



Speech By  
**Ros Bates**


**MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA**

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Record of Proceedings, 14 October 2022

## **MENTAL HEALTH SELECT COMMITTEE**

### **Report, Motion to Take Note**

 **Ms BATES** (Mudgeeraba—LNP) (3.17 pm): I am most grateful to be able to make a contribution to the Mental Health Select Committee report. There are plenty of different views in this place about many different things. However, I know one thing we all agree on is this: mental health is a very serious problem. We will not find a Queenslanders who does not know someone who has suffered at the hands of it, and that goes for all of us in here as well. As the report found, almost one in two Queenslanders experience a mental health illness in their lifetime. In fact, in any 12-month period in Queensland approximately 20 per cent of adults and 14 per cent of children and young people experience a mental illness. We also know that Queensland consistently records suicide rates above the national average.

Mental illness does not discriminate. Whether it is a mum battling postnatal depression, a veteran struggling to transition to civilian life grappling with crippling anxiety or PTSD, a professional hiding alcohol abuse or a teenager with a debilitating eating disorder, it does not discriminate. We all recognise that and so this debate is an important one. I know my colleagues from the opposition on the committee engaged in good faith throughout the inquiry and I thank them for their contribution on behalf of the opposition. While I am on my feet I would also like to thank all those who took the time to provide written submissions and appear before the committee. Your contributions are valued.

Before I move on it is important to remember how we arrived at this juncture. A very brave mental health commissioner laid it all on the table, explaining how the sector was at breaking point. The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists explained that the mental health system was on the brink of collapse. They pointed out that when it comes to mental health funding per head of population Queensland sat at the bottom of the list. There were pleas from all corners of the community that help was needed—from patients, parents, clinicians, advocates—and it was unanimous. I am proud to say that on this side of the chamber we backed those calls.

This inquiry was a necessary step but it cannot be a wasted one. Included in the recommendations of the report are genuine evidence based ideas that the government must consider and implement. I appreciate that it is not going to be an overnight fix but the government must use the momentum of this report to make tangible changes quickly. None of us in this place can let the pleas we heard from the sector, patients and their families be in vain. Just because a report has been written does not mean that the job is over. I say to the government: the job has just begun.

Recently, the opposition was contacted by someone who had tried to call Queensland Health's mental health access line, which should connect patients to public mental health services. After going through the automated section of the call, the individual's call was placed to the Redcliffe Hospital. The call was made midmorning during business hours. The phone rang out. Nobody picked up. For someone who might be at a low ebb or at their lowest ebb, that hurts. That is a small example and it might be an isolated case, but it might not be. It is a small glimpse that shows that mental health services in this state are not up to scratch. The government cannot let people fall through the cracks.

It is unfortunate that, given all of the work of the committee, the attention by the government seems to have been on one key recommendation. That recommendation was of course 1b), which the government used to slap an increase on payroll tax for businesses. I wish that the government jumped at the opportunity to rapidly implement some of the report's other recommendations as quickly as it did this one. Mental health is a sensitive issue. It is as sensitive as it comes. I was disappointed because it was obvious that the government had used this sensitive issue as a Trojan Horse to cover for its inability to manage a budget. The solution to tax Queenslanders in the middle a cost-of-living crisis will exacerbate the very problem this committee sought to solve. Queenslanders are already under enough pressure and a new tax would only make things tougher in difficult times. A good government would acknowledge that but they have not. Properly funding and resourcing to the mental health sector is critical. However, introducing a new payroll tax would force small, medium and large businesses to pass on their costs to Queenslanders. Every Queenslanders will pay. I repeat: every Queenslanders will pay, even those suffering from mental health illnesses and those who can ill afford it.

Queenslanders deserve a world-class health system no matter where they live and nowhere is that more apparent than in the rural, regional and remote areas of Queensland where the incidence of mental health illness is greatest. We need to ensure that everyone with a mental health illness is looked after.