CAIRNS UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

BRIEFING NOTE SUMMARY

• In 2019 the State Government announced an operating budget of $1 billion for the Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service.

• Significant additional recurrent funding* beyond the current budget is sought to facilitate the transition of Cairns Hospital to Cairns University Hospital (Level 6 tertiary referral).

• Level 6 status will facilitate new services such as endoscopy, cardiac (coronary care unit), cardiac medicine, some medical and surgical specialties, perioperative (operating suite and post anaesthetic room) and anaesthetics, reducing the need to travel outside the region for medical treatment.

• The CHHHS master planning process has identified about $500 million in infrastructure needs over the next 20 years and $6 million is now sought for a detailed business case to map out this significant upgrade.

• To attract, retain and educate the workforce required, JCU’s College of Medicine and Dentistry requires an extra 50 Commonwealth Supported Places, 30 International places and an allocation of scholarships through the Destination Australia scholarships program.

THE ISSUE

Expanded clinical services and a qualified and comprehensive workforce at Cairns Hospital are critical for meeting the health needs of Tropical North Queensland’s (TNQ’s) growing population. Over the past three years, the Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service (CHHHS) has addressed this need with an expansion of clinical 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; and
• increased cancer care services.

In 2019 the State Government announced an operating budget for CHHHS of $1 billion, plus $70 million to upgrade the Mental Health Unit, $2.8 million to build a second catheterisation laboratory and $4 million for a vascular surgery theatre.

In coming years, the CHHHS is aiming to obtain Level 6 status in a range of clinical areas including endoscopy, cardiac (coronary care unit), cardiac medicine, some medical and surgical specialties, perioperative (operating suite and post anaesthetic room) and anaesthetics, reducing the need to travel outside the region for medical treatment.

Following these investments, the Cairns Hospital will be delivering its highest level of care to date. However, to cater for growing demand and address the critical health challenges facing TNQ, there remains an urgent need to continue to increase surgical capacity (outpatients, pre-admission clinic and operating theatre time) and to recruit Cairns-based clinicians to provide specialist services currently being delivered elsewhere.

The CHHHS has recently completed a master planning process identifying infrastructure needs worth an estimated $500 million over the next 20 years and is now seeking $6 million to complete a detailed business case to map out this significant upgrade.
OUR RECOMMENDATION

- Additional funding is sought to facilitate the transition of Cairns Hospital to Cairns University Hospital (Level 6 referral status).
- That the State Government provides $6 million in 2019-20 for a detailed business case to support implementation of the CHHHS master plan over the next 20 years.
- That to support the training of a regional medical workforce, the Federal Government allocate an additional 50 Commonwealth Supported Places and 30 International places recurrent, together with an allocation of Destination Australia scholarships to JCU’s School of Medicine and Dentistry.

Next Steps:

To successfully transition Cairns Hospital to Cairns University Hospital, an increase in Level 6 services is required over the next three years across specialties such as cardiac medicine, endoscopy and other medical and surgical specialties. Master planning by CHHHS has also identified the need for an estimated $500 million in infrastructure during the next 20 years with $6 million now needed for a detailed business case. In addition, to support the training and recruitment of Cairns-based clinicians, JCU requires an additional 50 Commonwealth Supported Places (CSP) and 30 international places recurrent for the JCU Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) program. This will allow JCU to offer years 1-6 of the MBBS in Cairns and Mackay. The additional places will be distributed across the regional centres of Cairns (30), Mackay (10) and Townsville (40).