



### **GAWLER HEALTH SERVICE**

Mr PICCOLO (Light) (15:36): Today I bring to the attention of the house some matters dealing with health. One is a particularly local issue and the other is an issue which is of general interest, I believe, to men in particular.

Members of the house may be aware that a recent federal government budget announcement has proposed that Gawler will no longer be classed as a rural zone for funding for health services. This means that Gawler has lost its RRMA 4 status and is now classified as Remoteness Area 1 (RA 1), and that puts it alongside other metropolitan areas. RAs are a new five-category system used by the ABS and Department of Health and Ageing to determine localities' remoteness and, the more remote you are, obviously, the more funding you have to support the health services.

The RA classification is determined using what they call an ARIA+ score, which is a way of determining distance using a whole range of things to determine how remote you are. The ARIA+ is a geographic measure of remoteness created by the University of Adelaide and the ARIA+ score is determined by dividing the distance of a location by the distance from its nearest service centre.

To cut a long story short, as a result of that, some of the benefits, if you like, which could accrue to local doctors to support the local health service will be removed over time. The local GPs, and also the local GP Inc service (which supports the local GPs), obviously have protested this change, as has the community. In fact, over 5,000 people have signed a petition which today I understand is already on its way to the federal parliament to be tabled.

While the doctors are rightly concerned about this change and its impact on the community, some assertions, such as the after-hours clinic service (the accident and emergency service) will be closed down as a result, are not correct. In fact, the health minister (Hon. John Hill) was in Gawler only this week and was able to reassure the Gawler residents about the future of local health services and, in particular, accident and emergency services.

The minister spoke at the Monday meeting of the Gawler sub-branch of the Australian Labor Party and said that, while the federal government decision to change the classification had created some challenges, obviously, for the delivery of health services in that locality, his department was working with local doctors to ensure these services could be maintained.

In fact, only last week, the minister received a delegation from local doctors (which was organised by me) and he reassured the doctors that the state government would support them in ensuring the services are maintained in that region. The minister also went on to say that communities like Gawler are growing and are different from country towns and metropolitan Adelaide, and therefore require different approaches to ensure that services keep up with the increase in demand. The minister also gave an assurance that the state government will continue to work with local health providers to deliver the best health services possible.

I also understand that the local doctors have now put a case to the commonwealth health department, with the assistance of the South Australian Department of Health, in relation to maintaining current benefits for a five year period, which will give local GPs an opportunity to maintain local services and provide a transitional period. This proposal will allow rural doctors to work in Gawler. It will allow overseas trained doctors to work in the emergency department and after-hours clinic at the Gawler hospital, and it will also maintain funding for mental health and palliative care. Hopefully, that proposition, which has been put by the local doctors, with the support of the South Australian Department of Health and the minister, will be

well received by the federal minister. It certainly has my support.

In the few moments I have left, I bring to the house's attention that this week is International Men's Health Week. Again I draw attention to the poor state (in a relative sense) of men's health in this country and that we need to address that. As part of my commitment to supporting that, tomorrow I am sponsoring a barbecue for blokes at the local men's shed in Gawler, which I helped to establish.