

Ministers response to Member for Hill Shane Knuth's Question Without Notice in Parliament on Tuesday, March 17.

MEMBER FOR HILL SHANE KNUTH: My question without notice is to the Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services. I have received information that hospitals in smaller regional centres will not be provided with adequate resources to battle a coronavirus outbreak in comparison to major centres. Considering regional communities have a large ageing population, will the minister commit to ensuring these hospitals are fully resourced to the same level as those in major centres?

QUEENSLAND HEALTH MINISTER Dr STEVEN MILES: I thank the member for his question. It is of course an important one. It is always a challenge for Queensland, given the dispersity of our population, to ensure that all Queenslanders have access to the same level of world-class health care and it is entirely our intention to ensure that all Queenslanders do have that access throughout the COVID-19 potential outbreak. In this state all of our hospitals are well equipped with testing capability as well as protective equipment. It is the case though that for some people their best chance of survival will be intensive care, particularly ventilation and potentially ECMO treatment. Those facilities can only be supported in certain bigger regional centres. The assurance I can give the member is that, as we do with every illness, if people need a higher level of hospital service than is available where they are then we will get them to those services. We will ensure that they have access to those services.

Our larger hospitals, including our regional hospitals, have additional intensive care capability and additional emergency department capability. We are working with our aeromedical evacuation services to make sure that we can get people to those bigger hospitals. That may be Townsville University Hospital or it may indeed be Brisbane depending on their location and their level of criticality, but Townsville is indeed an important northern hub for us. It is the location outside of Brisbane where we are not just collecting samples but doing testing on site. The lab at the Townsville University Hospital is doing a fantastic job, bringing to three the number of public labs we have doing testing and ensuring that we do not need to courier samples from the north all the way to Brisbane to have them tested.

The assurance that I give the member is that we are planning for every eventuality, including potential outbreaks in regional and remote and isolated communities. That is a very important part of our planning work. While our smaller regional local hospitals or health clinics might only be the front door to our hospital services, we will make sure that behind them is all of the world's best medical support so that we can keep as many Queenslanders as we can alive through this crisis.