



MEN'S HEALTH POLICY

Mr PICCOLO (Light) (12:37): I rise to speak in partial support this motion in the sense that I wish to move an amendment to the motion, as follows:

That this house welcomes the strong commitment of the federal and state governments in developing a men's health policy and acknowledges the need to continue working on men's health issues, including awareness, research and treatment.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: That amendment is in order.

Mr PICCOLO: In speaking in support of my amended motion, as a society, it is good to see that we are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of raising the profile of men's health and men's health issues. I am pleased to be able to report on the strong commitment from both the state and federal governments in this area. In fact, last week the federal parliament handed down its Senate report into men's health policy, and I will speak about that a little later.

Having said that, it is fair to say that, in comparison to other people in the world, men in our society are generally in good health, but that is not to say that improvements cannot be made. In some areas, we can make significant improvements. As I said, there are variations in health outcomes depending on the work you do, where you live and also a range of other factors; for example, Aboriginal men in society are faring the poorest when compared with the rest of the male population.

Heart disease, lung cancer and suicide were the three leading causes of premature death among men in South Australia between 2004 and 2006. The leading three contributors to health loss—that is, premature death and illness—among males in South Australia between 2004 and 2006 were heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and anxiety and depression, which are slowly getting more attention with *beyondblue* and other programs.

South Australia has become increasingly proactive in addressing men's health issues. For South Australia, the South Australian Men's Health Strategic Framework (the 2008-2012 plan), which was published last year in June, provides some policy and planning framework to respond to men's health needs in the planning and delivery of health services.

The framework supports the development and coordination of research to develop our understanding of men's health and health service issues, as well as the development of programs and health services that are appropriate for men. The framework recognises that the increasing awareness of men's health needs is consistent with the recognition of the need to address preventable illnesses and injuries across all sectors.

South Australian Health is also involved in a number of men's health initiatives, including providing funding to the Freemasons Foundation Centre for Men's Health, a centre established by the Freemasons Foundation in conjunction with the University of Adelaide. I am proud to say that I am a member of the foundation's Patrons Board along with my colleague here, and I have attended some of their local events in Gawler. The Freemasons are doing a wonderful job in promoting men's health right across the country.

One of the centre's aims is to build a pool of researchers and practitioners with an interest in various aspects of men's health to generate knowledge related to men's health and wellbeing. Again, it is important that, if we introduce new programs, they are based on research and are effective.

SA Health is also currently funding or contributing to the funding of several men's health projects, including the Florey Adelaide Male Ageing Study, which is a longitudinal study of chronic disease among 1,200 men

aged between 35 and 80 and living in the northwest regions of Adelaide. If my memory serves me correctly, this is the first longitudinal study of men's health in this state. SA Health is also involved in the development of a training resource for primary health care workers working with men and it also provides research around improving men's access to primary health care, in particular, investigating men's use of health call centres.

As I have mentioned, the federal parliament established a Senate select committee to look at men's health. This has provided our state government with an excellent opportunity to put forward our position on areas of interest to the inquiry, including: the level of funding to address men's health; the adequacy of existing education and awareness programs; the prevailing attitudes of men towards their own health and sense of wellbeing; the adequacy of treatment services; and general support programs for men's health in metropolitan, rural, regional and remote areas.

The Select Committee on Men's Health handed down its report last Thursday, I think. I will highlight a couple of the recommendations and findings, because I think it is relevant to the particular motion before us. Recommendation 2 of the committee states:

The committee recommends that legislative drafting instructions and administrative procedures applying in all commonwealth government departments and agencies include a mandatory requirement that they consider the impact of legislation and policies on men as well as women.

This recommendation supports the comments made by the member for Fisher. More importantly, there is a growing awareness that, in trying to improve men's health, you do not have to do it at the expense of addressing men's health issues. Both can and should be addressed. Another finding in the report states:

There is a common perception that men are either not interested in their health or careless in managing it. The committee does not accept this. Men do in fact use health services in high numbers and respond positively to education and awareness campaigns. However services need to be provided in ways that acknowledge men's social and economic circumstances and take account of their distinctive attitudes.

I would add to that their distinctive circumstances and situations because of work and a whole range of other factors. The report continues, 'In addition, boys should be informed about healthy behaviours at an early age.' I could not agree more. The final recommendation that I would like to draw to the house's attention deals with depression. The report states:

Depression and other mental illnesses are significant and often poorly recognised problems in Australia. Overcoming the stigma which still attaches to mental illness is a major issue. Depression is a significant problem in its own right.

I would like to acknowledge the work done by *beyondblue* to improve that. The report continues:

It is also closely linked to alcohol and drug abuse and can also be present as a co-morbidity with major physical health problems such as prostate cancer. It is important that this interconnectedness be recognised in the provision and conduct of treatment services.

That supports the position of this government. SA Health and the government are doing research to make sure that our policies are appropriate.

The Australian government has also undertaken an extensive consultation process for the development of a national men's policy, which is continuing. The national men's health policy forums held in South Australia were valuable in informing and providing representatives from South Australian men's health groups and those individuals with an interest in the area of men's health with an opportunity to have an input in the development of a national policy. South Australia has long recognised the need for improvement in the area of men's health and applauds the federal government's national consultation in the development of its national men's health policy. The government looks forward to the outcomes of that national policy to improve men's health.

At this point I acknowledge the contribution of a number of people in my own community in addressing men's health issues. I was involved in a men's health group in Gawler which has led to the creation of a men's shed, and the men's shed is one of those vehicles where men can meet and discuss a whole range of health and related issues and, through the local health service, is very proactive in promoting men's health. With those comments, I ask the house to support my amendment.