



Speech By  
**Amy MacMahon**

**MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE**

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Record of Proceedings, 21 August 2024

**MOTION**

**Mental Health Services**



**Dr MacMAHON** (South Brisbane—Grn) (4.29 pm): I move—

That this House:

1. notes that:
  - (a) every Queenslander has the right to high-quality mental health care, regardless of their income level or where they live; and
  - (b) in 2022, the federal Labor government halved the number of Medicare subsidised psychology sessions from 20 to 10;
2. calls on the Queensland government to tax big corporations to:
  - (a) ensure every Queenslander can access 20 free psychology sessions each year; by
  - (b) directly employing additional clinical and registered psychologists in the public health system.

Queenslanders have been through a heck of a lot during the first half of this decade. We have been through a pandemic with rolling lockdowns, uncertainty and economic instability. We have had spiralling inflation driven by corporate profits and wars in the Ukraine and Gaza. We have been through natural disasters such as the 2022 floods. We are seeing a genocide in Gaza right now. The cost of rent, mortgages, food and health care is at crippling levels. One in five Australian adults have experienced a mental disorder in the past 12 months. There is increased risk for people with a disability, First Nations adults, people in insecure housing, new parents and people on low incomes. In Queensland, the prevalence of psychological distress is at least 1.5 times higher in the most disadvantaged areas.

In the 2023 mental health report to the nation, 59 per cent of people said that their mental health was being impacted by the rising cost of living and 45 per cent of people said that their mental health was being impacted by the housing crisis. The cost-of-living crisis and the housing crisis are making people sick. To make matters worse, cost-of-living pressures are preventing people from accessing the mental health care they need. Some 21 per cent of people said that cost is a barrier to accessing care such as going to a psychologist. Some 44 per cent of psychologists surveyed by the APS said that cost was a key barrier for patient access.

With people struggling with the rising cost of rent, mortgage payments, groceries and transport, how many people can afford to spare \$100, \$200 or more on a gap payment to see a psychologist? In a wealthy state like Queensland, it is unacceptable that thousands of people are unable to access the health care they need. It is not enough to say that mental health is a federal responsibility. The state government can, and needs to, step in.

Everyone here will have someone in their life who is struggling with their mental health and, in fact, many people here have been open about their own struggles with mental illness. In my late 20s, the combination of insecure and stressful work, a relationship breakdown and my mother having a

stroke opened up a dark hole under my life. There were times when I wondered if I would make it through the night. The support of my family and friends and having something meaningful to do with my life, as well as the support of psychologists and psychiatrists, helped me through. After the car crash a few months ago that rattled my body and my brain, I felt a dark hole opening up again and I was able to connect with mental health practitioners who shepherded me through recovery so I could get back on my feet and return to work. I cannot thank them enough.

Everyone should be able to access the mental health care they need, but we know that this is not the case. Our mental health system has been underfunded and thousands of people cannot access or afford the care that they need. In the 2022 Mental Health Select Committee inquiry, the sector was calling for an increase in funding of between \$650 million and \$900 million each year. The government's response was to take the lowest estimate of what it would take to fix our mental health system and slash it by about half, granting additional funding of just \$350 million in the first year and \$520 million in this financial year. The Greens have been proud to support the mental health levy but it is clearly not enough.

At the federal level, in 2022 the federal Labor government cut the 20 subsidised psychology sessions available under the Better Access scheme to just 10 sessions. Many people said that getting access to 20 sessions had been life-changing and now people are missing out on crucial treatment. I have heard from both patients and practitioners that 10 sessions with a psychologist just is not enough. The Greens will make mental health a priority and bring back 20 free psychology sessions for every Queenslanders who needs it, and Queensland can afford this. We are a wealthy state and, by properly increasing mining royalties, we could fund 200 new public health clinics across the state and give Queenslanders access to free GPs, psychologists and allied health workers.

Alongside this, we need to address the drivers of mental ill health in Queensland such as housing insecurity, rising living costs, climate-driven extreme weathers and social isolation, which is why we have been fighting to cap grocery prices, have a rent freeze, have more social housing, have fully funded schools and have initiatives like free school meals and free school sport for kids.

*(Time expired)*