

Second Reading

The Hon. MELINDA PAVEY (Parliamentary Secretary) [3.21 p.m.], on behalf of the Hon. Michael Gallacher: I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

It gives me pleasure to support the Mental Health Commission Bill 2011. The New South Wales Liberals and The Nationals were elected in March with a strong commitment to make the delivery of quality mental health services a high priority. Mental health reform was always a major priority for the New South Wales Liberals and The Nationals in opposition and is now even more so now that we are in government. Through the Mental Health Commission Bill 2011 the Government has put forward one of the most important reforms in the field of mental health in the State's history. This legislation will improve the mental health system, and the mental health and wellbeing of people in New South Wales. I commend the actions the Minister for Mental Health, Kevin Humphreys, has taken in establishing the Mental Health Commission. This legislation will make a real difference to the lives of people with mental illness and our community as a whole. Around 1.1 million people in New South Wales live with mental illness, with just under 200,000 suffering from a severe mental illness.

Mental illness can have a devastating impact on an individual in aspects such as health, social exclusion and quality of life. The mortality rate for people with a mental illness is 2.5 times higher than it is for those who do not have such an illness. As the Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Health I have a particular interest in how mental health services are delivered across this State and, in particular, in the challenges we have in ensuring that regional communities have fair and equitable access to services. The Minister shares this interest and has a very good understanding of the mental health challenges in his electorate of Barwon. The Mental Health Taskforce was charged with consulting, researching and advising on what should be in legislation to establish a Mental Health Commission to respond to the specific mental health needs of New South Wales. This bill is the culmination of an extensive consultation process, in which regional New South Wales played a central role.

The taskforce consulted widely and directly with people with mental illness, families, carers, clinicians, service providers, government agencies, the non-government sector and the general community. Importantly, it ensured that people in regional centres in the north, south and west of New South Wales were able to participate in and contribute to these consultations. The taskforce hosted forums in the important regional centres of Dubbo, Wagga Wagga, Nowra and Coffs Harbour as well as an online survey so that we could hear from people beyond those centres and ensure that we had an even wider reach into the community. The contributions of the people of regional New South Wales formed an integral part in the formation of the bill. The taskforce heard loud and clear from its community consultations that the commission must ensure the views of and issues of significance to Aboriginal, culturally and linguistically diverse and regional communities are understood and reflected in its work.

The needs of regional communities were a consistent and strong message heard by the taskforce during the statewide consultations. One size does not fit all and the commission will need to be aware of these regional concerns. Clause 10 (4) requires that the commission's Mental Health Consumer Advisory Council includes representatives of people living in regional and remote New South Wales, as well as representatives of culturally and

linguistically diverse communities and Aboriginal people. This is to reflect the different sorts of mental health service delivery models required for these groups. Clause 12 (2) (e) requires that the commission, in exercising its functions, is to take into account the particular views and needs of different sections of the community, including these groups.

As this House would be aware, ensuring that the needs of women are considered in developing and delivering policy is a matter close to my heart. This will be a critical matter for the commission to consider. The bill requires that the commission, in exercising all its functions, will engage and consult with people who have a mental illness, their families and carers, as well as the broader community. It will need to listen to everyone, and have regard to issues relevant to specific groups—for example, the often hidden problem of postnatal depression, the difficulties many women face in accessing perinatal mental health services and the battles that women with serious mental health problems have in raising a family. These are issues that this Government is committed to addressing, and issues that I am sure the commission will be looking at closely.

I expect the commission, in undertaking its functions, to consider the needs of the full range of population and age groups, including, of course, the needs of women. Establishing a Mental Health Commission will allow us to give issues such as these the close consideration that they deserve. The fact that this Government has put improving mental health care front and centre demonstrates our commitment to serious and meaningful reform, and to improving the lives of people with mental illness. Having Kevin Humphries as Minister for Mental Health has been instrumental in our meeting our commitment to put forward legislation to establish a New South Wales Mental Health Commission based on best practice models from around the world. This legislation will allow us to drive reform and improve outcomes for patients, to be responsible for allocating resources to where they are most needed through the most appropriate models of care, and to be a champion for mental health across government and the community. I strongly believe that this will be one of the most important mental health reforms in the history of New South Wales.

The Mental Health Commission Bill 2011 delivers on our commitment to establish an independent Mental Health Commission that will be a champion for mental health, that will ensure better accountability of mental health services and the use of mental health funds, and that will nurture innovation in the approach we take to mental health. The Government's reform agenda is about getting the right structures that will deliver better health and mental health care. Already we have taken giant steps to address the problems in the New South Wales mental health system. In our first budget we delivered the largest increase in funding for mental health in the State's history. I am proud to be part of a Liberal-Nationals Government committed to improving services and outcomes for mental health patients, their families and carers across New South Wales. This commission is being established to deliver strategic direction for mental health in this State to ensure services are appropriately designed and targeted and to review, monitor and report to the Government, the Parliament and the public on how funds are being used.

The first role of the commission will be to prepare for the Government's consideration a draft strategic plan for the mental health system in New South Wales. This does not just mean the health system but the full range of services and supports provided across government, including housing, education and those in the criminal justice system. For too long the Government has operated with a silo mentality. We want to reach out to all agencies so they can have an input and be part of the solution. Consistent with the new spirit of cooperation and collaboration the Government wants to instil in care for the mentally ill, the commission will develop the plan in genuine consultation with government agencies and service

providers. The commission will take an holistic approach across government to addressing the whole-of-life needs of people with mental illness. It has a broad scope in that it deals not only with mental health issues but with related diseases and disorders.

The commission will focus on systemic issues rather than duplicate the functions of existing entities that respond to individual cases or complaints. It has a strategic capacity and leadership role with the ability to make recommendations about having a more integrated service system. It will have the ability to drive service quality improvement as well as report on performance. It stands to be an authentic champion for those with mental illness, maintaining strong ongoing connections with people touched by mental illnesses and other key stakeholders across government and the community. Furthermore, it can educate us all about mental illness with the aim of stopping the stigma, and quite frankly the discrimination, that people affected by mental illness often experience. Mental health is an area that is too important to be politicised and I thank those opposite for their support of the bill and the Government in its effort to improve mental health services in New South Wales.

Before congratulating the Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Healthy Lifestyles, and Minister for Western New South Wales, the Hon. Kevin Humphries, on this landmark bill it is important to recognise the role this House has played over the past 15 to 20 years in establishing mental illness as an issue within the community. We must acknowledge former Liberal member the Hon. Brian Pezzutti, CSC, RFD, who was chair of a general purpose select committee that released a seminal report into mental health. It was a landmark report within government in Australia that made people stand up, listen and take notice. It was a major contribution from this Chamber to the mental health area across Australia. The Hon. Brian Pezzutti and the secretariat, which included Bayne McKissock, were instrumental in producing that report. The report started a conversation that the community at large needed to have. It is with great pleasure that I present the second reading speech on the Mental Health Commission Bill 2011 and congratulate everyone who assisted in its delivery, particularly the Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Healthy Lifestyles, and Minister for Western New South Wales, the Hon. Kevin Humphries.