

MI148074
MO: H/07/06191

Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Queensland Legislative Assembly

Email: TableOffice@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Mr Laurie

Thank you for your letter dated 9 August 2007, forwarding a petition regarding dental health treatment within the Bundaberg-Burnett region.

The provision of timely, quality oral health care services for eligible Queenslanders is a significant priority of this Government. Queensland continues to provide the most comprehensive public dental services in Australia, with a budget of approximately \$94.1 million for adult services and \$46.3 million for school services in 2006-07. This represents a total budget of approximately \$137.7 million.

An estimated 226,000 general and 339,000 emergency/immediate occasions of service were provided by Adult Oral Health Services in 2006-07. This includes a 10 percent increase in emergency services over 2005-06.

As you may be aware, the Howard Federal Government withdrew funding for oral health services in 1996, and has steadfastly refused since then to re-engage with its clear responsibilities to partner with the States in the delivery of these vital services. This has deprived Queensland of at least \$20 million each year, and has resulted in a national funding shortfall of \$1.1 billion.

Together with my interstate colleagues, I have repeatedly called on the Federal Government to reinstate funding to assist the States in addressing the significant issue of dental waiting times.

I am delighted that the Federal Opposition has recognised the Commonwealth's critical role in this area and has pledged to reinstate Federal oral health care funding. As you may be aware, the Federal Opposition has pledged that a Rudd Federal Labor Government would fund up to one million additional consultations for Australians requiring dental treatment as part of its Commonwealth Dental Health Program. This represents a much-needed Commonwealth investment of up to \$290 million.

I can further advise that the Wide Bay Health Service District has clearly identified the need for additional oral health services in the region, with a larger surgery facility included in the Bundaberg Hospital Master Plan currently being developed. Once finalised, this will become part of the District's Asset Strategic Plan for Capital Works funding.

The Bundaberg Oral Health Service currently has a number of agreements in place for outsourcing emergency and prosthetic dental treatment. However, due to a nationwide shortage of dentists caused by the Federal Government's failure to provide adequate dental training places – a shortage which is particularly acute in rural and regional locations – opportunities to utilise the private sector for treatment of public clients can, at times, be limited.

Queensland Health is in the process of conducting a Statewide review of oral health services, which follows a recommendation from the Queensland Health Systems Review. The purpose of the review is to examine the provision of oral health services in Queensland and make recommendations to support the provision of appropriate, safe and sustainable oral health services, with local consultative workshops conducted to identify specific areas of need across the State.

Should you have any queries regarding my advice to you, Mr Ryan Robertson, Policy Advisor, will be pleased to assist you and can be contacted on 3234 1191.

Yours sincerely

STEPHEN ROBERTSON MP