

# CONSTITUENT QUESTION

## House of Assembly

ASKED BY: Simon Behrakis MP

ANSWERED BY: Hon Jacquie Petrusma MP  
Minister for Health

### QUESTION:

Several constituents in Hobart have contacted me concerned over the closure of maternity services at Healthscope. I have informed them of the announcement last week, which was received positively, but can the Minister please provide details on the plan to relocate the Mother Baby Unit at the Royal Hobart Hospital to St John's Park, and how this will help families?

### ANSWER:

On Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> February 2025, the Tasmanian Government was informed of Healthscope's disappointing decision to withdraw maternity services from Hobart Private Hospital.

Upon receiving this news, we took swift and decisive action and are pleased to have secured \$6 million in Federal funding to expand maternity services at the Royal Hobart Hospital and Calvary Lenah Valley.

This funding will deliver infrastructure and equipment upgrades for both the RHH and Calvary Lenah Valley. Importantly, it will also allow the expansion of maternity services at the RHH from 29 to 34 beds by moving the current Mother Baby Unit to St John's Park in New Town.

A new Residential Intensive Parenting Unit will be established at St John's Park in New Town to support mothers experiencing postnatal challenges in Southern Tasmania, including support for their mental and physical health needs.

This service will provide intensive residential and day program parenting services and support for all the challenges associated with being a new parent, including mental health and psychosocial support.

It will be able to help with the same type of issues that the previous St Helens Private Hospital service did.

For example, it will include a multidisciplinary team to provide residential and day program assistance with issues such as parental anxiety and post-partum depression, feeding, settling, sleeping, family attachment, and behavioural issues.

However, if it gets to the point where mental health issues are severe to the extent that the mother and/or the baby's safety is at high risk (for example, the mother develops psychosis), higher acuity mental health support may be required at the RHH – as is current practice in the current Mother Baby Unit model, and previously occurred at St Helens.

To be very clear – right now, access to the RHH Mother Baby Unit is for non-urgent planned admissions only – where a mother experiences acute mental illness, and there are concerns about her capacity to care for her infant, she may be admitted without her infant to the Department of Psychiatry for treatment.

This decision is made by clinicians, as it should be, with the safety of both the mother and baby at the forefront. Mothers and babies will be clinically assessed to ensure they receive the most appropriate care.

The feedback that we have consistently received on the current Mother Baby Unit at the RHH since St Helens closed is that a home-like community environment – rather than a hospital environment – is a more appropriate setting for delivering holistic multidisciplinary care for mothers and their babies – an example of how this is achieved is the Peacock Centre, which is also designed along these principles.

Consultation is occurring with experts as the new model is finalised, which I will have more to say on in the coming weeks, because the new intensive service for mothers and their babies will be based on expert clinical advice – the safety of mothers and their babies is paramount and will always come first.

While staffing needs are not finalised, the existing RHH Mother Baby Unit staff, including those who initially transferred from St Helens Private Hospital, will be offered the opportunity to work in the new Unit once operational.

I am advised that the staffing mix for a residential service of this kind typically includes Midwives, Allied Health Professionals, Child Health Nurses, and Mental Health Professionals with support from THS Medical Specialists to meet the needs of the individual patients.

Parents can also continue to be supported by the Perinatal and Infant Mental Health Service located in the community state-wide.

I would like to reassure your constituents that the Tasmanian Government's number one priority is ensuring mothers and babies have the appropriate support and services they need both during and following their birthing journeys.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'JP', is written over the printed name and title.

Hon. Jacquie Petrusma MP  
**Minister for Health**

Date: 19/3/25