



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR BURLEIGH

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AIDS AWARENESS WEEK

Mrs SMITH (Burleigh—ALP) (12.58 a.m.): Last Sunday I was honoured to participate in the Gold Coast AIDS candlelight memorial vigil. The theme of the vigil this year was 'Remembering the cause, renewing our commitment'. It was a very moving occasion and I congratulate the many people who worked so hard to make it a special ceremony. This vigil aims to balance the remembrance and mourning with a celebration of life—celebrating the lives of those who have died as well as those now living with HIV AIDS. In Queensland, it also marks the beginning of AIDS Awareness Week.

Deserving of particular congratulations is Michelle Faraday and the people from the Queensland AIDS Council on the Gold Coast who worked in collaboration with members of Queensland Positive People, the Queensland Police Service and Kalwun Health Services. Also, Lara who shared her poignant story of how she copes as a young mother who is HIV positive.

In Australia there are 13,000 people infected, several hundreds of those living on the Gold Coast. Recent statistics worryingly show an increase in HIV infections in Australia for the first time in 10 years. The United Nations report states that about 40 million people world wide are infected with AIDS or the virus that causes the disease. More than half a million of those are children under the age of 15. It is an epidemic of global proportions.

Australian governments, both state and federal, are to be commended for their early recognition of the disease and for implementing strategies to deal with it. It has meant that the spread of the virus had been much less in Australia than in other countries. There is no cause for complacency, however. There is still much to be done.

We need to be educating our young people about the virus by introducing information into the school curriculum. Sex education without AIDS education is telling only half the story. This is a disease that is preventable, but only if people are given the facts. AIDS education in schools is not about corrupting the morals of our children; it is about preparing our young people to be responsible and well-informed members of society. HIV AIDS is not a moral or religious issue; it is a health and social issue. It is time to stop pretending that AIDS is not a problem that affects us all. AIDS is an epidemic that is causing widespread devastation around the world.

The candlelight vigil gave everyone the opportunity to remember those who have been lost: sons and daughters, mothers and fathers and friends who are sadly missed. It also introduces AIDS Awareness Week, culminating in World AIDS Day on 1 December.

The red ribbon that I wear today is a simple way to show our support for those living with and affected by HIV AIDS. It allows us to show that those who have died are not forgotten and that we care about those living with the chronic condition. I encourage all members to wear a red ribbon this week.