

Legislative Council

Hansard

Tuesday 24 March 2026

The President, Mr Farrell, took the Chair at 11 a.m., acknowledged the Traditional People and read Prayers.

[excerpt...]

MOTION

Parkinson's Disease in Tasmania

[12.03 p.m.]

Ms WEBB (Nelson) - Thank you, Mr President, I'm pleased to rise to make a brief contribution and to support this motion put forward by the member for Murchison and thank her for doing so. It's important to raise this matter, which highlights the challenges faced by many Tasmanians and their loved ones, and it's a very worthy thing for this Chamber to be considering and to be encouraging the government to act on. This is a timely debate with the expected launch of the National Parkinson's Action Plan (NPAP) today in the Australian parliament house in Canberra.

As the honourable member has already informed the Chamber, Parkinson's is currently the second-most-common neurological condition in the world, but is becoming the fastest neurological disorder impacting people across the world; yet our understanding of the disease and our treatments for it are not keeping pace. We know Parkinson's disease is a movement disorder of the nervous system that worsens over time. We know that a range of symptoms can emerge slowly for some people and quite suddenly for others.

Symptoms may begin at any stage of life: for those other gen Xers, Michael J Fox probably comes to the forefront of our mind as someone from our youth, who we watched in movies, who was struck down at quite a young age - I think at 29 he was diagnosed with Parkinson's. Symptoms may begin at any stage of life. The first symptom may be barely a noticeable tremor in just one hand or sometimes a foot or the jaw. Or people may experience their face no longer shows expression or their speech begins to slur. Such a diverse range of symptoms, with some or all striking those diagnosed with this disease.

Yet, despite that extensive range of symptoms, there is one commonality that is shared across them all: there is no cure. As I do not have a medical background, I'm not going to recite the range of symptoms and experiences so familiar to those who live with Parkinson's or those who care for someone living with Parkinson's, but suffice to say, I think we would all agree, this is a cruel disease.

The member for Murchison has detailed much of the impacts of this disease, and I thank her for doing so faithfully in her contribution, and I won't seek to repeat it in such detail. However, in researching in order to contribute to this motion, I was struck by recent statistics detailed in a 2024 report, Ecosystem of Parkinson's in Australia Project, which was prepared by Prof George D. Mellick for Parkinson's Australia. That report laid out that more than 1 million Australians are impacted by this disease. There are up to 19,500 new cases diagnosed every year, and over 13,400 of those diagnosed are of working age. Parkinson's reaps an

estimated cost to the national economy of more than \$10 billion per annum, both in lost revenue, ongoing healthcare costs, and other associated costs.

Prof Mellick's 2024 report also provides an estimated breakdown of people diagnosed with Parkinson's for each of the federal electorates, which I found quite interesting to look at, in relation to our state. It was quite interesting and concerning reading, that during 2021, which was the year noted, the electorate of Bass had 73 people diagnosed as developing Parkinson's that year: 23 females and 50 males. A total of 456 people living with Parkinson's in the electorate of Bass. For 2021 in the electorate of Braddon, it was estimated that 82 people developed Parkinson's in that year: 26 females and 56 males, with a total of 505 people living with Parkinson's in that electorate. For Clark, which is one of the federal seats my electorate of Nelson partially spans, it's estimated that 64 people in 2021 develop Parkinson's: 21 females and 43 males. Also for the total for Franklin for the year of 2021, the other federal electorate that my electorate partially spans, had an estimated 75 people diagnosed with Parkinson's: 24 females and 51 males. Lastly, Lyons had an estimated 81 people who developed Parkinson's in 2021: 24 females at 57 males.

Obviously, these figures, being based in 2021 data, are now a little out of date. However, what we do know of this disease tells us there will not have been a reversal of these figures over time. Each Tasmanian electorate is experiencing approximately 100 new diagnosis of Parkinson's each year, I believe. Clearly, when faced with the diagnosis of an incurable, chronic and progressive disease, which steadily erodes your functionality, these Tasmanians are going to require assistance.

Which brings us to part 2 of the motion before us, which details a form of action plan that we would be requesting the government to undertake. Paragraphs 2(b) and 2(d) call on the Tasmanian government to work with the federal government to develop multidisciplinary patient-centred care models involving specialists including neurologists, allied health professionals and psychologists, to improve healthcare to patients with Parkinson's and to introduce process improvements to integrate state and federal care systems, repairing fragmented links between inpatient, outpatient and community care systems. This call is eminently sensible, cost effective and based on common sense.

According to a Deloitte access economics report commissioned by Parkinson's Australia and released in 2015, governments bore around two-thirds of the health system costs, which was about 68.3 per cent, while individuals bore 17.8 per cent of the costs, and other parties, such as private health insurance and charities, bore the remaining 13.9 per cent of the costs. When breaking down the government's costs, the federal government bore approximately 41.4 per cent of those costs, with state and territories bearing the 26.9 per cent.

In 2014, the health system cost of Parkinson's disease, including additional costs from associated falls and pneumonia, were approximately \$567.7 million, an increase of \$223.8 million since 2005. The average health system cost per person with Parkinson's disease was \$8202 per annum in 2014. Those figures are out of date, but according to Parkinson's Tasmania, in their response to Tasmania's 20 year Preventive Health Strategy of 2025, the disease currently costs the state government here in Tasmania an estimated \$165 million per year, with this estimate expected to be doubled by 2040.

Available evidence indicates that Tasmania has the highest number of people living with Parkinson's in all of Australia, which our ageing demographic is only going to exacerbate. As we know, the current precarious nature of the state's financial situation makes collaborating with providing the necessary care and research into future options for the welfare of Tasmanians living with Parkinson's absolutely essential.

Sub-paragraphs 2(a), 2(c) and 2(e) of the motion call on the state government to support the delivery of the following things –

- (1) Clinics and centres offering integrated and holistic care throughout all stages of the condition for those newly diagnosed with Parkinson's.
- (2) Research bodies to examine the links between pesticides and industrial solvents and Parkinson's prevalence. And also –
- (3) The development of a local workforce trained in-home care, enabling Tasmanians to remain in their homes longer and alleviating an escalating financial burden on Tasmania's health system and budget.

Again, all sound common-sense and compassionate courses of action for the state government to invest in.

Further, these paragraphs and sub-paragraphs are consistent with Parkinson's Tasmania's submission in response to Tasmania's 20-year Preventive Health Strategy Discussion Paper of 2025.

Parkinson's Tasmania's 2025 submission also has specific bearing on the last subparagraph of the motion before us, sub-paragraph 2(f), which calls on the government to support Parkinson's Tasmania as the central advocacy body for Tasmanians living with Parkinson's.

Parkinson's Tasmania's document states at point 7: Enable and support Parkinson's Tasmania to be a sustainable organisation for people living with Parkinson's. Parkinson's Tasmania can be the coordination point and secretariat for other key stakeholder groups in the Parkinson's cohort, provide a centralised voice on policy and related matters. Navigating the complex health system is another gap that exists and Parkinson's Tasmania could assist as a key enabler for the 20-year Preventive Health Strategy.

The key phrase there, of course, is 'sustainable organisation'. Sadly, the current government does not have a strong track record in fostering and supporting sustainability for non-government and community sector support and service organisations. It simply doesn't. We know that because right now those organisations are crying out to not be cut to ribbons in the upcoming state budget.

We really shouldn't have to debate and pass motions in this place calling for the government to ensure sustainability of crucial support services, providing such a practical and support role for many Tasmanians struggling with this cruel disease. It should be regarded as an essential cog within our preventative and multidisciplinary healthcare model.

The data, statistics and the projections demonstrate the urgent need felt by hundreds of Tasmanians currently diagnosed with Parkinson's and the numerous others about to face such a diagnosis.

In light of the fact that Parkinson's is the fastest-growing neurological condition in the world, and given the increasing prevalence of the condition and the demographics here in Tasmania that will have a significant economic, social and cultural impacts, an integrated and urgent public health response is needed to prevent the onset of Parkinson's in Tasmania.

As stated by the organisation in question:

Parkinson's Tasmania is uniquely positioned to contribute to the development and implementation of Tasmania's 20-year Preventive Health Strategy. We understand the critical importance of early intervention, prevention and sustained engagement in improving health outcomes for people living with Parkinson's.

It would be a significant and valid investment for the state government to develop a funding plan to ensure Parkinson's Tasmania is placed on a sustainable footing to ensure it can continue to provide the essential support mechanisms that so many Tasmanians have required and will continue to require.

I'm very pleased to support this motion.