




Speech By
Ali King

MEMBER FOR PUMICESTONE

Record of Proceedings, 14 October 2022

MENTAL HEALTH SELECT COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Ms KING** (Pumicestone—ALP) (3.22 pm): Our Mental Health Select Committee's inquiry into the opportunities to improve mental health services for Queenslanders was truly a work of heart. From Brisbane to Bundaberg and Hervey Bay, from the Gold Coast to Yarrabah, and from Cairns to Kingaroy, we heard from mental health advocates, community organisations, public and private mental health practitioners, faith groups and peak bodies. Most importantly, we heard from Queenslanders with lived experience of mental illness, suicidality, and alcohol and drug issues. Theirs are the voices I remember most vividly. I am so grateful for their honesty, courage, forthrightness and insights. Thank you for sharing your difficult experiences out of your commitment to improving mental health for Queenslanders.

From the young mental health advocates who told us bravely that mental health treatment had made their situations worse rather than better to the Kingaroy Chamber of Commerce President, Damien Martoo, who described his family's heartbreaking experiences after the suicide of his son, you made our report better. In particular, I will never forget our first site visit to Stepping Stone Clubhouse in the electorate of the member for Greenslopes. One clubhouse member, whose name I am ashamed to say I do not recall, loudly demanded to know why the committee had no members who identified as having a lived experience of mental illness. He questioned how we could properly do the work of the inquiry without that lived experience. I admit in that moment I was deeply taken aback. How could we as members of parliament take that vulnerable step of admitting that we have a lived experience of mental illness? His challenge was a stark reminder to me of the stigma that is still attached to mental illness. I am really grateful to that gentleman for helping me think more deeply about the importance of each of us as leaders in being honest and vulnerable and sharing our stories. In fact, each of us came to this work with our own stories, our own experiences and our own insights. Like so many, my own family has lost too many people too soon to mental illness and addiction. Others have recovered from mental illness and addiction and built good lives.

I thank the mental health professionals who shared their insights with us. They include thousands of people with lived experience who work as peer workers and whose roles in caring for Queenslanders in mental distress are so critical. Lived experience peer workers not only care with real empathy for their clients; they also bring hope every day by demonstrating to people in dark periods of their lives that recovery from even serious mental illness is possible and that those experiences can be a force for good. Peer work takes many forms, like the Red Cross Sisters for Change program run at the Townsville Women's Correctional Centre where the prisoners themselves receive mental health first-aid training. Positive experiences are reported by facility workers, staff members and the prisoners themselves. Recommendation No. 15 of our report regarding the delivery of AOD services into correctional facilities and, in particular, to people on remand is particularly close to my heart.

Across Queensland, our mental health workers told a remarkably consistent story. You told us again and again that mental health is the poor cousin of health care and that alcohol and other drug services are the poor cousins of mental health care. One submitter challenged our committee not to add yet another unheeded mental health report to the pile.

Today's release of the Better Care Together and Achieving Balance plans shows Queenslanders experiencing mental illness, their families, friends and carers and the professionals who support them that our inquiry has made a difference. The extra \$1.64 billion in funding for mental health and AOD services over the next five years shows it too. This record funding will add beds, enhance rehabilitation care, provide more community care, grow child and adolescent services, improve crisis response and suicide prevention, and fund dedicated services for First Nations Queenslanders. It has the potential to save the lives of some Queenslanders and give others back their lives. But it is not going to be easy.

Thank you to the member for Greenslopes for his leadership and to all members for their bipartisanship. I thought it was disappointing to hear the member for Mudgeeraba's contribution undermine that bipartisanship. Our mental health inquiry was the first of its kind to provide a trauma informed response. I particularly congratulate the member for Macalister for her advocacy. I commend our report to the House.