

**DR MARISA PATERSON MLA SPEECH**  
**Private Members Business – Adjournment Speech**  
**Wednesday 10 February 2021**

**Federal Government promise to build an  
Eating Disorder Clinic in the ACT**

**Start**

At the last federal election, as part of a \$52-million-dollar health package for the ACT, Senator Seselja announced a \$13.5 million-dollar Eating Disorder residential treatment centre in the ACT.

Currently, Canberra families who require residential support for an eating disorder must leave the ACT for treatment.

Whilst federal funds for Senator Seselja's announcement were allocated for the 2021-2022 budget, the Canberra community has not yet heard any details about the project. There appears to have been no further comment at all from the Federal Government on this matter since the 2019 election.

Experiences of eating disorders can be very complex for the individual affected, and very distressing for family and friends who watch a loved one's battle – often over a prolonged period of time.

The promised centre for eating disorders in the ACT will provide a critical, and much needed, service.

It is for this reason that I am speaking today to hold the federal government to account, and to ensure that they fulfill their promise to our community.

Eating disorders are common. Too common. And not enough is being done.

Research shows that eating disorders - and disordered eating - impact between 4 to 16 percent of the population, and that this number continues to rise.

In 2012, research found that 63% of those with an eating disorder in Australia were women.

However, specific disorders such as binge eating are experienced by males and females alike.

The average age for the onset of an eating disorder is between 12 and 25 years of age. Many disorders disproportionately impact young people.

Given the co-morbidity of eating disorders with other mental health issues, treatment can be complex and long-term.

However, a 2015 report by the Butterfly Foundation and Deloitte Access Economics highlights that only between 5 and 15 percent of people receive treatment for their eating disorder.

As is common with mental health and addiction issues, there are significant barriers to seeking help.

But one of the major barriers in the ACT is not that families don't want help; it's that help doesn't exist here in the form of a residential facility.

Severe eating disorders can require very specialised, long term medical treatment to effectively save an individual's life.

As a mum of three children who are about to enter into their teenage years, including two daughters, I feel enormous compassion for those families who grapple with eating disorders on a daily basis.

Parents I have spoken to are distraught as to how to support their child, or children.

I would like to read a quote from a father whose daughter has experienced a severe eating disorder.

He said:

*'Eating disorders are devastating in that none of us really fully understand or can rationalise the problem. The problem persists over an extended period of time and the stresses placed on the family are immense as you watch your loved one deteriorate before your eyes with almost no support until the disease is life threatening. In our case, our eldest daughter had to leave home to protect herself from the toxic environment that evolved as a result of the constant pressures in the family environment that come from an eating disorder'.*

One of the most striking features for me, personally, in my discussions with people in the local community about eating disorders, is how deeply it impacts the entire family.

Many of us take our family mealtimes for granted.

But for some in our community it is a deeply distressing daily battle.

This is why it is so important that the Federal Government deliver on their promised Eating Disorder Clinic in the ACT.

I encourage anyone who is grappling with an eating disorder – individually, or as a family member or friend – to contact the Butterfly Foundation National Helpline on 1800 33 4673 (ED HOPE) or to visit [butterfly.org.au](http://butterfly.org.au)

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