providing world class care across all disciplines and specialties.

Since being elected, the Palaszczuk Government has increased Cairns and Hinterland HHS's operational funding by 77 per cent. These record budgets have facilitated the delivery of additional staff for the Cairns and Hinterland HHS. Since 2015, in the Cairns and Hinterland HHS we have hired:

- 243 more doctors;
- 695 more nurses and midwives; and
- 154 more allied health staff.

Finally, I am advised, as part of our wait list management, the Health Contact Centre (HCC) conducts administrative auditing to ensure the wait list is reviewed and updated regularly.