

DR MARISA PATERSON MLA SPEECH

30 November 2021

Petition – Eating disorder speech

Start

Thank you, Madame Speaker.

In early August a local community member, Ms Kate Steen, wrote to me, asking that I sponsor a petition. Her email read as follows:

I'm a 34-year-old mum, I live in your electorate, I'm a lawyer and, last Thursday, I was diagnosed at the local Medical Centre with anorexia. I was referred to the Eating Disorders Program run by ACT Health in Phillip. When I rang them this week, I was told I couldn't be given an estimated wait time but that it could be up to a year, and I'm nervous about waiting that long because I don't know if I will have the resolve for recovery in a year...

It's a time critical issue and unfortunately moments of clarity in the journey are too few and far between. The system has to be positioned to take people in as soon as they reach out for help, because it's such a brief, shiny moment. Today I'm motivated to recover. I hope I feel the same tomorrow. There's a lot of tomorrows in 12 months.

Similarly, I've had other community members – parents of young women suffering eating disorders – engage with me in despair of their situation. I thank everyone who has shared their story with me, and I note those who are here in the Assembly today – thank you, and I am dedicated to working with you to ensure that your families receive the care and support that you need.

I commend the ACT Government's commitment to improving the services and supports for people living with eating disorders in our community. I'm pleased that there's recognition of the need to do more.

I welcome the current tender for the design of a residential care facility which will provide a home-like environment with intensive nutritional and psychological treatment to help establish a safe, healthy relationship with food and exercise. I commend the ACT Government on its inclusion of people with lived experience in the design process.

Eating disorders affect approximately four in every 100 people in Australia – that's roughly 17,000 Canberrans.

What is equally concerning is that the mortality rate for people with eating disorders is up to six times higher than for those who do not have an eating disorder. This figure particularly reflects people who suffer anorexia nervosa.

Anorexia nervosa is both a psychological and medical condition, and can affect anyone, of any age, any gender, any socio-economic demographic, cultural background or stage of life.

According to the Butterfly Foundation, eating disorders can result from many different causes including discrimination, trauma, exposure to violence and abuse, pressure to conform to social or cultural stereotypes, or desire for sports performance.

Given that anorexia nervosa is both a medical and psychological condition, the disease requires a multidisciplinary approach involving medical doctors, psychiatrists, psychologists, nurses, dieticians and physiotherapists/physiologists. Our support systems need to recognise and fully reflect that anorexia is a treatable disease and, as such, provide environments of hope to enable people to recover and thrive.

As highlighted by Kate's email to me back in August, we need to do more to provide timely, accessible eating disorder support for people in our community.

Madame Speaker, the 741 signatories to this petition I have sponsored call on the ACT Government to:

- Update the Assembly about progress on the ACT Government's 'Eating Disorder Program Statement' and refresh the Statement;
- Detail the actions that have been taken to improve access for more patients to the ACT's Eating Disorders Program; and
- Commit to reviewing demand and reducing the backlog to provide appropriate eating disorder resourcing and support.

I look forward to hearing more, and to remain closely involved in this matter to ensure positive outcomes for our community.

Eating disorders are an absolutely debilitating experience for everyone involved, and for too many people in our community. We need to do more.

Ends