

CORONAVIRUS — LOTTERYWEST CRISIS AND EMERGENCY RELIEF GRANT FUND

465. Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY to the Minister for Community Services:

I refer to the impact that COVID-19 has had on the community services sector and the increase in demand for services and support. Can the minister update the house on how the McGowan Labor government is supporting Western Australia's community service organisations to meet this demand through the Lotterywest COVID-19 relief fund?

Ms S.F. McGURK replied:

I thank the member for the question and for the opportunity to talk about some of those issues. We all know that COVID-19 and the resulting closedown of our community in various forms has had a huge impact on everyone, not the least of whom are some very vulnerable members of our community who were at immediate risk during the pandemic threat, which we have heard about again today and which everyone is well aware of. We knew that some of those people would require extra assistance. That was why the Premier, in particular, committed to supporting all members of the community and put in place the \$159 million COVID-19 relief fund and made sure that Lotterywest would be in a position to meet the needs of those in the community who would need extra assistance and attention.

Of the \$159 million COVID-19 relief fund, \$59 million was made available initially for crisis and emergency relief support and support for not-for-profit organisations that have had to cancel events. The pandemic has had a huge impact on many of those organisations that, as members would be aware, do not have a lot of fat in their budgets to deal with cancelled events and the like. The fund was also for grants for not-for-profit organisations in the arts, sports and community sectors to maintain their viability and to build resilience for future recovery. That initial \$59 million has been split up throughout those three sectors of effort.

As an example, I was particularly pleased to deliver, on behalf of the Premier, the Lotterywest cheque to support the financial toolbox, which is an online resource that was championed by former Western Australian Chief Scientist Lyn Beazley. A range of accountants worked with a number of women's refuges to make a free service available to women who needed financial knowledge and skills and were experiencing domestic violence and domestic abuse. We know that eight out of 10 women who seek support for family and domestic violence have also been victims of financial or economic abuse. A lack of economic security and financial resources is often a reason that women go back to abusive relationships. That free resource was put together with the assistance of Lotterywest and some of those advocates I spoke about. It is a good example of the more sophisticated approach that we are seeing by volunteers with particular professional expertise. The state government is able to partner with those groups to provide better outcomes. Over \$5.5 million of grants have already been approved to organisations that respond to people who are experiencing hardship, crisis or financial uncertainty, including for those who have experienced family and domestic violence.

Another example is the food relief framework, in which the government has partnered with organisations that know that food relief is needed. There is food insecurity in various parts of our state. There are also retailers that are prepared to donate some of their excess and that has helped facilitate the framework. The COVID crisis has pulled together food relief organisations that members will be aware of, such as Foodbank, SecondBite, and OzHarvest; retailers such as Coles, Woolworths and Metcash; transport companies; and local governments to make sure that we can match supply and demand.

There are many good reasons that people in Western Australia are grateful to have a government led by the Premier, Hon Mark McGowan, and the Minister for Health, who are advised by the Chief Health Officer. We have been guided by science and have had a disciplined approach. We have made sure that we were in a good budgetary position to provide an immediate response and can now gear up and make sure that there are jobs available where we need them. In particular, I think people should be grateful that those sitting on the other side of this chamber are not in government at the moment. We have heard today how absolutely appalling that would have been for many vulnerable members of society, whether it is older members of our community we have heard about or others who are vulnerable whom I see in my portfolio. We would have had the borders open and we would have had health advice being second-guessed—doctor shopping, if you like—to hear the advice that suited their ends at the time. There would also be second-guessing of the position they should take, when what the community wants is certainty and surety that they are going to be led well, and that is what we have with the McGowan Labor government during this year.