




Speech By
Jessica Pugh

MEMBER FOR MOUNT OMMANEY

Record of Proceedings, 2 May 2019

HEALTH AND WELLBEING QUEENSLAND BILL

 **Ms PUGH** (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (12.10 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the Health and Wellbeing Queensland Bill, which is aimed at tackling obesity, the greatest health challenge we face as a state. Like all members of this House, it is an issue that is close to my heart. I am sure that each member of this House wants to do all that they can to address this critical issue. Year to year our Health budget is roughly 30 per cent of the annual state budget. It is usually more than any other portfolio. That is staggering. We owe it to each and every Queenslanders to do whatever we can to address the health issues that underpin that expenditure.

Perhaps a reason that the issue is so difficult to address is that health is such a deeply personal issue. We confide in our doctors with complete trust, because in order to properly address our health issues we have to be nakedly honest with them, figuratively and literally. Sometimes those conversations can be challenging and uncomfortable, and the advice can be difficult to follow due to time constraints, budget restrictions and more. It is easy to tell somebody to prepare and cook more fresh fruit and vegies, and to go for a run three times a week. However, in reality for many Queenslanders finding the time and money is a real struggle. Sometimes it can feel that losing weight is mission impossible, and weight loss and health improvements can be a long, hard row to hoe, but the journey of one thousand miles begins with a single step—a step like this bill.

I thank the committee for their work on the bill, particularly the wonderful chair of the committee, Leanne Linard, who is a paragon of healthy living and an inspiration to all of us in this House. Leanne has inspired me to visit the parliamentary gym of a morning from time to time. The committee heard from some fantastic witnesses who were all committed to challenging the rising levels of obesity and weight gain. I very much enjoyed reading the perspectives of the different witnesses. One issue that certainly struck me as being key is judgement, both internal judgement of oneself and external judgement from our peers and others. At one of the committee hearings, a witness, Ms Hamill, said—

It is about being aware that there is language. What we are finding increasingly is that we talk about obesity, but in fact you have to talk about healthy weight, not obesity, because obesity now has negative connotations. We even find it with diabetes. Someone who is newly diagnosed with type 2 diabetes may not be quite so willing to talk about it because of the connotation that they got it because they eat too much, they are fat and they did not do the right thing. There are a whole pile of people with a whole range of reconditions who are going to get type 2 diabetes. If you are a male over 55 with any kind of history you have a one-in-seven chance of getting type 2 diabetes, yet three-quarters of the factors that make the difference are not your fault. There is this whole 'fault' discussion.

...

Throughout the world everyone is trying to find a polite way to talk about it to engage people positively but still get the point across ... It is very difficult to have a conversation with someone without seeming to place blame on people or them seeming to feel like it is blaming them. It is a challenge.

Witnesses spoke about the fact that weight issues can also result in comorbidities. We know that weight issues can cause type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and many other issues. That medical terminology that can sound very ugly and very confronting. It might make patients feel like they are getting an ever-increasing set of diagnoses, which, piled one on top of the other, can create the feeling

of an ever-increasing challenge that seems insurmountable. Of course, the easy and obvious answer is not to gain weight. However, most people will need to lose weight at some point in their lifetime, whether, like me, it is losing the extra weight after having a baby or dealing with the extra kilos that pile on during a period when you are preoccupied with other things. This legislation addresses that reality.

I think we can all agree that starting young with these conversations is critically important. The tuckshops in Queensland schools now have health ratings on all items to help kids and parents understand their choices. As a busy parent and a single mum, I love tuckshop Fridays and the awesome tuckshop team at Middle Park State School. I tell the kids that it is a treat for them, but truly it is more a treat for mummy because I do not have to make lunches. It creates an easy way of starting with my kids that conversation around healthy choices for their lunch. That is great because that conversation is hard to have and even at their young age it can feel laden with judgement. My daughter has always had an adventurous palate. She eats just about anything. On the other hand, my son loves cheese, pasta and cheesy pasta, with as little variety as possible. I have had to talk to him about why making healthy choices is important and what happens when all he eats is cheese and pasta.

I could go and on, as I am very excited about this bill. The bottom line is that we all know there is no silver bullet to fix this problem, otherwise it would be fixed by now. This bill puts the wellness of Queenslanders at the forefront of our health system. I commend the bill to the House.