

ROBBIE KATTER

Member for Traeger



MEDIA RELEASE

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GOVT TAKES FINGER OFF PULSE OF BLOOD DONOR DEMAND

Katter's Australian Party (KAP) Leader and Traeger MP Robbie Katter has welcomed a new national advisory group exploring the extension of lifesaving programs that recruit bone marrow donors through cheek swabs via post, but says a talkfest won't save critically-ill Queenslanders.

Mr Katter wrote to the Federal and Queensland Health Ministers raising deep concerns with the severe lack of blood, stem cell and bone marrow donation capacity in regional Queensland, specifically government restrictions hamstringing critical national registry Strength to Give, which recruited peripheral blood stem cells or bone marrow donors through a cheek swab test in the mail.

Mr Katter's office was informed that the registry's recruitment was limited to only 6,000 of the required 25,000 donors and existing funds were locked up under federally-imposed contractual constraints, forcing 80 per cent of transplant patients to find a donor overseas.

Both Ministers' offices acknowledged more work needed to be done to boost domestic stem cell donor capacity, and revealed a Clinical Advisory Group had been established to consider the requirements of setting up regulatory frameworks and pathology labs for buccal (cheek) swab donor recruitment "over the coming months".

The office of Federal Minister for Health and Aged Care Mark Butler said Strength to Give pilot programs raised potential non-compliance issues, as the swabs were not listed on the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods, and also limitations in infectious disease screening.

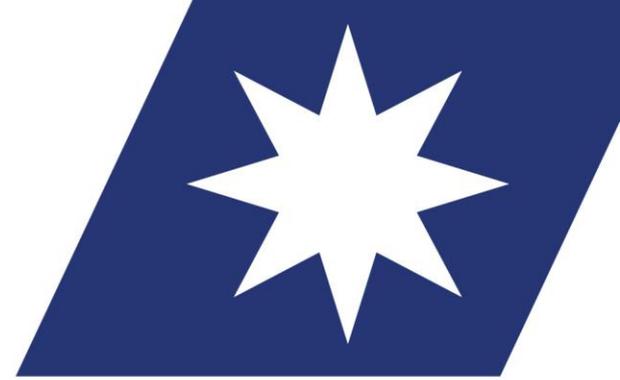
"It's very encouraging that critically-ill Queenslanders like young Charters Towers woman Bonnie Black, whose battle with Acute Lymphoblastic Leukaemia was the catalyst for this action, are being heard and Government is moving on unlocking the maximum potential of stem cell and bone marrow donation services to meet Australia's critical demand," Mr Katter said.

"However, all the talk of advisory groups and new regulatory and accreditation frameworks is a hard pill for these patients and their families to swallow as they don't have the luxury of time; they want action on cutting the red tape tying up these lifesaving services."

Mr Katter's office received feedback from partners of the Australian Bone Marrow Donor Registry that questioned effective advisory group member selection, as well as conflicting regulatory requirements.

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The representatives claimed that the advisory group needed to include donor recruitment experts as well as representatives of ethnicities that the Government identified for specific targeting.

The partners also challenged the Governments' issue of the buccal swabs not having Therapeutic Goods approval, questioning why the Strength to Give swab pilot program was able to progress if the Government had such strict regulatory and accreditation requirements.

"I share the concerns we've heard that we can't waste precious time and money on an advisory group to determine what we already know, and support the urgent request to fast-track these decisions to lift the limbo people have been stuck in for the past two decades," Mr Katter said.

He continued that the Governments still failed to address the limitations of adequate blood donation services for people in the bush, who had to travel to city centres for donation and treatment, with only three Australian Red Cross Lifeblood donor centres in North Queensland.

People in Charters Towers had to travel a three-hour round trip to Townsville, where the donor collection centre had transitioned to plasma-only.

"The Health Ministers talk up the role of Townsville as Australia's first plasma-only centre as it was leading the country in plasma collections, and that's all well and good, but it still translates to fewer services for North Queenslanders," Mr Katter said.

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