

NEEDLE EXCHANGE PROGRAM

Tuesday, 19 June 2007

The Hon. D.G.E. HOOD: I understand that the state government funds the AIDS Council of South Australia, and its SAVIVE needle exchange program is part of funding to the Drug and Alcohol Services Council. Yesterday, Family First witnessed a 16-year old girl go into the Norwood SAVIVE service, which sold this child a body piercing needle for \$3. This event was photographed by a journalist.

Family First has received reports from two sources that children are obtaining needles and have been piercing each other at school during the lunch break, particularly at the Seaford 6 to 12 school and at the Noarlunga Downs Primary School. A recent survey has indicated that more than 1 000 people have been treated in the past year for body piercing-related infections in the southern suburbs alone, often as a result of inexperienced or unhygienic piercing, which is quite a concern. My questions to the minister are:

1. Given that legal and more hygienic alternatives exist to self-perform piercing, what possible harm minimisation argument is there for SAVIVE's sale of body piercing needles?
2. Are these needles sold by SAVIVE used by backyard or inexperienced operators, and could they be contributing to our very high rates of cross infection?
3. Finally, is the SAVIVE service currently operating within government guidelines or is it simply out of control?

The Hon. G.E. GAGO (Minister for Mental Health and Substance Abuse): I thank the honourable member for his important questions. The AIDS Council of South Australia conducts a range of programs that aim to improve the health and well-being of key client groups, particularly in relation to the prevention of HIV transmission, and funding for those services comes from a range of different sources, including commonwealth and state funding. The state

government funds are provided by Drug and Alcohol Services, and there is some commonwealth funding as well.

In relation to illicit drug diversion initiatives supporting measures relating to needle and syringe programs, two key programs funded by the council include the South Australian Voice for Intravenous Education (SAVIVE) and the Sex Industry Network (SIN) outreach service. In relation to SAVIVE, my advice is that this is a primary clean needle site located at the AIDS Council head office in Norwood. This primary clean needle program is significant in this state in relation to ensuring that sterile injection equipment is distributed.

The program also provides injecting drug users with referrals for drug treatment and other health and welfare services, as well as education and information on blood-borne virus prevention and a range of support and other advocacy services, which I have been advised have been funded by the state government. SAVIVE also administers the placement of five peer educators at a number of the high volume clean needle program sites located within community centres across metropolitan Adelaide, and the work is funded by the Australian government. Peer education has been demonstrated to be a successful method of engaging drug users to change risk-type behaviours.

I have been informed that the total funding to the AIDS Council of South Australia for the 2006-07 financial year was just under \$500 000—about \$474 000—comprising federal funding of just over \$200 000 and state funding of \$264 363.

I am not aware that any of the programs funded by DASSA involve the selling of body-piercing needles. Certainly, I am not aware that that is part of any of the Drug and Alcohol Services programs it provides. I have been advised only in relation to the clean-needle program and the other programs I have outlined. I am not disputing what the honourable member has said. However, I need to seek further advice and information in relation to that and bring back a response.