

ST JOHN AMBULANCE — INDEPENDENT INQUIRY

Statement by Minister for Health

DR K.D. HAMES (Dawesville — Minister for Health) [2.02 pm]: Yesterday I released the report of the independent inquiry into the safety and quality of St John Ambulance Western Australia's clinical practices. As members may be aware, the report was commissioned in July this year to investigate the root causes of the tragic death of four patients highlighted by the ABC's *Four Corners* program and to present recommendations to improve clinical practices. On behalf of the Liberal-National government, I would like to express my sincere thanks to the families of the deceased patients for their cooperation with the inquiry. I would also like to thank the review chairman, Greg Joyce; the Chief Medical Officer, Dr Simon Towler; and all those who have contributed to this independent review.

The investigation examined systems and processes within the ambulance service, and the report's 13 recommendations are intended to strengthen the service capacity of St John Ambulance and to improve the safety and quality of care for patients. The recommendations cover issues related to the communication centre, clinical governance, staffing and continuing education. The report endorsed the continuation of the existing service model; however, it also makes it clear that there are a number of areas in which improvements must be made. To this end the state government will provide an immediate funding injection of \$1.028 million to the St John Ambulance service in response to the recommendations. This funding will provide for the service's immediate needs as identified in the inquiry report.

Western Australians can be assured that they have a strong, high-quality ambulance service in place. This additional money will allow St John Ambulance service to employ 10 more call centre operators, 26 patient transport officers and a paramedic in Karratha during the remainder of the current financial year. This will boost capacity at St John Ambulance and improve the safety and quality of services provided to the Western Australian community. The Department of Health will immediately begin developing a business case, evaluating the funds required to address the report's other recommendations relating to additional expenditure.

It is absolutely essential that we get our response to this inquiry right. The state budget process will allow the government to make a measured assessment of how we can deliver maximum improvements in the ambulance service in the context of our broader, long-term health funding decisions. The need for additional ambulance services in country areas will be the subject of further assessment, as will the feasibility of introducing structured call taking in the SJA communication centre.