POLICY DESCRIPTION

Over the past 2 years the Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service (the Health Service) has expanded with significant additional services including:

- locally based urology services
- a new adolescent ward
- 24-hour availability of the cardiac catheter laboratory
- an expanded intensive care unit
- a dedicated stroke service
- increased cancer care services

The Cairns Hospital is now delivering its highest level of care and has the infrastructure required to satisfy designation as a full service tertiary referral university hospital (level 6). However, there is an urgent need to expand the Mental Health Unit, increase surgical capacity (outpatients, preadmission clinic and operating theatre time) and consider the cost benefits of providing locally based service for currently exported services (e.g. neurosurgery, cardiac electrophysiology and cardiac surgery) to cater for regional demand with appropriate fiscal responsibility.

The goal of this policy is for the Cairns Hospital to become a full service tertiary referral university hospital within the next 5 years. The availability of a qualified and comprehensive health workforce will be critical for the health needs of a growing population in this region in the coming decades. It would help deliver on the “Closing the Gap” priorities and meet the needs of some of the most socioeconomically disadvantaged people in Queensland. With the expansion of the tertiary training medical footprint in Tropical North Queensland (TNQ), particularly by James Cook University (JCU), there is growing support to justify the development of the Hospital to become a university hospital.

This requires new medical school campus facilities and staffing for training and research, additional to and supporting the new and expanded services in the hospital.

A recently signed Memorandum of Understanding between Northern Queensland Primary Health Network (NQPHN) and JCU to establish the Tropical Australian Academic Health Centre (TAAHC) recognises the unique opportunity to create a world leading academic health centre with a focus on tropical health, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and the provision of services in regional, rural and remote settings. While unique in content, TAAHC reflects well established models of academic health centres overseas. By embedding research into health service delivery, TAAHC aims to improve quality and efficiency of care, enhance recruitment and retention of professionals in the region and encourage greater investment in the north.

TAAHC will develop a region wide strategy for patient centered research that identifies existing gaps in service delivery, as well as opportunities to improve quality and safety of care, and to develop new therapeutics and interventions. It will significantly enhance the ability of Northern Queensland to compete with other parts of Australia for funding that will benefit the health of our local populations.

The Infrastructure and Policy Priorities list is a range of initiatives that has been developed collaboratively by leading regional advocates and is regularly reviewed and updated.
RECOMMENDATION
That the Queensland Government commits to expand and add more services to Cairns Hospital with the aim to achieve designation as a full service Tertiary Referral University Hospital (level 6) over the next 5 years.

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