

CORONAVIRUS — MEDICAL RESEARCH

361. Ms J.J. SHAW to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the McGowan government's unprecedented support for medical research in Western Australia.

Can the minister outline to the house what support is being provided to Western Australian research projects—the focus on the treatment of COVID-19 or projects that aim to give us a better understanding of the virus?

Mr R.H. COOK replied:

I thank the member for the question. I am proud of the McGowan government and what it has been able to achieve in health and medical research and innovation this term. It is pleasing that last week's successful passing of the Western Australian Future Fund Amendment (Future Health Research and Innovation Fund) Bill 2019, one of our key election commitments, has made it possible for us to this week announce a \$2.9 million boost to local research into COVID-19. The 12 Western Australian research projects have been boosted with funding from the McGowan government, with nearly \$3 million funding going towards COVID-19-related research infrastructure. Recipients come from a range of disciplines and work across hospitals, universities, research institutes and biotech companies. This is about Western Australian companies doing their bit to join other researchers around the world to find a vaccine or treatments for COVID-19. A total of \$1.9 million has been granted for research, which has been awarded to support COVID-19-related research projects. Another \$1 million has been provided for infrastructure support, which will cover costs such as consumables, staffing and site set-up for local COVID-19 research.

The funding for the 12 research projects will go towards treatments, studies of at-risk groups, the development of less invasive tests, studies of mental health impacts and tests that will more accurately inform us about immunity to COVID-19. One of them is a project, led by Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital respiratory specialist Dr Anna Tai, that is looking into the effectiveness of transfusing active COVID-19 cases with plasma from recovered patients—convalescent plasma. This is important work looking into how we can prevent patients from deteriorating to the point that they need to be hospitalised. The project will also see whether early intervention can reduce the time it takes for a person to feel better or clear the virus from his or her system. With Western Australia's current low number of active cases, Dr Tai is collaborating with other research projects to involve patients from other states and jurisdictions. In the absence of a vaccine or treatment for COVID-19, Dr Tai's study will investigate the therapeutic potential of convalescent plasma in treating COVID-19 patients in the early stages of the disease. A full list of recipients for this round of funding is available on the Department of Health website.

The more research we can support, the closer we are to finding out more about this virus. As I have said on multiple occasions, a vaccine is a long way away, but in the meantime, we can find out more about this virus and we can work out what treatments are more effective in dealing with it. Projects such as this are a fantastic example of how we can continue to back research and innovation in Western Australia. The McGowan government has made step changes in the way we fund medical research and innovation research in this state. The passage of the future health research and innovation fund bill last week represents an important milestone as we become a world leader in medical research and innovation. I am very pleased that we are able to be part of this latest measure to ensure that Western Australia takes its place in the fight against COVID-19.