




Speech By
Hon. Leeanne Enoch

MEMBER FOR ALGESTER

Record of Proceedings, 31 March 2022

COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND SERVICES COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Hon. LM ENOCH** (Algester—ALP) (Minister for Communities and Housing, Minister for Digital Economy and Minister for the Arts) (3.49 pm): Ahead of the 2020 state election, the Palaszczuk government committed to hold a parliamentary inquiry into social isolation and loneliness. The Community Support and Services Committee has now conducted this very important inquiry. The committee undertook extensive consultation over a five-month period which included 10 public hearings and a review of 196 submissions by community members and key stakeholders. During the inquiry the committee heard that the issues of social isolation and loneliness are complex and can affect the physical and mental health and wellbeing of many people. The final report was delivered late last year.

The Palaszczuk government takes this issue very seriously, and its response will take into account the findings and recommendations. I take this opportunity to again thank the Community Support and Services Committee, led by the member for Mansfield, for its hard work in reviewing this issue so thoroughly on behalf of all Queenslanders. I also thank everyone who had their say. It has demonstrated again just how important this issue is to Queenslanders.

The timing of the inquiry meant it could consider the impacts of COVID-19. It is clear that the pandemic contributed to loneliness and isolation for many people. The Australian Bureau of Statistics reported that loneliness was the personal stressor most experienced by Australians during the height of the pandemic. One in five people experienced feelings of loneliness and social isolation. We know that Queenslanders such as seniors, people with disability and their carers, people with mental illness and young people are the most vulnerable to social isolation and loneliness, and these groups felt the effects of COVID-19.

We are fortunate that we had and continue to have services and supports that encourage and increase social and community connections. At the forefront of this is our network of more than 125 Queensland government funded neighbourhood and community centres. The COVID-19 pandemic further demonstrated the value of these centres that are the backbone of their local communities. Many of the neighbourhood and community centres adapted and embraced technology throughout the COVID-19 pandemic so they could continue service delivery and support their local communities. That is why the Palaszczuk government has supported each of Queensland's funded neighbourhood and community centres with an additional \$20,000, to help respond to increased demand for services as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are currently working with neighbourhood and community centres and their peak body, Neighbourhood Centres Queensland, to make these centres even stronger and more responsive to their local communities.

I was also pleased recently to announce that the Palaszczuk government has delivered on its commitment to employ Neighbourhood and Care Army Connect workers in 15 communities across the state. They will build on the legacy of the Care Army by linking volunteers with organisations, including

neighbourhood and community centres, in their local areas, helping Queenslanders be more engaged and connected with their communities. I am proud that the Palaszczuk government has provided \$1.7 million towards this important initiative and partnered with Volunteering Queensland to deliver it.

We have also been supporting our frontline housing and homelessness services to work directly with people to help develop tenancy and support connections. The Queensland Housing and Homelessness Action Plan includes a commitment to stronger, safer and more inclusive communities across our state. Action 10 commits to building social inclusion and participation by leveraging community infrastructure, including neighbourhood and community centres, to provide access to support services, make art more accessible in the community and provide spaces for creation of art and social activities.

Additionally, our very popular My Home Awards were expanded this year to recognise public housing tenants who are building social connections. The new community and culture category has provided an opportunity for public housing tenants to share how they connect with or celebrate their community. This could be through volunteering, supporting neighbours, celebrating cultural events or other ways to connect. I look forward to announcing the winners of those awards very soon.

Social isolation and loneliness is a complex issue that impacts many communities globally. The Palaszczuk government will continue its important work with sector partners on initiatives aimed at preventing and responding to social isolation and loneliness in communities across Queensland. I again commend the committee for the incredible work it has done in this particular inquiry. As we went through the pandemic and as we continue to ensure that our cultural identity as Queenslanders is intact, this work and the work around social isolation and loneliness will become incredibly important. I look forward to being able to update the House in future months with regard to our response to this inquiry.