

MI142605
MO: H/06/09889

12 February 2007

Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000
Email: TableOffice@parliament.qld.gov.au

Dear Mr Laurie

Thank you for your letter dated 30 November 2006, enclosing Petition No 753-06 regarding the proposed Needle Exchange Program at Palm Beach.

The Needle and Syringe Program (NSP) is one of the core services offered by Queensland Health throughout the State, and is provided by experienced multidisciplinary teams of Doctors, Nurses and Allied Health Professionals.

The Program aims to reduce the spread of blood borne viral infections among local injecting drug users and to protect the wider community from such infections. It also provides education, counselling and treatment referral services.

Queensland Health staff's clinical work and decision making processes are guided by detailed policies and guidelines, developed at State and Commonwealth levels, and are informed by current research evidence in the field. They are also guided by Queensland Health's extensive experiences in having established a network of 150 NSP services across the State over the past 20 years.

During this time, it has become standard Queensland Health practice to operate the NSP through community health centres and public hospitals. An extension of the range of services provided from Queensland Health owned properties would not usually involve community consultation.

The Palm Beach site was recommended in Queensland Health's 2002 review of NSP services on the Gold Coast, especially to service the southern section of the region.

Palm Beach Community Health Centre is a Queensland Health owned and operated multi-purpose health centre similar in scope to other community health centres, like Inala, West Moreton and Beenleigh, which have long provided NSP services as part of mainstream health service delivery. This is consistent with normal Queensland Health policy.

The NSP to be established at the Palm Beach Community Health Centre will be a dedicated service which will only be provided during the business hours that the Centre currently operates.

There is clear evidence that the Gold Coast is under-serviced in relation to NSP availability. In 2002, a Queensland Health review calculated the population per outlet on the Gold Coast to be 183,936 compared to 44,957 on the Sunshine Coast and 26,789 for Cairns.

The NSP is established in areas where injecting drug use is already occurring. There is nothing in the research evidence to show that the provision of the NSP attracts more injecting drug users and other illicit drug users to live in that area. Over the past 20 years, Queensland Health has not been made aware of any evidence of a negative impact of the Program on local communities.

Should you have any queries regarding my advice to you, Mr Robert Kemp, Manager, Queensland Needle and Syringe Program, will be pleased to assist you and can be contacted on telephone 3896 3848.

Yours sincerely

STEPHEN ROBERTSON MP