

INSULIN-DEPENDENT DIABETICS, GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE

**408. Mr TEMPLEMAN to the Minister for Health:**

Will the minister outline any new state government initiatives that will help reduce the financial burden faced by Western Australians with insulin-dependent diabetes?

**Mr KUCERA replied:**

I thank the member for some notice of this question. I know this has been a pressing issue in his electorate, particularly with some of the older people who live in the Mandurah area. I was pleased to hear him speak early today about the upgraded dialysis services.

Some time ago I had the great fortune to meet Professor Fred Hollows. He talked about the explosion of AIDS and diabetes as problems in the State. We have conquered the issue of AIDS but we have not conquered diabetes.

Dr Gallop: One of the greatest Western Australian sportsmen, Barry Shepherd, was lost to us because of diabetes.

Mr KUCERA: The previous Government was lobbied continuously and I have been lobbied about diabetes. Needles and syringes used by insulin-dependent diabetics will be made available free of charge from 1 October. The cost of needles and syringes is partially subsidised by the Commonwealth Government, and the State Government has moved to close the gap to ensure that diabetics can access these vital products at no cost to themselves. The decision was made because of the increasing prevalence of diabetes in the community, and because of the Government's belief that the cost of needles and syringes places an unfair financial burden on affected people. Diabetes is the seventh major cause of death in Australia. A recent study found that almost one million Australians aged 25 and over suffer from the disease. I urge all members to have a health check-up. I plan to have one. The free needle scheme will begin on 1 October and will be administered by Diabetes Australia-WA on behalf of the Department of Health. It is expected that almost 13 000 Western Australians with insulin-dependent diabetes will access the free needle program. Given the rising prevalence of diabetes and the ageing of the population, it is believed that this initiative will provide a great deal of relief for many Western Australians in the years to come.

An opposition member interjected.

Mr KUCERA: I hope whoever made that comment is not putting the people who suffer from diabetes in the same category as drug addicts.