




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR NUDGE

Record of Proceedings, 16 July 2015

ADJOURNMENT

National Perinatal Depression Initiative

 **Ms LINARD** (Nudgee—ALP) (1.16 am): I rise to speak on an issue of significant concern to many women and families across Queensland and, indeed, the country. As any mother or father can attest, becoming a parent is one of the most significant transitions in life. The perinatal period is considered to be the period from pregnancy through to the first year after childbirth. It is often a time of fluctuating emotion: elation, fear, hope, anxiety, exhaustion. Sometimes all can be felt in a day, sometimes in a moment. It is a critical period for the mental and physical health of both mother and child, with women at increased risk of mental illness during this period. It is estimated that perinatal depression will affect one in seven Australian mothers and one in 20 fathers. For many of those parents, it is the first time in their lives that they have faced a mental illness.

Although perinatal illnesses are among the most preventable and treatable of all mental illnesses, alarmingly, suicide is the leading cause of death for mothers in Queensland in the first year after birth, accounting for as many deaths as all obstetric causes combined, all of which makes the perinatal period a critical intervention point for effective public mental health care and why the introduction of the National Perinatal Depression Initiative in 2008 was so important. This \$85 million program aimed to improve the prevention and early detection of antenatal and postnatal depression and to provide better care, support and treatment for expectant and new mothers experiencing perinatal depression.

Under the funding agreement with the Commonwealth, thousands of new parents accessed screening and counselling services aimed at identifying and treating the illness in the early stages, which is why it is disgraceful that, four weeks ago, the federal health minister, Susan Ley, advised that the Abbott government is ripping up that agreement and with it \$1.6 million from Queensland as of 30 June, only two weeks later. This sudden discontinuation of funding will not only see a reduction in the specialist services available to women during the perinatal period but also potentially increase the number of women needing to be admitted to hospital. Anecdotal reports show that, where there is a perinatal mental health clinical position, the need for inpatient hospital admission and the separation of mother from infant may be prevented in almost every case.

Funding under the national partnership enabled Queensland Health to fund several such positions, giving vital assistance to women needing support during the perinatal period. To cut a program that funds support for vulnerable mothers and infants and families in distress is one of the cruellest cuts the Abbott government could deliver. No wonder the federal health minister, a woman and mother herself, was unavailable to be interviewed on the cuts. No wonder the federal budget, released six weeks earlier, made no mention of the scrapping of this funding. This funding cut represents yet another gap created by the failure of the Abbott government to properly fund public health services across Australia.

For those who experience perinatal depression or anxiety, it is a time of desperation and despair. It is frightening and it is isolating. It is a tragedy and an injustice that we have a federal government that has turned away from vulnerable mothers and families in this country.