

Legislative Council

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DRUG TREATMENT CENTRES

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON (15:09): I seek leave to make a brief explanation before asking the Minister for Mental Health and Substance Abuse a question on treatment centres and anti-social behaviour by drug users.

Leave granted.

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON: During the year the Minister for Mental Health and Substance Abuse has been asked a number of questions on certain practices within the drug and alcohol sector, namely by the Hon. Dennis Hood, around SAVIVE and the AIDS Council. Also we raised, jointly, an issue about the Hutt Street Centre and anti-social behaviour and public injecting drug use in March of this year. I commend the police force for an increased presence around Hutt Street Centre since then, to the point where it has issued a flyer to residents and business owners which states:

Police from the Adelaide Local Service Area are seeking your assistance in addressing crimes, in particular behavioural offences that occur in the vicinity of Hutt Street and South Terrace, Adelaide. To develop an appropriate response to this matter, it is important that police fully canvass residents and business owners that live within the area to gain a full appreciation of issues.

I would like to lend my support to and congratulate the police force for taking such a proactive stance on this. Recent feedback indicates that a police presence has greatly reduced the amount of anti-social behaviour being experienced. However, in the last few weeks it has been on the rise again and I have again been informed that there is a problem around Hutt Street, where syringes are being inappropriately disposed of in the vacant allotment next to the centre. The 'sharps' containers within the centre are full every day and are emptied every day, but still there are syringes being disposed of in the vacant allotment beside the centre.

In addition, I have also now been approached by a number of outraged residents who live in the same street where Warrinilla is located. They say that in the morning, because of measures that have been taken in the centre (basically a cage being put in to herd drug users into the centre to be able to pick up their needles and their medication), drug users are gathering outside Warrinilla and intimidating, abusing and assaulting residents of that street. They have said it has been gradually getting worse for the last 18 months.

There is no police presence around Warrinilla. In fact, I met a couple of residents the other day, in front of Warrinilla, who were dressed in suits and ties and looking like respectable people. A security guard came down and stood at the entrance of Warrinilla with his arms folded and his legs spread and basically asked us to move on. We were nothing more than reasonable citizens standing there having a conversation on the footpath, but we were not allowed to stand there and have a conversation. The questions that I have for the minister are:

1. Given the number of times that there have been complaints made about services under the minister's portfolio, when is the minister going to take

control of and manage the services that are funded by the state government with taxpayers' money to ensure that the wider community is not negatively impacted on by such programs that she obviously approves and funds?

2. When is the minister going to take action against the service providers, as at no time are the concerns of the residents taken into consideration or investigated? The service providers, when they are noticing a problem, should be requesting a police presence in those areas to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the residents and the surrounding residents so that they do not have to endure the property crime and personal crime that is occurring.
3. When will the minister take steps to ensure that the wider community is protected from some of the services and the programs that she is implementing?

The PRESIDENT: I remind the honourable member that there were a number of explanations and opinions in her questions. The honourable member should keep her explanations shorter and her opinions out of her questions. The minister will disregard those opinions when responding.

The Hon. G.E. GAGO (Minister for Environment and Conservation, Minister for Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Minister Assisting the Minister for Health) (15:14): I thank the honourable member for her important questions. This is the first that I have heard of complaints around Warrinilla. As usual, I invite honourable members here, if they have any concerns, to contact me and give me the details of any problems that they or their constituents are having, to give me an opportunity to address those issues. However, yet again, what we see is grandstanding going on here. The honourable member has not raised—

Members interjecting:

The PRESIDENT: Order!

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: That is what this is about. The honourable member has not raised this issue with me before. To the best of my knowledge this is the first time I have received a complaint from the honourable member, even though I have invited her on many occasions to raise these issues but, no, she likes to get in here and grandstand. I am very happy and responsive as always to investigate any alleged incidents, and I invite the member to give me details of any alleged incidents. As always, I have them promptly followed up. I encourage her to give me the details or information that would enable me to follow this up in a detailed and thorough way, rather than just grandstanding here in parliament.

The honourable member has given a good example of how incredibly thorough we are at monitoring those sites. The member talks about loitering and stalking around the streets, and what happens? The very measures we put in place to ensure the safety of the community actually work: a security guard approaches these stalkers and asks them to move on. She comes into the chamber and gives a very good example of our system working.

These people work very hard to manage the services and the flow through of clients at those sites. They get their treatments and services quickly and promptly and are moved out quickly. They are not encouraged to gather or congregate and when they do, as we see, security guards are there to address that. The member has given the chamber a very good example of the system working extremely well, while the local member and her colleague are stalking around trying to collect evidence out on the street. Truly, it is pathetic!

I have mentioned in this place before the importance of the clean needle program. It is about helping to reduce the spread of blood-borne viruses amongst injecting drug users and the risk of blood-borne viruses being transferred into the broader community. This is a very important service. It is not just about handing out clean needles but also about educating and providing information about safe injecting and the dangers of sharing injecting equipment. It is about an opportunity to provide information about safe disposal practices, including needle clean up, and about providing referrals for the people who use these services to other treatment services, and it enables us to use that as an opportunity to refer these clients on to other health services and other supporting legal and social services.

I have said here before, but it is worth saying again, that clean needle programs are estimated to have saved between \$2.4 billion and \$7.7 billion in downstream health care costs in a 10-year period from 1991 to 2000. Cost savings include the prevention of an estimated 25,000 HIV infections, 21,000 hepatitis C infections and 4,500 deaths attributable to HIV. Those figures are for 2002 and come from the commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing. These are the sorts of cost savings in terms of human life, suffering and economic burden to the community that this sort of program benefits.

Also, the 2004 International Review of the Clean Needle Program found that participation in such a program results in improved entry to primary health care services, higher rates of enrolment in drug-treatment programs, higher retention rates in drug-treatment programs, reduction rates of injecting and, based on information from the World Health Organisation, overall improvement of quality of life. In terms of the safe disposal of injecting equipment, a big component of the Clean Needle Program is safe and timely removal of injecting equipment from circulation.

Just as the vast majority of people in general do not litter, most people who inject drugs dispose of their injecting equipment in a responsible and safe way. The Clean Needle Program places a strong emphasis on safe disposal by providing information and education to clients on appropriate disposal of injection equipment, providing 'sharps' disposal containers and waste disposal facilities. If any honourable member identifies an issue or problem with that, all they need do is ring either the department or my office and it will be addressed immediately, rather than sitting around here waiting until question time to grandstand before doing anything about an alleged problem.

I find it irresponsible to wait until question time to raise a question of that nature. When irresponsible behaviour occurs, a range of strategies are in place to minimise risk to the community. For example, the 'sharps' bins are located at each of the 79 Community Clean Needle Program sites throughout South Australia and at

most Clean Needle Program pharmacy sites, and the 24-hour Needle Clean-Up Line coordinates a timely collection of publicly discarded needles and syringes. I wonder whether the honourable member has rung that 24-hour clean-up line, done the responsible thing and identified where there is an issue so that the alleged problem can be addressed?

The Hon. A. Bressington interjecting:

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: No, she stalks our facilities. She and her colleagues stalk our facilities so that security guards have to come along and move them along. I think I have addressed most of the issues raised by the honourable member.

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON (15:23): As a supplementary question—

The Hon. I.K. Hunter interjecting:

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON: Well, what are we here for, Mr Hunter, really?

The Hon. G.E. Gago interjecting:

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON: Your jokes? You're the one who is a bit of a joke, minister.

The PRESIDENT: Order! The honourable member will ask her supplementary question.

The Hon. A. BRESSINGTON: Will the minister explain why the residents who came to see me tried on numerous occasions to get to see the local member, Vini Ciccarello? They rang and tried to make appointments with the minister herself and were told that she was too busy. Then, on Friday last week, they came to see me, and that is my stalking! Numerous efforts were made to bring this matter to your attention, minister, but you were not available.

Members interjecting:

The PRESIDENT: Order!

The Hon. G.E. GAGO (Minister for Environment and Conservation, Minister for Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Minister Assisting the Minister for Health) (15:24): Well, Mr President, to the best of my knowledge, I have not received those calls—

Members interjecting:

The PRESIDENT: Order!

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: As I said, to the best of my knowledge, I am not aware—

Members interjecting:

The PRESIDENT: Order!

Members interjecting:

The PRESIDENT: Order!

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: As always, my office is open to members and constituents.

Members interjecting:

The PRESIDENT: Order!

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: As always, my office door is open to meet with constituents; and, if I am not available, I make sure that one of my officers is available to meet with them. I have not been informed—

Members interjecting:

The PRESIDENT: Order!

The Hon. G.E. GAGO: I am not aware of any attempts to meet with me; and, in relation to these particular matters raised by the honourable member, nor am I aware of any correspondence raising these issues. As I said, my door is always open. If I am not available, I make sure that one of my officers is. So, I believe that this is just another empty allegation.