



## CHIEF MINISTER

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Mr Mahiban Thomas  
Chair, NT Committee  
Royal Australasian College of Surgeons

Via email [Mahiban.thomas@nt.gov.au](mailto:Mahiban.thomas@nt.gov.au)  
Cc [Mark.Morgan@surgeons.org](mailto:Mark.Morgan@surgeons.org)

Dear Mr Thomas

Thank you for your letter of 31 July 2020 in relation to the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons – NT Branch election 2020 priorities. I am happy to provide this response on behalf of the Territory Labor Government.

Please be assured that as a Government, we are committed to continuing to deliver high quality and safe health services to all Territorians.

In relation to your specific queries, I can advise the following:

### **1. Investment in infrastructure and the surgical workforce**

The Territory Labor Government has undertaken an extensive Clinical Services Planning process to guide the development of future services and infrastructure requirements across Top End and Central Australia Health Services.

Models of care are undergoing reform to become more contemporary with increased use of telehealth and technologies; reducing length of hospital stay and community models of care such as Hospital in the Home; and better integration with primary health services to manage chronic conditions.

We are committed to expanding capacity for surgery across Top End Hospitals and redistributing services appropriately across the sites to improve access for emergency surgery, reduce elective surgery waiting times and reduce patients' length of stay.

We will expand additional capacity equivalent to 20 beds at Royal Darwin Hospital over the term of Government through formalising 'surge' capacity to a ward with rostered staff and 'virtual wards' by extending the scope of Hospital in the Home services to safely care for

patients in hostels, private homes, commercial accommodation and residential aged care facilities.

We are committed to ensuring clinical input guides patient flow reforms to increase bed availability and more sustainable models of care. These reforms are being implemented whilst all our health services remain agile and proactive in managing the ongoing situation with COVID-19.

Territory Labor is supportive of the concept proposed by RACS-NT of a NT-wide Surgical Taskforce or similar clinical engagement body to advise on the areas of greatest need for targeted investment in NT surgical services. Through our Minister for Health, Natasha Fyles, Territory Labor has maintained a high level of engagement with RACS-NT over the past 4 years and we are committed to continuing this engagement into the future. We welcome further discussion to develop the concept of a Surgical Taskforce.

## **2. Addressing the treatment of climate change**

Territory Labor is the Territory's first – and only – party to deliver a climate change policy. We set a net zero emissions by 2050 target and delivered a comprehensive climate change policy. Our evidence-based Climate Change Response: Towards 2050 is built around four key objectives:

1. Reducing emissions to achieve net zero emissions target by 2050
2. Building a resilient Territory that adapts and responds to the impacts of climate change
3. Unlocking the opportunities from a low-carbon future
4. Informing and involving all Territorians in the climate change response.

Priority deliverables include: identifying and prioritising risks to human health associated with climate change; working with the community sector to develop climate change risk adaptation and response frameworks; and incorporating climate responsive designs into our landscapes.

A copy of the Climate Change Response: 2050 and Three-Year Action Plan is available at: <https://denr.nt.gov.au/programs-and-strategies> We are delivering an economy-wide Climate Change Response that creates new local jobs, unlocks new opportunities and guides the Territory to a carbon-neutral future by 2050.

The Territory Labor Government is committed to public health services joining the Global Green and Health Hospital Network. NT Health Services are developing their Sustainability Strategies with key targets focusing on reduction of waste (general and clinical), energy efficiency, reduction of water consumption, and organisational behaviour. The strategies are being informed through consultation with clinicians and includes revised models of practice to address climate change.

Health infrastructure improvements are made cognisant of the environment with a recent example in Central Australia being the LED lighting project and Co-Gen. Solar panels will become a key discussion for any future builds.

Through participation in National Cabinet and the national Health Council, Territory Labor is committed to advocate with the Australian Government for national action on climate

change and a review of reducing medical waste and supporting local manufacturing of PPE.

### **3. Reducing alcohol related harm**

The Territory Labor Government has delivered ground breaking alcohol harm minimisation reforms, as recommended by the evidence based Riley Review 2017. We acknowledge the strong support provided by RACS throughout the implementation period has assisted with broad community acceptance and contributed to the success of the reforms.

The major milestones achieved in alcohol harm minimisation include:

- New Liquor Act 2019, based on harm minimisation principles and includes the independent Liquor Commission with community impact and public interest tests to guide decision-making;
- Risk based licensing;
- Introduction of the 'floor price' in 2018 for alcohol to reduce heavy consumption;
- Banned Drinker Register recommenced and evaluated;
- Police Auxiliary Liquor Inspector workforce established to reduce the harm of takeaway alcohol and additional police are on the beat to reduce harms from secondary supply;
- Moratorium on all new takeaway licenses;
- Launch of the NT FASD Strategy;
- Sobering Up Shelter review and realignment to meet demand and address client needs; and
- Engagement with Aboriginal communities with our Local Decision Making framework to manage the supply of alcohol in community.

Our reforms have achieved significant reductions in alcohol related harms. Compared to when our reforms commenced in 2017-18, there has been:

- 24% decrease in high range drink driving offences
- 25% reduction in alcohol-related assaults\*
- 16% decrease in alcohol-related presentations to NT Hospitals' Emergency Departments\*

\*Assault and ED data is for 12 months ending in May 2020 compared with the 12 months ending in May 2018

Territory Labor is committed to continuing this reform agenda to consolidate and strengthen these measures to save and improve the quality of Territorians' lives, if re-elected in August 2020.

### **4. Reducing the impact of family and domestic violence**

Territory Labor strongly supports RACS' statement that domestic and family violence is one of the most urgent social and public health needs of our time.

In the current term following Territory-wide consultation, the Labor Government developed a 10 year 'Domestic Family and Sexual Violence (DFSV) Reduction Plan', and the Territory's first ever 'Preventing and Responding to Sexual Violence Framework' together with a 3 year Action Plan.

These have been supported by the evidenced based research and evaluation undertaken and published by ANROWS, the specialist research centre set up and funded jointly by the Australian Government and the States and Territories.

In the next term, a Territory Labor Government will undertake a second 3 Year DFSV Action Plan. It will follow evaluation of the effectiveness of the first action plan and comprehensive Territory wide consultation on the priorities for the next 3 years.

Much reform has already taken place or is underway, including:

- comprehensive review of the *Domestic and Family Violence Act 2007*;
- mandatory information sharing across Government agencies and identified non-government organisations, where women and children are at high risk of injury and death;
- a review of the model for delivering DFSV services in remote areas, with a community driven model being developed in Galiwinku;
- additional investment in prevention and in perpetrator programs to change behaviour and investment in workforce development;
- workforce development plan for workers in specialist DFSV services as well as in generalist services such as police, teachers, health workers, child protection and NGOs.
- officers have also been working at the service delivery level to develop capacities and services throughout the Territory, from Safe Houses on communities to service hubs in regional centres.

What we have learned is that regional planning and local involvement and decision making is critical. Whilst not ruling out a wide-ranging review such as the Riley Report, we believe that at this stage it may not be the best use of resources when grounded, action-based research, regional and local projects and ongoing evaluation will help design a system that can work in the NT environment.

I trust this response addresses the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons' priorities. Our Government looks forward to further collaboration with you to improve the health and wellbeing of Territorians.

Yours sincerely



MICHAEL GUNNER

11 AUG 2020