



Speech by

**Miss FIONA SIMPSON**

**MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE**

---

Hansard 19 June 2002

### **NEEDLE AND SYRINGE AVAILABILITY PROGRAM**

**Miss SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—NPA) (6.10 p.m.): I am happy to support the motion moved by the member for Gladstone and to acknowledge her work in this area. How long do we have to wait for the government to introduce retractable needles in the state's health facilities as well as needle exchange programs? How long do the people facing the trauma have to wait? How long do parents of children who have stood on discarded needles in public places or health workers who have been subject to a needle-stick injury in their workplace have to wait?

On 23 February 2000, I announced with the Opposition Leader that a National Party-led government would phase out reusable syringes for Queensland's needle exchange program and replace them with retractable needles. We were concerned about the repeated incidence of needle-stick injuries at beaches, schools, parks and other public places. Governments can no longer ignore the danger and the trauma that is caused by discarded syringes. There is also a tremendous need for these retractable needles to be used in our hospitals. Despite the best of education programs, the figures show clearly that needle-stick injury still has a considerable impact in the workplace. Blood-borne diseases can kill and the trauma experienced by people waiting to have themselves tested has an impact not only on them but also on their whole family. It is extremely distressing to hear people talk about this and outline what they have gone through.

On 23 February 2000, the Health Minister engaged in an elaborate hoax to justify her opposition to our call for retractable needles. She produced a dodgy set of figures in what I believe was a disgraceful attempt to discredit initiatives and ignore the threat posed to the community by discarded syringes. However, the need for retractable needles is so great and the figures are so astounding that this issue will not go away. There has been growing community support and involvement in lobbying for their introduction in health facilities and in the needle exchange program.

On 15 March 2000, the Health Minister ruled out introducing retractable needles on the grounds that they were ineffective. We called on her to outline which brands of retractable needles she had tested and found to be defective, but she never did. Since then, the attempts have been more to do with stalling and talking about standards and waiting for standards to be approved. As the member for Gladstone has outlined, there is already a standard in the Australian Standards that can cover retractable needles. Basically, if there is a will, there is a way. Here we are two years down the track and still we do not see a strong commitment from the state government in this regard. In the middle of last year we saw that the doubling of free needle distribution over four years showed that the state government needed to explain to Queenslanders what it was going to do in regard to dealing with the problem of drug addiction. The spin-off of that was the discarding of these needles.

On 16 May 2002, after two years of delay under this Health Minister, the job of finally putting real funds into introducing retractable needles into Queensland has been left up to the federal government in its latest budget. Queensland should thank the federal government for seeing the merits of the program long before the Beattie government. The federal government announced a \$27.5 million package for product and strategy development for the introduction of retractable needles into Australia. In the United States, which is acknowledged as being a highly litigious society, we already see extensive use of retractable needles in a number of states. Legislation in some of those states basically mandates that they have to use the safest product, and they are in fact using retractable needles that have undergone high-level and strenuous testing. If the Beattie government is not prepared to match the funding, at the very least the Beattie government should go after a share of the

\$27.5 million allocated in the federal budget to ensure that retractable needles are introduced into Queensland. It is their chance to show some degree of motivation and to actively phase out reusable needles in favour of using retractable needles in all Queensland Health facilities as well as in the needle availability program. I acknowledge the work of Cindy Bush, who has also campaigned for this at the community level. This is an issue that affects people's lives. Where there is a will, there is a way. We have waited for far too long to see the introduction of retractable needles. It has occurred in a number of states overseas. Money is now available at the federal level. However, I do not believe that the overall cost is significant if there is a will for the state government to address it, at least in its own own health facilities, given that needle-stick injuries are causing great trauma and having an unnecessary impact upon the work force. The real cost of dealing with these issues has often been suppressed. It is time that some of the workplace issues were addressed. Certainly there are community concerns about children stepping on discarded syringes in play pits and on our beaches.

Time expired.