



Speech by

ELISA ROBERTS

MEMBER FOR GYMPIE

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GYMPIE ELECTORATE, MENTAL ILLNESS

Miss ELISA ROBERTS (Gympie—Ind) (7.12 p.m.): I rise to speak about the grave and disturbing situation that the people of my electorate are facing with regard to the severe shortage of emergency housing and adequate health service provision for people who suffer from mental illness. The situation in my electorate has reached crisis stage to the extent that people are dying whilst waiting for funding packages to be approved. Organisations such as Choice are struggling to service the many consumers who approach them on a daily basis. The lack of both short-term and long-term housing has led to people with severe mental illnesses being forced to live on the streets. Others who do have a roof over their heads but who do not qualify for funding packages are dying alone, with some not being found for periods of between four days and four weeks.

Because of its extraordinary volunteer and network system, Gympie is becoming a dumping ground for people with mental illness and disabilities. There are consumers from as far as Brisbane being redirected to Gympie for assistance. The staff at Choice Support Services are gallantly trying to keep pace with the influx of acute mental illness sufferers every single day. The burden of care which rests with many local non-government organisations is unrealistic and inhumane. The deinstitutionalisation of consumers has failed dismally. This government has not kept up the funding needed to ensure that these people have access to the appropriate care which they were promised when they were put out onto the streets. Our local hospital does not even have beds for psychiatric patients.

The plea for urgent assistance which the members of these incredibly hardworking organisations are making is non-political and genuine. They are begging for a whole-of-government approach to health and disability services which will ensure the provision of enough qualified people who are equipped to deal with those people who experience severe episodes, those whom ordinary and caring volunteers are not trained to deal with. There needs to be a complete overhaul of the funding allocation in this state to allow more people to be cared for as opposed to the current method which, I am sure, was aimed at being a sincere attempt to address the increasing needs of the community but instead is leaving thousands of people alone and uncared for. Community groups can only do so much and, believe me, they are doing as much as is humanly possible to assist our needy.

All governments need to reassess their responsibilities in this rapidly changing environment. It is time that they realised that their responsibility is to the isolated, the sick and the helpless and yet it seems that the more vulnerable or alienated a person is the less help they get. Governments can no longer afford to be frivolous with taxpayers' money. Let philanthropists pay for non-essentials such as the proposed beautification of North Bank. Put the millions allocated for that back into the areas which quite literally mean the difference between life and death.