

17 April 2015

FREE SURGERY FOR OBESE QUEENSLANDERS

DOCTORS are calling for publicly funded bariatric surgery to help morbidly obese Queenslanders lose weight.

The radical step is one part of AMA Queensland's five-year *Health Vision* strategy, which sets out ways to tackle the state's critical health care problems such as obesity and alcohol abuse.

AMA Queensland President Dr Shaun Rudd said the measure should only be used in dire cases and would help the healthcare system, as well as those who simply can't lose weight through diet and exercise.

"Extremely obese people create long-term, huge costs for the healthcare system," Dr Rudd said. "The fatter they are, the greater the risk of diabetes, heart attacks, strokes, some cancers and joint damage,"

"There's also the higher cost of buying specialised super-sized equipment for hospital patients such as stronger beds, bigger wheelchairs, ambulances and hoists.

"The ACT and New Zealand have already introduced publicly funded bariatric surgery and we think Queensland should follow."

Brisbane mum Yvette Kerr, who lost more than 40 kilograms following bariatric surgery, supports greater public funding to help more people afford the procedure.

"I dipped into my savings to pay for it but not everyone can - it is an expensive operation," Ms Kerr said.

"But it's been absolutely worthwhile. I no longer need to take blood pressure medication, have much more energy and migraines are a rarity.

"I am much healthier and happier."

Obesity was estimated to cause 5.4 per cent of hospital expenditure and indirectly cause 3,200 deaths in Queensland in 2010.

By 2020, an estimated 1.5 million Queenslanders will be obese.¹

Research has found that if an obese person with Type 2 Diabetes has bariatric surgery, the operation would pay for itself after about one year in terms of a reduction in their ongoing health care costs.²

Health Vision is the result of a year-long consultation with thousands of the state's doctors about Queensland's most pressing health issues.

¹ [Chief Health Officer's 'Health of Queenslanders' 2014 report](#)

² [Medical Journal of Australia, August 2014](#): 'The efficacy of bariatric surgery performed in the public sector for obese patients with comorbid conditions'

The first chapter of the action plan, released today, focuses on improving public health and includes:

- **A comprehensive Public Health Plan for Queensland:** AMA Queensland will partner with councils, community groups and Queensland Health to build a public health blueprint to tackle some of our biggest health challenges, including obesity and alcohol abuse.
- **Tackling obesity:** Expanding tele-health, publicly funding bariatric surgery in the most dire cases, subsidised fruit and vegetables and banning fast food outlets opening within 1km of schools.
- **Revive ‘Closing the Gap’:** A call for State and Federal Governments to reverse cuts to Indigenous health prevention programs including women’s health and quitting smoking. AMA Queensland will establish a committee, led by Indigenous healthcare experts, to advise on new ways to improve Indigenous health.
- **A booster shot for vaccination:** A plan for mobile vaccination clinics, free transport to clinics and help for GPs to ensure children are up-to-date on immunisations.

Dr Rudd said the plan fired the starting gun for a long-term strategy to improve the health of Queenslanders and the healthcare system.

“At the heart of our *Health Vision* is a partnership with Government and the community. We’re calling on all sides of politics to get on board and help improve the health of Queenslanders,” he said.

Download AMA Queensland’s *Health Vision* document here:

http://amaq.com.au/page/Advocacy/AMA_Queenslands_Health_Vision/

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