

TRANSCRIPT

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Transcript: AMA Queensland President, Dr Nick Yim, ABC Gold and Sunshine Coasts, *Mornings with Alex Easton*, Thursday 10 October 2024

Subjects: Ambulance ramping, elective surgery wait lists, healthcare workforce, payroll tax, Queensland election commitments

ALEX EASTON: The LNP has been slamming the state government for years over the state of Queensland's health system, particularly ambulance ramping, where ambulances rush to a hospital and are then forced to wait outside the emergency department for extended periods while waiting for a bed for the patient they're carrying. And now, as we head towards the state election, Opposition Leader David Crisafulli has delivered his pitch on how an LNP government would fix it.

[EXCERPT]

DAVID CRISAFULLI: It's a \$590.9 million rescue package for a system that desperately needs a fresh start, and for health workers who desperately need the resources to do their job. By the end of the term, the Queensland ambulance ramping figure will be under 30 per cent for the first time in almost half a decade.

ALEX EASTON: So we're talking about a plan of more than half a billion dollars involving measures such as increased transparency on hospital data and accountability on emergency department waiting times, clearing surgery waiting lists through improved scheduling and fast tracking elective surgeries, employing more doctors and nurses and giving medical staff a bigger say in how hospital and health services are run. That's not all of it, not close to it. It's a big list and it's a lot of money. But issues like ambulance ramping and surgery wait times aren't unique to Queensland, and every Australian state and territory has similar problems. None have so far been able to solve them. Dr Nick Yim is the President of the Australian Medical Association Queensland. Nick Yim, can the LNP's approach actually deal with the problem of ambulance ramping, as David Crisafulli said, when so many other states have been able to make headway on the issue?

DR NICK YIM: Well, good morning. What we've seen this week with the number of health announcements, it's really positive to see a large commitment from both major parties in healthcare. And the LNP's announcement with regards to investment of healthcare funding to address ramping is highly positive and it does match with AMA- Queensland's Election Priorities and our Ramping Roundtable from a couple of years back. So it's really positive to see.

And we acknowledge that ramping itself, it's a healthcare system issue. It's not just about the front door entering the hospital. It's also about the flow of patients through the hospital. And that includes hospital beds, discharges back to the community, such as aged care, NDIS services. And at the same time, there's also a need for investment into the primary care sector, i.e. your general practitioner.

ALEX EASTON: Right. The ambulance ramping is a symptom rather than the actual issue itself in a lot of ways. And the LNP's talking about doing things like reopening maternity wards in places where they've been closed. They're talking about building or setting up standalone mental health facilities, which is a model that we shifted away from a fair while ago. But these would presumably be things that would help clear beds to get that flow going. But these are all very resource intensive. And one of the key parts of all of this is employing more doctors and nurses, which sounds like a great idea. But isn't the issue that there just aren't enough doctors and nurses to employ to begin with?

DR NICK YIM: Yeah, those are really good points, and you've touched on a fair few things there. We acknowledge that workforce is one of the big issues, and both major political parties have invested significantly in their workforce plans. And as you mentioned, it's something where recruitment, retention and also prevention of attrition, there are some key aspects there. And the devil is in the detail. We have seen announcements with regards to financial incentives such as \$40,000 from the Labor government to help train general practitioners, which is highly positive. At the same time, we have seen the announcement of the exemption of payroll tax from both major parties, and that's huge for general practice and their patients. So there are some strategies in there. But we are also calling for 400 additional Commonwealth-funded medical school places every year to ensure that we have the training pipeline there.

ALEX EASTON: Going back to the ambulance ramping question, you couldn't say that the LNP's approach doesn't invest a lot of money. It's investing a heap of money. But if something like that was going to make the difference that they reckon that it will, given it's a big political issue right around the country, wouldn't we have seen this happening in other states already?

DR NICK YIM: The key thing is that investment into the healthcare system is not just purely focused on ramping. From the AMA Queensland perspective, we need investment in the whole healthcare system. We have the AMA Queensland Surgical Waitlist Roundtable. That has been given to both political parties, and that is calling for bringing down the surgical waitlist. We know that patients are waiting to see the surgeon, they are waiting to get their surgeries. And obviously the longer people are waiting on the public list to get their surgeries, that increases the chance of having pain or having a fall and the need for emergency services and the need for an ambulance. So those are some of the pathways that we're trying to commit to to ensure that we are bringing some of the other aspects down to ensure the health of Queenslanders.

ALEX EASTON: So from AMA Queensland's point of view, maybe it'll get the effect on ambulance ramping and surgery wait times that the LNP is saying it will, or maybe it won't. But regardless, it's a big investment in a health system that needs big investments.

DR NICK YIM: Absolutely. These announcements, this is a big investment. Obviously this is positive for the healthcare system. But ultimately we need to ensure that both major political parties do action it. These are great announcements. It's positive. And we need to make sure that we move into the action phase, because ultimately we have been calling this for many years.

ALEX EASTON: All right, Dr Nick Yim, thank you so much for your time this morning.