

**INTERNATIONAL MEN'S HEALTH WEEK**

Mr PICCOLO (Light) (15:13): Last week, International Men's Health Week was celebrated in South Australia. This week has been celebrated since 2003. Throughout the 1990s, various Australian states and territories set aside a week to highlight men's health issues. In 2002, representatives from six leading men's health organisations from around the world met at the Second World Congress on Men's Health in Vienna, Austria and resolved to work together to launch International Men's Health Week. Australia was represented at this meeting by the Men's Health Information Resource Centre at the University of Western Sydney.

The aim of International Men's Health Week is to increase awareness of male health issues on a global level and to encourage international and intranational institutions to develop health policies and services that meet men's specific needs. This increase in awareness has led to an increase in policy development by both state and federal governments addressing specific needs of men or, more accurately, male health. Recently, the federal government released its national male health policy.

The health policy has six priority action areas: optimal health outcomes for males; health equity between population groups of males; health equity between males at different life stages; a focus on preventative health for males; building a strong evidence base on male health; and access to health care for males. One of the funding areas outlined in the policy was \$3 million over four years for the Australian Men's Shed Association to help develop national infrastructure and to assist in the development of sheds in high need areas. I will come back to that a little later.

On the state scene, last week a report was released that deals with men's health in South Australia, particularly men's access to health services. The question asked by the report, which was commissioned by the South Australian Department of Health but which was undertaken by the University of Adelaide, was: are there populations of South Australian men who underutilise a range of health services, particularly primary health care services, and as a consequence experience a disproportionate burden of disease?

The report goes into a lot of detail about various health and other issues facing men and also how they need to be addressed. I would like to highlight two areas in that report, the first of which is the impact on rural men. The report acknowledges that, because of their geographical isolation and less access to direct services, men are at greater risk of having their health issues addressed in rural areas, but also the very nature of the work they perform puts them at greater health risk.

The second issue raised in the report relates to access to services. The report states:

Men need to be better informed about the health issues that affect them , and services should be delivered in a manner that makes them readily accessible to men. Health planners and service providers also need to acknowledge that men's health warrants greater attention. Different groups of men have particular health issues and needs and, therefore, a range of approaches will be necessary to meet them.

That is an acknowledgment that, rather than just complain that men do not access health services, we need greater understanding of the reasons for that and how we meet that gap.

I mentioned the Men's Shed Association. As part of Men's Health Week, I would like to acknowledge the great work done in my own community of Gawler by the Willo's Men's Shed, which is a registered member of the Australian Men's Shed Association, where men can meet and chat over tea and coffee, share ideas and experiences about their lives, pursue a number of hobbies and, more importantly, access information about health (particularly mental health) and relationships. It is one of those non-threatening environments where men can talk freely about their health concerns and have them addressed.

The organisation is run by volunteers. It also receives support from the Gawler Health Service, the Freemasons and local businesses. I acknowledge the support and the work of Mr Brian Walters, the administrator of Willo's Men's Shed.