

# Building a healthy future

## \$22 million to improve cancer services at LRH

A GROWTH in demand for local cancer treatment services has led to \$22 million in new funding to double the capacity of the Gippsland Cancer Care Centre at Latrobe Regional Hospital (LRH).

The Nationals Member for Gippsland Darren Chester, who has been a vocal advocate for improved health services in the Latrobe Valley, said the Federal Government funding would mean fewer Gippsland cancer patients would have to travel to Melbourne for treatment.

The funding will provide for an additional 400 radiation treatments and 8000 chemotherapy

treatments per year at LRH.

“The Gippsland Cancer Care Centre opened four years ago and many local patients have shared with me the benefits of having access to high quality care and treatment without having to travel to Melbourne,” Mr Chester said.

“Being able to access treatment in the Latrobe Valley eases both the cost and travel burden on families from across Gippsland.”

Mr Chester said previous reports had shown that, with some cancers, patients from rural areas were up to three times more likely to die within five years of diagnosis than their urban counterparts. This was attributed to the difficulties and expense of accessing treatment.

“The Gippsland Cancer Care Centre overcomes this barrier, allowing Latrobe Valley residents to receive care within their own community,” Mr Chester said.

Mr Chester recently visited the Gippsland Cancer Care Centre and paid tribute to the work of staff and volunteers for their commitment to patients and their families.

“The challenge in the future will be to attract and retain oncologists and other specialists to meet the health needs of the local community,” Mr Chester said.



**Hospital expansion:** Darren Chester discusses expansion plans with LRH Chief Executive Peter Craighhead.



**Smiles all round:** The Nationals Member for Gippsland Darren Chester and State Member for Morwell, Russell Northe, pictured with volunteer Carmen Cook, welcoming the news that Centenary House will receive \$1.5 million in Federal funding.

## Training future doctors

MORE doctors will be trained across Gippsland and the Latrobe Valley, developing links with the local community to help ease the doctor shortage.

The Nationals Member for Gippsland Darren Chester said the Federal Government would provide \$1.1 million to construct training facilities at local GP clinics.

While full details of the successful clinics have not been announced, the Monash Gippsland Medical School is coordinating the program, which will see two medical students trained in 15 practices across Gippsland every year.

Unfortunately some local practices have missed out on funding and Mr Chester is urging the Federal Government to extend the program.

Mr Chester said it was well recognised that medical students who developed links with regional communities were more likely to practice in a regional setting when they graduated.

“All credit must go to the local doctors and Monash Gippsland who have been working together to provide opportunities to train the next generation of doctors for Gippsland,” Mr Chester said.

“This funding will assist with the upfront costs of providing training rooms and equipment - but the real challenge is being taken on by the local doctors who will dedicate their time to training new students and sharing their knowledge.

“There are many outstanding doctors in Gippsland who make a real difference by providing ‘on the job’ support for students. Their dedication is helping to train young

doctors in the specific demands of rural medicine.”

Mr Chester lobbied the Federal Government to support the application for funding which was lodged by Gippsland doctors last year.

He said the recruitment and retention of doctors and specialists to regional areas was a key issue that needed to be addressed under the proposed national health reforms.

“The Rural Doctors’ Association of Australia (RDAA) reports that at least 1800 additional doctors are urgently required in regional Australia,” Mr Chester said.

“The critical shortage means many country families are facing long waits to visit their local GP.”



**Training doctors:** Darren Chester chats to mock patient Krissi Thomas at the Monash Medical School.

## Centenary House boost

THE Latrobe Valley community’s dream to extend Rotary Centenary House and construct nine additional family units is about to be realised.

The Nationals Member for Gippsland Darren Chester said the Federal Government would provide \$1.5 million for the Stage Two expansion to support more cancer patients and their families.

Rotary Centenary House provides care, support and accommodation for families from across Gippsland who are receiving treatment at Latrobe Regional Hospital.

Mr Chester has been a key supporter of the House, and personally donated almost \$5000 last year to support the community fundraising effort. He has also spoken about the project in Federal Parliament and directly lobbied the Federal Minister for Health.

Mr Chester said the facility was a credit to Rotarians across Gippsland and the local board of management, which had worked tirelessly to construct the facility and had now achieved funding for its expansion dream.

“It is an outstanding facility that allows local families, particularly cancer patients, to share their experience and support each other, while also reducing the cost burden of accommodation during treatment,” Mr Chester said.

“Rotary Centenary House provides a home away from home at a difficult time in people’s lives and the demand has grown so much that additional rooms were needed.”

Centenary House Chairman Ken Peake said the nine additional units would more than double capacity.

“About \$600,000 has already been raised by business sponsors and the wider community to support the second stage and we will need to continue our fundraising efforts. In addition to the nine units, the next stage will include community meeting facilities which will be an added bonus for the Latrobe Valley community,” Mr Peake said.



**More support for patients:** Reviewing plans for the Rotary Centenary House extension are Centenary House Chair of Committee of Management Ken Peake; House Manager Carol Crewe; Chair of Building Committee Rob Soares; Chair of the Fundraising Committee Kay Radford; and Darren Chester MP.

## Share your views

AS your Federal Member of Parliament, I am fighting for our fair share of funding for local projects. By putting locals first and working together, we can build a better future for the Latrobe Valley.

I’m interested in hearing your views. If I can assist with any Federal Government issues, or if you have a good idea for the future of our region, please fill out this form and post it to me, or drop it into my office in Traralgon.

Your name and address: \_\_\_\_\_



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Comments:

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