



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

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 3985-23 and 3932-23, tabled in Parliament on 14 November 2023, in relation to Treatment of Acute Ophthalmology presentations via private rooms of ophthalmologist in Toowoomba. As these petitions are similar in nature, I have taken the liberty of responding to both petitions in this letter. I therefore ask that this response be noted against each petition.

Queensland Health is committed to ensuring all Queenslanders are treated within clinically recommended timeframes if not earlier. In support of this commitment, the Department of Health commenced the Surgery Connect program. Surgery Connect is a statewide initiative dedicated to assisting the Hospital and Health Services (HHSs) treat patients waiting longer than clinically recommended in the private sector. Darling Downs HHS currently has two private providers under the current Surgery Connect Standing Offer Arrangement where ophthalmology consultations and procedures are performed to assist with the ophthalmology patients from the Darling Downs region.

Queensland Health utilises a networked model to support equitable access to health services across the state. As a regional health service in relatively close proximity to Brisbane, there are a range of highly specialised services that Darling Downs Hospital and Health Services (Darling Downs Health) does not offer that are publicly available at larger health facilities. Ophthalmology services are not currently provided by Darling Downs Health. Patients are, however, able to receive care for Lens procedures and Pterygiums via a local private provider, while more advanced procedures are to be referred to the Princess Alexandra Hospital.

Many factors must be considered when commencing a new service, of which an appropriately trained, skilled and sustainable workforce is one. Darling Downs Health would need to ensure any service established in Toowoomba could provide consistent and safe care to our patients.

I can advise that the Patient Travel Subsidy Scheme (PTSS) may be available. The PTSS provides financial assistance to eligible patients who are required to travel for specialist health services not available locally (within 50 kilometres of the patient's closest public

hospital or public health facility). The PTSS assists with travel and accommodation costs and is not intended to cover all costs associated with accessing specialist health services.

Travel subsidies exist for eligible patients travelling by either:

- commercial transport (air, bus, ferry or rail) being a fully subsidised payment equal to the lowest available discount fare (including economy/government rates); or
- private motor vehicle at a rate of \$0.34 per kilometre, from the street address of the public hospital or public health facility closest to the patient's permanent address, to the street address of the closest public treatment facility.

Accommodation cost subsidies are also available for patients required to stay overnight to access specialist health services and are calculated as \$10 per person per night for private accommodation and up to \$70 per person per night (excluding GST) for commercial accommodation. Eligible patients may be required to pay for the first four nights of accommodation in each financial year. Escorts accompanying patients who require assistance when travelling may also be eligible for subsidy under the PTSS.

The PTSS is administered by each local HHS, through funding allocated by the Department of Health, and in accordance with the PTSS Guidelines. All HHSs are able to book air, bus, ferry or rail fares for patients who are able to access these transport options in their area. Booking through the HHS alleviates the need for patients to outlay travel costs or rely on subsidy reimbursement. Approved commercial accommodation subsidies can also be paid directly to the accommodation provider by the approving public hospital facility which additionally assists patients with outlay costs.

I have requested that Darling Downs Health continue to listen to the community and patients and use this feedback to inform future opportunities for service enhancement and improvement.

I trust this information is of assistance to the petitioners.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shannon Fentiman', written in a cursive style.

**Shannon Fentiman MP**

Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services

Minister for Women

Member for Waterford