



Speech by

Annastacia Palaszczuk

MEMBER FOR INALA

Hansard Wednesday, 10 October 2007

AUTISM FUNDING

Ms PALASZCZUK (Inala—ALP) (11.44 am): Two years ago as a result of concerns raised by many families whose children have autism the then minister, Warren Pitt, announced a groundbreaking autism initiative. As a consequence, funding for autism has been in the last two Queensland budgets. Indeed, \$30 million was allocated over four years to implement early intervention strategies for children with a disability, including the family support program, and early intervention strategies for families caring for children under five years of age with autism who have complex and challenging behaviour.

Funds allocated to children with autism were allocated to Autism Queensland and AEIOU to establish autism early intervention centres in Brisbane and regional Queensland. Children with a disability are a priority for this government. Many families in my electorate and throughout Queensland have children who have autism. In the report entitled *The prevalence of autism in Australia* in February 2007, the chairperson of the Australian Advisory Board on Autism Spectrum Disorders stated, 'All research to date demonstrates that early intervention leads to better outcomes for children with an autism spectrum disorder.'

The Australian Advisory Board on Autism Spectrum Disorders estimates that one in every 160 children is diagnosed with autism. For years, Queensland has lobbied the federal government for more funding for children with a disability and this has been by and large ignored. The federal government has ignored this issue up until now. The federal injection of funds includes new Medicare funded services, which has and always will be a federal government responsibility. But one must question why the federal government has done nothing over the past 11 years.

Queensland has been leading the way in relation to this issue, incorporating an autism initiative over the last two budgets. Under the Bligh Labor government, children with autism will continue to be funded over the coming years. I welcome the position of the federal Leader of the Opposition, Kevin Rudd, to set up specialised child-care and early intervention services for children with autism—with six in the initial stage. A federal Labor government would enhance and embrace what Queensland is already doing by creating centres that would follow similar developmental methods to the AEIOU centres throughout Queensland.