




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR NOOSA

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PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT

Youth, Early Intervention

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (2.46 pm): It is increasingly obvious in multiple realms that there are issues surrounding early intervention, especially with our youth. Prevention is key, whether in relation to crime, mental and physical health, school attendance, or disruptive behaviours. Our home environment is the first touchstone for interventions, with the next safety net our schools, family and friends and our communities. With increasing numbers experiencing housing insecurity, there is also instability from mental health and addictions in households. The frustrations of communities that have individuals sleeping rough with their children and who are offered accommodation yet refuse is just one example of where no agency can force a resolution, which, in itself, is early intervention. Currently it appears that interventions only occur once a crime has been committed which, in many instances, is already far too late for these children.

From our schools, reports from teachers that they have increasingly become disempowered to provide parameters for our youngest Queenslanders is of concern. With no ability to prevent disengaged students walking out of class when they choose to, the ongoing time demands of those displaying antisocial or problematic behaviours, and a system that does not provide constant whole-of-life monitoring and mandatory pathways to address this is creating a domino effect of teacher attrition rates and student absenteeism. Teachers and parents of these students need greater support and options beyond fragmented delivery and oversubscribed programs that are mostly voluntary. With vast volumes of reports, papers and inquiries identifying early intervention as key in prevention—whether behavioural, mental health or criminality—we need to ask ourselves why are we so late in the early equation?

There is also the question of why recommendations from these bodies appear to fall by the wayside, or are only partially implemented, including geographically. Widening gaps are being experienced across the state. Budgetary constraints are often part of the excuse; however, let us look at what it costs to not intervene early with our children to prevent disengagement and the resulting trauma. Lamb and Huo from the University of Melbourne calculated both the lost opportunity and the fiscal and social cost, which included lost tax payments, increased public expenditure on criminal justice and corrections, health and support programs and welfare. These costs did not include things that are harder to quantify such as the provision of housing or care for young people, or the considerable economic costs borne by non-government and philanthropic organisations; nor do they include the intergenerational cost of disadvantage. Prioritising early intervention in budgets ultimately saves not only dollars, it saves lives. Let's ensure budget considerations are made at every level of government to move beyond the cost of an election cycle to one that expands a lifetime.