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THE SENATE
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GP Superclinics
SPEECH

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Page 1410
Questioner
Speaker Furner, Sen Mark

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Senator FURNER (Queensland) (7.41 pm)—I was privileged just last month to be part of the official opening of the Strathpine GP Superclinic, part of an excellent Rudd Labor government initiative. The Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon, along with state member Carolyn Male and Moreton Bay Regional Council representatives, officiated at the opening, which was two months ahead of schedule. Local residents will now have better access to healthcare services thanks to the Strathpine GP Superclinic, which is in the heart of Strathpine, just five minutes from my office.

The Strathpine GP Superclinic will offer bulk-billing and extended hours of operation to the residents of Strathpine and surrounding suburbs. Five GPs are currently on staff, their numbers having grown since the end of February. Six nurses, including an Indigenous health nurse, and a wide range of allied health professionals—including a physiotherapist, chiropractor, dietician and diabetes educator, psychologist, audiologist, exercise physiologist and podiatrist—work from the superclinic, providing services that include X-ray and ultrasound. The GP superclinic's health professionals work in multidisciplinary teams to provide patients with integrated, patient centred care. The clinic has a focus on providing preventative and chronic disease management services. It will also help to train and expand the future health workforce and it is working with the University of Queensland to provide clinical experience to medical, nursing and allied health students.

This government's GP superclinics initiative is a key element in improving access to health services and addressing the shortage of health professionals in suburbs like Strathpine. The Rudd Labor government made a commitment to the people of Strathpine to improve access to GP and allied health services in their community, and we have delivered well ahead of time.

The Strathpine GP Superclinic will have additional GPs working longer hours in the Strathpine community, with most services bulk-billed. Having health professionals working together to provide continuity of care under the one roof will allow residents to attend one facility to access a variety of health services. Moreton Bay Regional Councillor Mick Gillam has explained to me that the superclinic

will be of great benefit to the residents of central Strathpine. He told me that sometimes in that area it is impossible to get in to see a doctor and the nearest hospital is half an hour away. Waiting lists and times at hospitals should also be reduced as fewer people will go there, letting hospitals operate more as they should.

The National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission's final report recommended that health services be redesigned around people, by building on the role of general practice. To do this, it recommended the creation of multidisciplinary primary healthcare centres, with a range of primary and specialist services in one location and open for extended hours. The GP superclinics are founded on the same principles and point the way to the future of primary health care in this country.

The Strathpine GP Superclinic will bulk-bill patients for all Medicare rebateable services and will operate, at this stage, from 8 am to 7 pm Monday to Friday, 8 am to 6 pm on Saturdays and 9 am to 5 pm on Sundays. The federal government is building 32 GP superclinics across Australia at a cost of \$275 million. Nine clinics will be built in Queensland, as well as in Strathpine, Redcliffe and Ipswich in the south-east, Townsville in the north and Cairns in the far north.

Another feature of the GP superclinics would also help close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous health and life expectancy. With a large Indigenous community in and around surrounding Strathpine, local Aboriginal health needs will be met. This multidisciplinary facility will provide more much-needed medical services for Strathpine and the local community. It will allow patients to access general practitioners, allied health services and community health services all in the same precinct. Strathpine has been in need of more health facilities and this \$2.5 million government funded clinic will ensure this happens.

At the opening, Superclinic Nominees Director Dr Evan Jones indicated the clinic size as about 900 square metres with an underground car park, secure parking for staff, a lift and disabled access. In fact there is ample car parking, some 20 secure car parks for staff after hours and around 60 underground, as well as additional car parks and ambulance access at ground level. Its location at 328 Gympie Road Strathpine is

close to Westfield Shopping Centre and a short walk to the Strathpine train station, providing easy access for patients. The Strathpine GP Superclinic is established next to a busy community pharmacy which provides patients with advice and a prompt medication delivery service.

In addition the building is environmentally friendly. The building is a concrete and steel construction with good thermal insulation and has a large 120,000-litre rainwater collection and recycling tank as part of its construction. The Strathpine clinic is the 12th GP superclinic in Australia to be signed up to by the federal government and is part of the Rudd government's commitment to providing primary health care where and when it is needed.

It was disappointing that the local Liberal MP and opposition spokesperson for health, Mr Dutton, has continued to talk down improved health services for his local community. If Mr Dutton and the Liberals had their way, GP superclinics like this one in Strathpine would never have existed and the community would not benefit from improved access to a variety of health services. In fact the member for Dickson, as of December last year, confirmed the opposition has no health policy. As health minister in the previous government, Tony Abbott cut \$1 billion from public hospitals, froze the number of GP training places and ignored the need for more nurses despite a shortage of 6,000 across the country.

Conversely, the Rudd Labor government put \$5 billion back into health, and today in this chamber we saw opposition senators on the subject of health reject the government's attempts to make private health insurance fairer, leaving a huge \$2 billion hole in the budget. Only a Rudd Labor government has the vision for our future health needs, a vision for the future primary care and general practice that supports and enhances medical services to the community and a vision that access to good medical care should not be restricted by what you can afford or by who you are.