

MEDICAL INDEMNITY SUBSIDY SCHEME, PEEL HEALTH CAMPUS

**1111. Mr MARSHALL to the Minister for Health:**

This question may be more of a supplementary question. I refer to the minister's media statement released yesterday on the extension of the medical indemnity subsidy scheme for country doctors.

- (1) Will the scheme apply to GP obstetricians and specialist obstetricians currently practising at the Peel Health Campus?
- (2) If not, is the minister aware that rising medical insurance premiums will result in the campus being unable to offer a safe and reliable maternity service to the Peel region from 1 July this year, a week away?

**Mr KUCERA replied:**

- (1)-(2) I have already answered most parts of that question. I cannot say at this stage whether the Peel Health Campus falls specifically under the scheme. However, the majority of doctors working in the country are private practitioners. They are no different from garage owners, lawyers or anybody else. They are certainly different in that they supply specialist services. However, unfortunately, all the other people in this country are having to shoulder the enormous costs of liability insurance. The only difference with doctors is the specialist services they supply, which are essential services, and that is why the Government must step in. However, there is almost a deafening silence coming from the Canberra office of the Minister for Health and Aged Care on support for GPs.

I remind the member for Dawesville that the federal Government, not the State Government, pays for GPs. We support them when they work in the public hospital system. However, GPs working for private hospitals are welcome to come and work in the public hospital system under a salary and under other adjusted processes by which we pay them in hospitals. I have already said to GPs across the State, to the AMA as late as this week and to Dr Graham Jacobs of the Rural Doctors Association that we must push the envelope to get the federal Government to acknowledge its responsibility in the first instance. In the second instance, we must find a way to come together to work out a sensible and balanced arrangement for this vexing problem.

It is not in the State Government's best interests to sustain doctors by paying their insurance. It is in the State's interests to establish a program to support doctors who practise in country areas, where there is very little private practice. Ultimately, doctors in private practice who are brought into the public system, as we are trying to do so that we can support them, will lose a large amount of their income.

The member's question is a very good one. We must find a way of sensibly balancing the demands of insurance companies with the needs of the bush and the requirement of doctors to make a decent living. I do not have a simple answer to those questions. It is obvious that the federal Government does not have a simple answer either, otherwise, by jingo, it would have implemented it by now. I have meetings regularly with the federal Government but I am getting no solutions from it. All I can do at this stage is give GPs an interim subsidy. I cannot give the member an answer in the House today about whether the subsidy specifically applies to Dawesville, but I will be happy out of session to make sure he gets an answer.