



Youth Mental Health

House of Representatives

2 November 2011

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I rise to update the House on the government's historic mental health reforms and the recent announcement that Newcastle will be the site for a new Headspace centre to support young people in my electorate.

According to the Hunter Mental Health Institute, approximately 6,000 young Novocastrians aged between 12 and 25 will experience depression at a disorder level, with another 2½ thousand young people experiencing serious anxiety problems.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that 20,100 young people between 14 and 25 years call Newcastle home. That is 15.6 per cent of our population, two per cent higher than the national average. Young people are the most at-risk group, and in Newcastle we are fortunate to have lots of young people. The data shows that one in four young Australians has a mental health disorder and suicide continues to be the leading cause of death for those aged 15 to 24 years of age. Sadly, gay, lesbian, trans and intersex people, as well as Aboriginal youth, figure higher in these statistics of human tragedy. This is definitely unacceptable.

Health service deliverers and not-for-profit groups in my region continue to assist in the wellbeing of our communities. I would like to congratulate Wesley LifeForce and Lifeline Newcastle and Hunter for holding the 2011 Suicide Memorial Day by Newcastle Harbour last Friday. It was a beautiful ceremony to remember those lives lost to suicide.

Last Monday I met with students at the University of Newcastle to discuss their experiences with existing youth mental health services and to find out what they would like to see in the future. They told me how important it is to have designated 'youth specific' services—and that is of course what a Headspace is. As 75 per cent of all mental illnesses begin before the age of 25, the need for early intervention services aimed at young people is crucial. I congratulate ORYGEN Youth Health's clinical director and 2010's Australian of the Year, Professor Patrick McGorry, for his advocacy for many years for these dedicated youth services. Pat is a former Novocastrian and a frequent and very welcome visitor to Newcastle. While he has always understood the clinical need for dedicated youth services, anyone who once was young knows how much young people need to be with other

young people when accessing personal services. They understand the value-adding that can be achieved by involvement of peer groups and by enhancing that sense of having somewhere to fit in and somewhere to belong. The current problem young Australians face is that only 30 per cent of those who require help for mental health care end up actually obtaining access to it. So, as well as increasing the number of Headspace around Australia, the federal Labor government understands that in the 21st century we need to use the most modern methods of communication to access and stay in touch with young people who are increasingly, if not exclusively, relying on social media these days.

So last Monday Minister Butler also launched eheadspace: one-on-one professional chat services and dedicated phone lines accessible at times appropriate to the lifestyles of young people—and, if you have any in your family, you know that means during the night when we are all asleep. This has come about through extensive consultation with young people, and I congratulate Minister Butler on his efforts and on these wonderful initiatives.

This government is delivering a significant mental health agenda directed at early intervention and addressing the shortfall in services for young people, just as we promised to do. We have also set up the National Mental Health Commission to monitor our nation's mental health and the progress of our reforms.

It is not good enough to spend money and not see any outcomes; and the Mental Health Commission will account to us and for us for the actual outcomes and achievements. Our agenda, though, is to assist the happiness, wellbeing and the health of our future generations—and the Headspace Newcastle, eheadspace and a dedicated phone line for young people is a great start and a great way to do that.