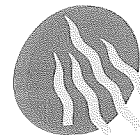




Hon Paul Lucas MP



Queensland
Government

MI170016
MO: 10002124

Deputy Premier
Minister for Health

30 JUN 2010

Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4001

Dear Mr Laurie

I write in response to your letter dated 20 May 2010, regarding Petition No 1443-10 received by the Queensland Legislative Assembly on 19 May 2010, in relation to oral health services in Charters Towers and surrounding districts.

Regrettably the Oral Health Therapist position has been vacant for nine months and the Senior Dentist position has been vacant for three years. The positions remain vacant due to difficulties experienced in recruiting suitably experienced clinicians to rural centres.

The oral health service in Charters Towers, during this time, has been supported by Locum Dentists when available from the Travelling Dentist Program based in Cairns and by the local private dentists providing emergency care. Both vacant positions have been listed with the Oral Health Workforce Unit as critical vacancies.

In respect to the school dental services, the current vacancy resulted from a resignation of the Oral Health Therapist in August 2009 and has recommenced from the school van and fixed clinic on a temporary five days per fortnight, part time basis, from 17 May 2010.

Eligible school aged children in Charters Towers, and those in the Flinders and Richmond Shires, have been assessed by an Oral Health Therapist within the two year accepted schedule (National Oral Health Plan 2004-2013).

The Townsville District is reviewing its model of service delivery for oral health for rural facilities to develop a sustainable service. The concept of establishing a travelling oral health team based in Townsville or Charters Towers is being considered. If this option is progressed, it is anticipated that the service could be operational early 2011. Advertising for vacant oral health positions in Charters Towers is being progressed and recruitment to the Senior Dentist position remains critical for a sustainable service.

The State Government is committed to investing in training more dentists particularly in regional areas. That is why in the 2010-11 State Budget, the Queensland Government committed \$45 million over four years to the James Cook University Dental School to provide clinical teaching facilities in Cairns and Townsville.

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Queensland Health is committed to improving oral health services to all entitled Queenslanders and provides the most comprehensive public oral health service in Australia with over 1.9 million people (45.3% of the total Queensland population) eligible for dental care at no cost. Public oral health services provided a total of 1,094,443 occasions of service in 2007-2008, with a budget of approximately \$145 million. This budget is estimated to be \$150 million for 2008-2009.

The Queensland Government's oral health services would have been significantly bolstered by the Gillard Government's Commonwealth Dental Health Program, which has unfortunately been stalled in the Senate by non-government members.

The Scheme would have increased funding to Queensland oral health services by \$52.8 million over four years and delivered an additional one million dental consultations Australia-wide.

The State Government has called on LNP members to lobby their Federal colleagues to pass this extra funding for Queenslanders.

Should you have any queries regarding my advice to you, Ms Marlene Cochrane, Clinical Director, Institute of Rural Health, Townsville Health Service District, will be pleased to assist you and can be contacted on telephone 4799 9066.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Paul Lucas', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

PAUL LUCAS MP
Deputy Premier
Minister for Health