

MULTIPLE CHEMICAL SENSITIVITY

15 November 2006

The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD: I seek leave to make a brief explanation before asking the Minister for Mental Health and Substance Abuse, representing the Minister for Health, a question about multiple chemical sensitivity (MCS).

The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD: I have recently met with a number of people suffering MCS, and it has been drawn to my attention that it is a serious condition and quite prevalent in our community. My colleague, the Hon. Andrew Evans MLC, set out the recent history of MCS in his Matters of Interest speech in this place on 20 September this year. Briefly, for members' interest, MCS is an unusually severe sensitivity or allergy-like reaction to many different kinds of pollutants such as solvents, perfumes, petrol, diesel, smoke and the like, and other naturally occurring matter such as pollen, house dust mites and pet fur, for example.

MCS is unlike common allergies where the causes are understood and the allergy widely accepted. The causes and workings of MCS are not yet understood. The Social Development Committee's inquiry into MCS found that 'MCS is very real and that up to 6 per cent of the population may have MCS'. The inquiry found that around 15 000 people in South Australia have being diagnosed with MCS and that 'many individuals experience considerable suffering, particularly in light of the lack of recognition surrounding the condition'. Medical evidence presented to the inquiry suggested that the incidence of MCS is increasing in the community.

The inquiry warned that research-based evidence linking MCS to exposure to common chemicals should not be ignored and made a number of groundbreaking recommendations, including the development of consistent policies and protocols to assist people with MCS to safely access basic services such as health care. The lack of disability access to essential services such as health care for people with MCS was highlighted in a public rally on the

steps of Parliament House just last month, at which I and a number of other members were in attendance. My questions are:

1. When will the Department of Health develop the guidelines and hospital protocols to assist in the access to health care for people with MCS in line with the recommendations that were handed down?
2. Given the proposed dissolution of DAIS in the 2006-07 budget, can the minister please confirm that the government remains committed to providing disability access for people with MCS?