



Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance
Services
Minister for Women

1 William Street Brisbane Qld 4000
GPO Box 48 Brisbane
Queensland 4001 Australia
Telephone +61 7 3035 6100

22 NOV 2023

Mr Neil Laurie
Clerk of the Parliament
Queensland Parliament
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr Laurie

I write in response to your letter regarding petition number 3969-23, tabled in Parliament on 26 October 2023, in relation to the closure of Cairns Private Hospital Maternity Unit.

The Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service (the Health Service) offers public birthing services for all birthing women in the Far North.

I am advised more than 2,000 babies were born at the Cairns Hospital last year representing 91% of births within the Far North. The Cairns Hospital is also the major referral hospital for women from the Tablelands, Cassowary Coast, Cape York and Torres Strait regions.

For many years, women who become critically unwell during their pregnancy have their care transferred from the private sector to the Cairns Hospital.

The decision-making process regarding the granting of private admitting rights for any practitioner at any public hospital is a complex matter best determined by the Chief Executive of the relevant Hospital and Health Service.

This decision requires consideration of a range of local factors including the current models of care offered at that public facility, the impact on patient care and the broader care needs of the community to ensure that any decision aligns with the best interests of staff, all patients and the public facility.

There are wider and more complex implications to permitting private obstetricians to work within a public hospital. These factors include operating theatre capacity and additional staffing resources such as theatre staff, anaesthetists and pharmacists, along with ensuring cultural alignment between the two services in every respect such as quality, safety and team dynamics.

I understand the priority of the Health Service Chief Executive is to ensure resources are firstly deployed to meet the needs of all public patients as well as ensuring operating theatres are available for those who require elective surgery and have been waiting on a list for some time.

I am advised that all the women who were planning to birth at the private hospital and have chosen to birth at the Cairns Hospital have had appointments, been seen and have been booked in for ongoing care.

I also understand that Cairns Hospital staff work together in shared antenatal care arrangements with GPs and private obstetricians to provide maternity care to women in the community.

To assist with this transition, the Palaszczuk Government has invested \$10 million to increase maternity staffing in the Health Service and I am advised that CHHS are currently advertising for obstetricians to accommodate this expansion and I encourage all qualified clinicians to apply for those positions.

I am pleased to advise a capital works expansion worth \$1 million has begun at the Cairns Hospital to create a new Maternity Assessment Centre, which will also increase capacity within the existing birth suites.

I understand the Cairns Maternity Unit has had a stable workforce of obstetricians and midwives who work closely together for the best outcomes for birthing women and their babies.

Women who access the Cairns Hospital Maternity Services have access to antenatal classes, lactation support, specialist medical clinics and women's health physiotherapy through a referral process. In the antenatal clinic areas, the Health Service runs midwife clinics, medical clinics and specialist clinics such as diabetes services.

The nine birth suites are fully equipped to manage any labour and birth situations and three of the rooms have birthing pools. The 25-bed maternity unit is made up of 1 and 2 bed rooms with ensuite.

The Health Service midwives also provide home visits to mothers and babies within one week of going home, to help support the transition into parenthood.

The staff of the Cairns Maternity Unit have done an exceptional job to expand the service and safely transition the care of pregnant women in such a short period of time

I trust this information is of assistance to the petitioners.

Yours sincerely



Shannon Fentiman MP

Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services
Minister for Women
Member for Waterford