




Speech By
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MENTAL HEALTH AMENDMENT BILL

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (3.47 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate on the Mental Health Amendment Bill 2016. Once again we see this Labor government dropping the ball on mental health. We saw a new Mental Health Act introduced and passed through this parliament, only for this minister to come running back into the chamber a year later to introduce amendments. The bill we are debating today contains 50 proposed amendments to the act before it has even commenced because the implementation committee which was set up to prepare for the new regime noticed 50 issues that needed to be addressed. For a reform of this scale that is not good enough. This minister needs to explain how he allowed 50 oversights to occur under his watch on a significant piece of legislation. Why were these issues not addressed or even considered in the original bill? Why are we back in this chamber more than a year after the original bill was introduced fixing the problems created by this Labor government?

We know how important mental health is to Queensland. At some point in their lifetime almost half of Australians will be affected by a mental health disorder. One in five of these people will encounter a mental health issue in a 12-month period. We on this side of the House know how important this issue is, and that is why we put so much focus on mental health during our time in government. We have a strong history of investing in mental health issues and delivering for Queenslanders, with a \$1.1 billion investment in services in 2014-15 alone. We on this side of the House also established the Mental Health Commission, because we wanted to see better coordination and advocacy for services and support.

As the shadow minister for the prevention of domestic and family violence, I know how important mental health is. Having spoken to so many victims of domestic violence in support services throughout this state, I know that mental health can play a significant role in domestic violence situations. This has also been noted by the Domestic and Family Violence Death Review and Advisory Board, which is responsible for the systemic review of domestic and family violence deaths that have occurred in Queensland.

The board recently conducted a meeting which reviewed seven suicides of male perpetrators of domestic and family violence and two homicides of female victims that occurred between 2013 and 2016. All of these deaths occurred in the midst of a relationship separation where there was an identifiable prior history of intimate partner violence. The board found that mental health was a key factor in these deaths which occurred in a domestic violence context. The board noted that there were significant similarities across the cases, including: all male perpetrators had a prior history of mental illness and problematic substance misuse concerns, either professionally diagnosed or in the opinion of family and friends; four perpetrators had recent contact with mental health professionals in relation to domestic and family violence or suicide attempts or threats; and in seven of the nine deaths the deceased had come to the attention of formal services in relation to either domestic and family violence or suicidal threats or attempts. This shows that mental health played a key role in domestic violence

related deaths in Queensland in recent years. That means that when it comes to domestic violence we owe it to victims to have a robust mental health system which can provide support, especially to those with a prior history of mental illness.

Instead of introducing a bill that improves mental health services in Queensland, we have a bill that creates a number of contentious issues which put our mental health system at risk. We see issues relating to the Mental Health Review Tribunal still not addressed by this Labor government. Serious questions remain over the role and function of the Mental Health Review Tribunal and the part it plays in releasing dangerous people back into the community after short stints in secure facilities.

We have heard from the shadow minister that the tribunal is reported to be under investigation by the Crime and Corruption Commission over nepotism claims. Now we see this Labor government asking us to support a rushed amendment which would only serve to hide the dysfunction in the Mental Health Review Tribunal. I, too, have spoken directly with Sonia Anderson on the Mental Health Review Tribunal. Her bravery in the face of losing her daughter Bianca is nothing short of heroic. I want to reinforce the position put forward by the shadow minister and say that Sonia is not alone. Her case is one that raises serious questions about the conduct of the tribunal and the lack of confidence victims' families have in this process. Not only did Sonia lose her daughter through domestic violence; she was also let down by a mental health system that Labor is asking us to support. Where are the amendments to immediately advise family members when a patient escapes a secure facility? Where is the balance for community safety?

We have heard a lot from the minister about the clients but not a lot about victims. These amendments would only reinforce the secretive and one-sided nature of the tribunal in its current form. We cannot support legislation that does not address the underlying dysfunction and distrust of the Mental Health Review Tribunal process. Instead of introducing these rushed, ill-considered amendments, this Labor government should be investing in mental health services and restoring confidence in the system like the LNP did.