

## **Question on Notice**

**No. 1137**

**Asked on 10 December 2024**

**MR B HEAD** ASKED MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND AMBULANCE SERVICES (HON T NICHOLLS)—

### **QUESTION**

Will the Minister outline (a) what the government is doing to identify gaps in rural and regional maternity services and (b) what steps are being undertaken to reopen services in rural communities in Queensland including in Biloela?

### **ANSWER**

(a) What the government is doing to identify gaps in rural and regional maternity services:

Access to regional and rural birthing services is a priority for the Queensland Government.

As part of the Government's first 100 Day Plan, an assessment of staffing levels at all regional maternity services is underway and will include assessing staffing levels for those facilities offering level 3 and 4 maternity services, as per the Clinical Services Capability Framework, where planned birthing is currently offered.

This assessment includes Cooktown Multipurpose Health Service and Biloela Hospital, services that usually offer planned birthing services but are temporarily offering a reduced level of maternity services due to workforce shortages.

During the tenure of previous Labor governments, 37 birthing services were closed across Queensland.

The assessment of staffing levels at regional maternity facilities that offer planned birthing will result in a report outlining staffing gaps at these facilities.

This information will identify current maternity workforce gaps in rural, regional and remote maternity services by location and staff. It will also assist the Government regarding future workforce initiatives for these communities, including Biloela.

This Government is committed to collaborating with communities to review and implement models of care that can improve access to maternity services in rural and regional areas.

(b) What steps are being undertaken to reopen services in rural communities in Queensland including in Biloela?

The resumption of planned birthing services at Biloela Hospital is contingent on adequate staffing being available and the operating theatre meeting required standards. The Biloela Hospital Refurbishment Project Team is reviewing the scope of the project and is also considering other elements of the facility that may require

refurbishment and/or replacement. This review is being supported by Health Infrastructure Queensland and includes local Central Queensland HHS key stakeholders as members of the project team.

Antenatal and postnatal services continue to be provided in this community. Planned birthing services will recommence on-site when staffing permits, and it is safe to do so. Importantly, there are appropriate referral pathways in place to support pregnant people for planned birthing services.

When it is not safe to birth at a location due to insufficient staff, or there are infrastructure issues, risk mitigation plans are put in place to support women to relocate for planned birthing at alternative locations. The need to consider alternative birthing plans is undertaken in consultation with the woman, their family and clinicians.

Central Queensland HHS has made successful efforts to recruit permanent midwives and will be adding more staff accommodation, available on site.

The Department continues to invest in addressing the current workforce challenges in rural and regional areas through:

- funding more medical and midwifery positions.;
- supporting general practitioners and rural generalists to complete an Associate Training Program in obstetrics; and
- expanding virtual care to provide rural and remote midwives 24/7 access to expert advice.