



Speech by

SHAUN NELSON

MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

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NEEDLE EXCHANGE PROGRAMS

Mr NELSON (Tablelands—IND) (6.23 p.m.): It gives me great pleasure to support the motion before the House tonight. It certainly is heartening to see the Queensland Parliament call upon the Federal Government to look at this issue. It has always surprised me that this has never happened in the past. I have heard a few members say tonight that it was terrible that the coalition Government did not do it in the past. I say that it is terrible that it was not done by any Government in the past.

Many people in my electorate suffer from illnesses. One that comes straight to mind is migraines, which are a very debilitating illness. I do not suffer from them, but I have spoken to people who do. Migraine tablets cost about \$40 a pop. When people know that they are coming down with a migraine, they have to swallow a migraine tablet to stop it. That is a \$40 tablet. For some people that is a huge expense. Yet methadone is supplied for free. I know we need treatment for heroin addicts. I am not saying that we do not. I support the statements that have been made here tonight. I am not calling for the abolition of needle exchange programs. I realise that they provide a service to the community.

When I was a security officer, I worked in an area where a needle exchange program was in action. In my capacity as a security officer, I found a lot fewer syringes on the ground when doing my rounds than I had in the past. In the area in which I was working in the ACT, the AIDS rate did drop in that community. So, yes, I can see the need for needle exchange programs. Yes, I can see the need for drug therapy treatment provided by the Government.

In the same breath, I have always found it amazing that we can look after those unfortunate members of society who get themselves into the predicament of drug abuse and yet we leave people behind who suffer from illnesses through no fault of their own. Those illnesses are debilitating and take them out of the work force and their day-to-day lives. The rationale put to me by people in my electorate was that, if heroin addicts can get their methadone for free, why can people who suffer from migraines not get their migraine tablets for free? Of course, the same argument is evidenced with diabetes. Why can diabetics not get their syringes for free when there are needle exchange programs set up for heroin addicts?

As I said at the outset, it is with pleasure that I see this Parliament taking action along these lines. My only hope now is that the Federal Government—a Government that, over the past few years, has proven itself to be, as far as I am concerned, the enemy of Queensland—listens to this plea from a united Parliament with open ears and with an open heart and takes into consideration the fact that the costs outlined in the speeches by the member for Barambah and the member for Gladstone are not massive. They are not huge. We are not talking about millions and millions and millions of dollars being expended. We are not talking about breaking health budgets. We are not talking about taking money away from other important health initiatives. We are talking about providing a facility and a service that will give a reasonable amount of financial comfort to people who might find it hard to cover the costs associated with their illness—an illness they did not ask for and did not want, an illness which they are fighting with great fortitude.

I take great pleasure in adding my voice to the other voices supporting the motion tonight. I look forward to the timely response of the Federal Minister for Health and Aged Care. I hope that he will not only consider it for the State of Queensland but for other States in general. Perhaps this can be a Federal Government health initiative which can be extended to cover Western Australia, South Australia and so on so that all Australians can look forward to a better level of health care in the future.