



Speech by

John-Paul Langbroek

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

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WORLD MENTAL HEALTH DAY

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (12.00 pm): I congratulate the Deputy Speaker on his elevation to his current role. Tomorrow marks World Mental Health Day. I take this opportunity to highlight some ominous history and failings in Queensland's mental health services. I believe that mental health could well be tomorrow's health crisis. It is a not-so-hidden epidemic in the households of Queensland. The sting that Queenslanders are feeling when it comes to mental health services I fear is just the tip of the iceberg. Queensland has one of the highest suicide rates in the country yet mental health spending in Queensland is only 80 per cent of the national average.

This morning we heard the new Premier come in here twice and speak about ambulance spending, saying it is the highest per person in Australia. That is proof that throwing money does not always help to overcome a problem, as in the case of ambulance services, but in mental health not throwing money at it is definitely not helping the problem. The Premier cannot come in here as she did on a number of occasions this morning and blame the Bjelke-Petersen government for failings in mental health spending two decades ago when she and I were at university together. Why does the Premier not come in here and tell us whether she believes in all the things she believed in at university, such as patriarchal tyranny? Why does the Premier not tell us whether she believes in all those things that she believed in two decades ago? We are seeing the new made-over Premier.

In Queensland vulnerable adolescents are being forced into adult mental health facilities because there are no specialised adolescent mental health beds outside south-east Queensland. In Cairns 20 teenagers were admitted to Cairns Base Hospital's mental health unit in the year to July 31. There are no specialist adolescent mental health beds in Cairns. Accurate statistics are hard to ascertain for far-north Queensland because there are hundreds if not thousands of youthful sufferers who need support.

Statistics show that one in five people will suffer some form of mental illness in their lifetime. Many of these victims of psychiatric conditions are teenagers struggling with the challenges of adolescence. In spite of that, this financial year only eight new mental health beds for troubled teens will be opened in Queensland. There are only 15 dedicated adolescent mental health beds in Queensland and every one of those is in Brisbane. This means that kids in Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton, Mackay, Toowoomba and other regional centres—even the Gold Coast, the sixth largest city in Australia—are forced into adult mental health facilities with little supervision. Not only is this inappropriate, it represents a danger to the health and safety of patients, not to mention the liability issues that arise from such arrangements. I note that the member for Toowoomba South is in the chamber. He is very aware of the sorts of things that have happened in Toowoomba recently.

Not only is the crisis in mental health wreaking havoc in our hospitals, the crisis is playing out on our streets. As a result of this government's gross underinvestment in Queensland's mental health services, people with mental illnesses are being sent back into the community without any treatment. Members of this House will be aware of constituents who contact them about incidents in shopping centres, train stations, buses, households and schools where people with mental illnesses are out in the community and

end up being dealt with by police officers. It is putting the community at risk and placing our police officers and patients in danger as well.

There is a real concern in the community about the lack of investment by this government in mental health services that will lead to more and more incidents. This Labor government is taking its eye off the ball. It advocated for deinstitutionalisation but failed to put in place alternative treatment options to assist people along the road to recovery. Our acute care facilities simply cannot cope with the demand. It was interesting this morning listening to the Premier talk about how her government's health reforms are taking effect. Yet every day distressed patients contact me because for them Queensland Health has not turned the corner. Our public hospital waiting lists are the longest that they have ever been. Some of the 144,000 Queenslanders waiting to see a specialist will never, ever get an appointment. Mental health is just one area of the health system where this government has failed Queenslanders.

The same Premier who insists that Queensland Health has turned the corner—contrary to the evidence against her claims—is unapologetic and apathetic about the serious lack of investment in mental health services in Queensland. In May the then Treasurer, now Premier, put out a media release admitting that her injection of funds into mental health services meant that funding for mental health services fell far short of the national average. This funding is not enough to make up for a decade of short-changing mental health services by this government.

I am pleased that the health minister mentioned my federal colleagues this morning as I would like to bring to his attention some of the initiatives coming out of Canberra which I hope, for the sake of Queenslanders, will inspire him to action. The federal government is investing almost \$2 billion in services for people with mental illnesses, their families and carers. We need to acknowledge the wonderful clinicians and staff who do a fantastic job under the most difficult circumstances. I have been fortunate to visit many public hospitals, including mental health facilities in Toowoomba and Townsville. The member for Toowoomba South and I went to Toowoomba Hospital a couple of months ago. It is quite remarkable what goes on on the ground in mental health wards. We need to deliver better services for Queenslanders and we need to attract and retain mental health staff. Working in the mental health wards is one of the hardest, most thankless jobs that there is. If the Bligh government is really committed to improving the state of mental health services in Queensland it must improve the working conditions of mental health staff—that should be an immediate priority—as well as implement the recommendations of Brendan Butler, which this government has ignored to date.

The Australian government does recognise the significant challenge of mental health—

Time expired.