



PARLIAMENT OF NEW SOUTH WALES
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

FIRST SESSION OF THE FIFTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT

Private Members' Statements

8 June 2021

YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend) (18:11):

A concerned grandfather wrote to me:

My granddaughter has been receiving medical assistance since the age of 4 for psychological problems, problems that appear to be gaining in intensity as she grows older. Because she is only 15, there is very little assistance provided by NSW Health, if anything, and yet she is in critical need of major assistance.

It is not an uncommon story. As anyone who has tried to help a young person through a mental health crisis will tell you, getting support is difficult. When her grandfather asked me to bring their situation to the attention of this House, I agreed to do so because we are looking at a slow-motion disaster in the area of youth mental health. My constituent explained:

As a family, we tried to have my granddaughter admitted to the mental health facility at Warners Bay Private Hospital only to be turned away because they only admit children aged 16 and over. The same age limitation applied when trying to obtain assistance at John Hunter Hospital ... because of her age, she was declined as a mental health patient [even though] her condition fully warranted inpatient care.

He told me that she is currently receiving private psychiatric help, but he said that she needs more. Her parents can barely afford the cost of this care. They will do anything for their child, as most parents would, and they would not let the cost stop them. However, my constituent pointed out that a range of services are available to his granddaughter when she turns 16 but she is still almost 12 months away from this milestone. While a sixteenth birthday should be a cause for celebration, the year this family will have to wait is a cause of major anxiety for them. He has one question for this Government:

Why is it that at age 16, as if by magic, a full range of services becomes instantly available and yet at 15 these services are beyond reach?

It is a good question. The statistics from Beyond Blue are stark. Over 75 per cent of mental health problems occur before the age of 25. Half of all the mental health conditions we experience at some point in our lives will have started by the age of 14. One in seven young people aged between four and 17 meet the criteria for a diagnosis of a mental health disorder in any given year.

One in 10 young people between 12 and 17 will self-harm, one in 13 will seriously consider a suicide attempt and one in 40 will attempt suicide. Those troubling statistics are made worse because young people are less likely than those of any other age to seek professional help. According to one study, only 31 per cent of young people, and 13 per cent of young men, with mental health problems have sought out any professional help. We know that many young people are struggling with their mental health and face many barriers when trying to access that help, and that recent events have only exacerbated those problems. My constituent's family is going through hell and the statistics make it clear that they are not alone in facing that situation. I was asked to share the family's story in an effort to change what is clearly a broken system. Something needs to be done.