




Speech By
Hon. Anastacia Palaszczuk

MEMBER FOR INALA

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Barrett Adolescent Centre

 **Hon. A PALASZCZUK** (Inala—ALP) (Premier and Minister for the Arts) (9.37 am): No parent should have to fear outliving their child. No parent should have to wake in the still of the night cloaked with dread that their child's life is in danger and they are helpless to protect them—helpless to offer hope. Yet, that is the peculiar hell a group of families found themselves faced with a little over a year ago. That was when the only facility they were able to turn to in a bid to protect their children who were at risk of self-harm was closed with little in the way of a legitimate reason.

The sequence of events leading up to the closure of Barrett Adolescent Centre at Wacol and the tragedy which followed that decision by the former LNP government is a mystery to the families whose children were in its care. The closure and catastrophic and heart-rending consequences haunt those families to this day. None more so than the families and friends of three teenagers who died over the eight months subsequent to Barrett closing its doors.

Talieha Nebauer was 17 when she died. Will Fowell was 18 when he died, as was Caitlin Wilkinson-Whiticker. These were young lives taken too soon. The loss of these teenagers has devastated their families and their friends and devastated a community. That is why my government promised these families that we would help them find answers. That is a promise that we will keep.

As part of this week's budget my government will establish a commission of inquiry which will investigate the closure of the Barrett Adolescent Centre and the subsequent deaths of these three teenagers who were classified as high risk. This was our election commitment and today we honour that commitment. This commission of inquiry will investigate why the previous government made the decision to close the critically important facility. It will investigate how decisions were made, who made the decisions and what evidence was available and considered before the centre was closed.

The government will appoint retired Justice Margaret Wilson under the Commissions of Inquiry Act with the full powers to summon witnesses and call for the presentation of all documents. The inquiry will be held from 14 September this year until 14 January 2016. Justice Wilson served on the Supreme Court from 1998 to 2014 and was also a judge of the Queensland Mental Health Court from 2002 to 2005.

My government and these families want the truth because the families—along with the centre staff, the community and other families impacted by the centre's closure—deserve to know the truth. It will give the families of these children a voice. It will allow these families to ask questions and seek answers about their children's care and about their children's tragic deaths. Its aim will also be to make recommendations for the future care of high-risk teenagers and the provision of mental health services for Queensland adolescents.

The Barrett Adolescent Centre was Queensland's only long-term residential mental health facility for adolescents at risk of suicide. What we do know is that, when the centre was closed in January 2014, there was a promise that other services would be in place. We do not know if that did eventuate.

I want to now quote Talieha's mother, Nicole, who this week described to the ABC her desperation to keep her daughter safe and alive and who has been fighting for the truth since her death in April last year. She said—

You go to bed of a night time and you don't want to fall asleep because you don't know how your child is going to be, you're just always on edge waiting for the next thing to happen.

Nicole also said that she turned to the Barrett centre as a last resort. She said—

I fought hard to get her to go there because I thought that was the last chance of keeping her alive. I just want justice for Talieha. I just want answers.

Today, I vow to Nicole and Talieha, who I had also met on a couple of occasions and listened to her stories quite personally—and all the other families and staff and the community—that we will find those answers for those families.