

Survivors of Wolston Park

*Speech by Hon. Cameron Dick MP, Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services
15 June 2017*

I'd like to acknowledge:

Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet

Queensland's Mental Health Commissioner, Dr Lesley Van Schoubroeck for inviting me here tonight, and her work to re-engage Government with the women survivors of Wolston.

And most importantly, the survivors of Wolston Park.

The experience of these women, who were placed inappropriately at Wolston Park, is a dark and shameful chapter in Queensland's history.

These women lived through a terrible experience—forced into an institution without reason.

It should never have happened, and it should never happen again.

I come here as a representative of the Queensland Government—but in that respect, I cannot say that I am proud.

Because Government let you down, it let you down firstly as children, and again as adults with a very much delayed process for redress.

The previous Bligh Labor Government—in which I served—was the first Government to finally recognise the wrong that was done to you.

I know that a commitment was made to work on achieving redress by the Bligh Labor Government in 2010.

Sadly, with the change of Government in early 2012, that important work did not continue, and the then Government indicated they would not be proceeding with the redress process.

But the women of Wolston are tenacious, and they would not let up in reminding Government of its mistakes, and its obligations.

And through Dr van Schoubroeck, I became aware—or should I say, I was reminded of this matter in August last year and in December 2016, I approved the resumption of the reconciliation process.

In April 2017 I was pleased to announce the next step in that process with the appointment of Betty Taylor as an independent facilitator to work with the individuals about providing reconciliation.

I know that Betty has met with all of the individuals concerned—I'd like to thank all of the women here for engaging with Betty.

I have great trust in Betty and I hope to bring this matter of redress to a conclusion for these women.

I said that this process, when I announced Betty's appointment in April, would take up to twelve months, but I hope to bring this to a conclusion as soon as we can.

But I also hope—beyond what the Government is doing—that the women here affected can also find some hope that our community more broadly is recognising what was done to them.

Through the good work of journalist Matthew Condon, who wrote movingly about this story earlier this year, and through this exhibition, we can bring this story to light.

I hope that all you, and the community more broadly, can learn something about what happened to these women.

Firstly out of respect to those that suffered this experience—but also so we can learn the lessons that it never happens again.

I want to thank Access Arts, Open Minds, the Queensland Mental Health Commission for helping to put this together.

Thank you and good night.