




Speech By
Trevor Watts

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

Record of Proceedings, 2 May 2019

HEALTH AND WELLBEING QUEENSLAND BILL

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (5.39 pm): I rise to speak about the Health and Wellbeing Queensland Bill 2019. It is good not to be guillotined off the speaking list of a bill for once. I appreciate the opportunity to speak. What concerns me most about this organisation is that it actually achieves the purpose for which it is being set up, and that is to ensure that the health and wellbeing of Queenslanders is improved. In relation to these grants, I am interested to know what are the KPIs; what sorts of organisations are getting them; is it for an investigation into the latest fad; or are we actually looking at some practical, long-term outcomes that will address the issues that exist?

Living in Toowoomba, we get a different view of the world to living in Brisbane. We all know that the further away people live from the 4000 postcode the shorter their life will be. That is complex when we look at it. It is really important that as the Queensland parliament we understand those complexities and we put in place mechanisms to deal with them. I would urge the minister to look at basing some of the staff who will run this organisation in regional and remote Queensland because they will get a different view of the world if they live in that environment. The government should do that if their objective truly is to get the outcome for the Indigenous communities, those of low socio-economic status and the people who are most affected by many of these chronic diseases. We know where they live; they live in regional Queensland and they deserve to have programs that are put together and implemented by people who understand their complex needs.

We have heard people talk about themselves and various things that they have tried to do. I have been fit in my life and I have been unfit in my life, and I can say that the lifestyle factors of being a politician do not necessarily align with the objectives of this bill. I would encourage everybody to take seriously their commitment to their own health and welfare.

The research and the grants that are provided by this organisation truly can make a difference. Every taxpayer has the government's hand in their pocket to pay for the burden of our health in Queensland. We have a health system that is overstretched and that is in a bit of chaos at the moment. Ultimately, if we all take responsibility for our own health we can take pressure off the system. It would be a good thing to get advice, education and programs implemented out there.

I can support this bill because I believe in what it is trying to achieve overall. What concerns me about the bill is that we do not need another bureaucracy telling people who live in regional, remote and provincial Queensland how to lead their lives, especially when they are based in Brisbane where they can catch nice public transport that is not available to the people in regional Queensland, where they can access hospital services that are not available in regional Queensland and where they can access programs that are not available in regional Queensland. If the government really wants to address these issues, we know from research where they are occurring.

This organisation, once it is established, needs to take very seriously its obligation to the people who live outside of the south-east corner. That is not in any way suggesting that it neglect the people in the south-east corner and the importance of their health and wellbeing. However, they do have better access to facilities. People might say, 'Get on to us via the internet.' However, there are places in regional Queensland where they cannot download things on the internet because the connection is so slow. If we are coming up with the latest and smartest app to try to help people control their own obesity, it needs to be able to work in places where people do not have the kind of coverage we get in the CBD of Brisbane.

I think this is a good idea, but the proof of the pudding will be in its implementation. Will we have a lot of well-meaning bureaucrats advising people thousands of kilometres away how best they can lead their life despite an inability to access services that those bureaucrats take for granted, or will we have an organisation that is providing funding where the problems are occurring and providing opportunities for people from those regions to get the services they need?

The Heart of Australia is a good example of such an idea. It was put together by Rolf Gomes. It is a great idea. Because the Heart of Australia van travels to regional and remote Queensland, people who live in those areas can receive the same cardiac services that are available in the CBD of Brisbane. Already it has saved hundreds of lives of people who would otherwise not have got those exams or understood their cardiac situation; they simply would have died. Instead, the good doctor can assess them in the same way as he would in the CBD using the equipment on the van. He can go out there, make that assessment and provide the services that are taken for granted by people who live in the south-east corner.

Whilst I support this bill and its objectives in principle, if we are truly going to prevent the poor health outcomes of regional and remote Queensland and we are truly going to reduce the pressures for the Indigenous community and for those of low socio-economic status, then we need to make sure those facilities are available. I commend the bill, but I am really interested in making sure it serves regional Queensland.