

Reality check on spending



MIKE BAIRD
MANLY MP

SOME days are hard to forget. It might start innocently with a morning run, returning calls, meetings and then, bang – a moment hits you that you know you will remember with clarity, forever.

A couple of weeks ago I was invited to visit the Royal Rehabilitation Centre. The invitation came from a wonderful local woman who wanted to show me, as a potential treasurer, a facility that enabled her to walk again.

I have received several invitations from people looking for state funds should we win government next year. But this stood out as a deep concern that a facility was under threat, a facility that literally helped someone walk again.

As is commonplace in many frontline services across the state, I met a team that was inspiring and I saw resources that did not do them justice.

Just before leaving, management took me to a place I didn't know existed – Weemala at Ryde. It is where we place our "incurables". Those severely afflicted by the worst brain injuries, extreme muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis and many more heartbreaking ailments.

The building looked cold and oppressive from the outside and it didn't improve as we went inside. The shock I felt wasn't because of the people I met (indeed their smiles defied their personal circumstances), nor the wonderful staff, but it was because of the facilities. They were sterile, depressing and certainly not a "home" despite residents living there for decades. Yet it was in the bathroom that I was moved close to tears. It was cold. Freezing cold.

I looked up and saw an air-conditioner and asked why it wasn't on. "Oh that hasn't worked for 10 years" was the despairing reply from a frontline worker let down by the system. It stunned me that as a society we could stand by and let these most vulnerable people shower in an ice-cold room.

It was hard to put into words the impact of this facility but it was a stark reminder that every dollar matters. We can't just look at headlines when government wastes money and say – oh well they do it all the time ... it matters.

It made me reflect on the \$500 million that has been poured down the drain through the CBD metro debacle and how governments cannot continue to turn a blind eye to this waste.

The northern beaches community have now been waiting 11 years for the funds to build the new hospital and all that's happened since is the existing hospitals at Manly and Mona Vale have been stripped bare leaving patient care compromised and staff demoralised.

There are countless examples across the northern beaches of facilities that are crying out for funds. I'm sure every reader has one in their mind right now.

As a potential treasurer, Weemala was a harsh jolt that every public dollar is precious and that waste has a tangible impact. The words fiscal discipline seem cold, dispassionate and usual political talk. When considering the potential impact on a place like Weemala or our local hospitals, they become a passion – they are given a heart.



The Weemala Hospice for the Incurables, as it was called at its inception, at Ryde. This photo dates back to 1914. On a recent visit, Mike was appalled at the lack of facilities and wondered if the government has moved with the times in terms of funding.