



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

**BILLS**

**National Health Reform Amendment (National  
Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011**

**Second Reading**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 16 August 2011**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Tuesday, 16 August 2011  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Ms RISHWORTH

**Source** House  
**Proof** Yes  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

(Kingston) (NaN.NaN pm)

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (19:38): I rise to support the National Health Reform Amendment (National Health Performance Authority) Bill 2011. This government has consistently demonstrated a real commitment to improving and transforming Australia's healthcare system. Those on this side of the House believe that everyone, no matter where they live, deserves access to a first-class healthcare system close to home. That is why we have now ended the blame game through a national agreement—and I must commend the Prime Minister on this national agreement—to boost hospital funding, increase local control and expand primary and aged care services Australia wide. The National Health Reform will mean more money, more beds, less waste and less waiting in public hospitals.

This Labor government's record in health reform and funding highlights our commitment to improving the healthcare system for all Australians, and it is a record that I am very proud to support. Since entering office, this government has made a number of considerable improvements to the healthcare system, including new elective surgery equipment for over 125 hospitals, the delivery of over 70,000 more elective surgery operations, upgrades to more than 37 emergency departments and an increase in the number of nurse places in universities by over 1,000 each year. In addition, I was very pleased this year to see in the budget \$2.2 billion over five years for mental health services. This includes a \$269.3 million boost for community mental health services. This represents the largest Commonwealth commitment to mental health in Australia's history, and I commend the government on its continued support for these much needed services in communities right around Australia, including my electorate of Kingston. I know that in my electorate the residents have certainly welcomed the government's considerable investment in mental health services.

I was very pleased, earlier this year, that the government announced a further \$1,296,000 to be allocated to the Mental Illness Fellowship of South Australia to continue their work in providing the personal helpers and mentors program. I have visited and seen firsthand how this program really affects the lives of many who rely on it. It is an example of

people with lived experience of mental illness actually working with those who are suffering to link them into services and to help them through perhaps an acute episode of mental illness. I think it is a wonderful program and I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate all of those involved in it. All of the workers do a great job. The funding extension that I have just mentioned will allow this wonderful service to continue, providing people within our community whose lives are severely affected by mental illness with some assistance and help.

In my electorate there has been another government announcement that shows its commitment to mental health. The commitment is that the youth-specific mental health service Headspace is going to be established at Noarlunga in Southern Adelaide. We know that two-thirds of all people with mental ill health experience their first symptoms before the age of 21, so it is critical that we do have these youth-specific facilities and services available. This service will provide local young people with not only mental health services but also appropriate physical health care and other help when it comes to drugs and alcohol, so it is a collaboration of a service that I think will make a real difference to people in the area. I look forward to working with the Southern Division of General Practice, who have been named as the lead organisation to establish the Noarlunga Headspace.

Those are just a few examples from my local area of how the government is making real improvements to mental health in my community. They are also examples of things that are happening all around Australia. In addition, of course, we have had significant investment in the local area through the building of the GP Plus Super Clinic at Noarlunga and the investment at Flinders Medical Centre, in both the elective surgery and accident and emergency areas. I must also mention the Primary Care Infrastructure Grants. These have been important grants that have helped doctors' surgeries in my local area to expand their services, provide practise nurse services and provide allied health services. So, a whole range of different services are now available in the local area.

This government has been committed to putting services on the ground, and I would dispute with the previous speaker that authorities like this do not help deliver these important services on the

ground. We are fortunate to have a world-class public health system. This is a system that provides all Australians with access to public hospital care where they can receive treatment from world-class doctors and nurses. However, we are still faced with a health system that is highly fragmented, under-resourced, unsustainable and suffering under the pressures to provide for patients with increasingly complex needs. While this government has consistently committed crucial investment towards reshaping our healthcare system, fundamental reform is required to ensure that it remains on a sustainable path. This fundamental reform is what underpins the bill before the House today. This bill seeks to provide safer and higher quality services and to ensure the effective reporting and monitoring of health service providers.

The bill before the House today introduces a new watchdog for Australia's healthcare system—namely, the National Health Performance Authority. The main function of the National Health Performance Authority will be to monitor and publish reports on the performance of local, public and private hospitals as well as primary healthcare organisations. The hospital performance reports and healthy community reports will be made publicly available through the internet and will allow Australians to determine where they can receive the best treatment. I think this is a critically important part which illustrates that this government is committed to transparency. The information that will be provided will not just be used by government departments; it will be available. In South Australia I must commend the Minister for Health, the Hon. John Hill, who has already taken great strides in ensuring that now there is a lot of information made available not just for the department but for the public. The authority will open up the performance of the health and hospital system to new levels of national transparency and accountability. It will also identify areas of the healthcare system that require improvement. Overall the National Health Performance Authority will improve quality and drive value for money in the healthcare system. This will be important, as we want to move towards a more sustainable system.

The bill before the House is taking decisive action to deliver a better deal for patients and a better deal for communities. This is part of this government's commitment to national healthcare reform. As we have heard recently, we have developed a National Health Reform Agreement, which has now been signed off by the states and the Commonwealth. It will see the Commonwealth injecting an extra \$19.8 billion into our public hospitals to 2019-20. I believe it needs to be noted that this is a stark contrast to the previous Commonwealth government, led by Prime Minister Howard, which spent a lot of its time working out

ways to dud the states instead of paying its fair share to the public health system. So I am very pleased that we are looking at long-term sustainability, where the Commonwealth will step up and transparently ensure that we contribute to making this system sustainable into the future.

A new national funding pool will also be created, meaning all hospitals will be paid in the same way to ensure transparency in the way hospitals are funded. Increased transparency will improve public services and empower the public to make health decisions based on a wide range of relevant information. Advice from the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission stated that performance reporting is the most effective way to promote continuous improvement and improve consumer literacy on the health system. The establishment of the National Health Performance Authority by this bill will further drive the system of performance reporting that Australia's healthcare system requires. Furthermore, its independence will provide Australians with nationally comparable information. It will allow Australians to better gauge how their health services are performing in relation to other areas of Australia. This principle will significantly drive improvements in patient care and therefore enhance Australia's health system. Finally the National Health Performance Authority will build on the government's MyHospitals website, established last year, which allows Australians to compare the emergency department and elective surgery performance of public hospitals around Australia.

Guiding and securing Australia's health system into the future is one of the most important challenges facing the current generation. This government recognises that Australia must strive to ensure that we have a healthcare system that is providing all Australians with access to quality care. It also recognises that Australia's population is rapidly ageing and that our health system must be significantly improved to meet the challenges that lie ahead.

It is no wonder that the opposition leader is opposing these reforms, given his track record as Minister for Health and Ageing in the previous government. Between 2003 and 2006 the current opposition leader, then Minister for Health and Ageing, cut funding for public hospitals by over \$1 billion. The opposition leader clearly does not understand the importance that Australian families place on getting access to health care when they need it. He is clearly out of touch with the needs of Australians.

While the opposition leader continues to do what he does best and say no, this government is committed to improving health services for all Australians through a

transparent health system that is appropriately funded nationally and run locally. The bill before the House represents groundbreaking reforms that will positively transform Australia's healthcare system into one which is modern, integrated and high performing and which represents and supports Australians now and into the future. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Minister for Health and Ageing on the introduction of this significant legislation, and I commend the bill to the House.