

COST-OF-LIVING ASSISTANCE PAYMENT

125. MR N.W. MORTON to the Minister for Finance:

At the risk of being sat down, I will skip straight to the question: could the minister please update the house on the cost-of-living assistance program that he announced at a seniors village in my electorate this morning?

Dr M.D. NAHAN replied:

I thank the member for Forrestfield for his question. I am very pleased to advise the house that I announced an extension of the popular cost-of-living adjustment program at the beautiful Arcadia Waters retirement village in Maddington. From today onwards, holders of the commonwealth pension card, veterans gold card, health card and the popular WA Seniors Card who do not have a direct relationship with either Synergy or Horizon Power in terms of billing arrangements will be able to apply for a cost-of-living adjustment of \$200 per year. If the member remembers—he was busy out campaigning last year—in the 2012–13 budget the government decided to adjust the existing supply charge rebate, which was about \$150. We adjusted it to \$200, and made seniors eligible to receive it. We discovered an anomaly between the old rebate scheme and the new one; that is, a number of eligible people do not have a billing arrangement with Synergy or Horizon Power. The government announced it would address this anomaly and, during the campaign, it promised to act quickly, which is what it has done today.

Under the existing scheme, people who live in abodes, usually retirement villages but perhaps apartment complexes, who do not have a billing arrangement with Synergy or Horizon Power are not able to get the cost-of-living allowance payment. The new scheme will allow them to obtain the COLA payment by making an application to the Department of Finance for \$200. Importantly, the rebate started from 1 October 2012 for the 2012–13 year. Eligible people have up to 31 December to apply for the 2012–13 COLA payment through the Department of Finance. We have backdated it. This applies not only to the cost-of-living assistance, but also to families who fall into this category and who have dependent children. They will be able to apply for the dependent child rebate. Those who live outside the metropolitan area and areas designated being hot will be able to apply for the air conditioning rebate. This is an extremely popular program, particularly for retirees, as it helps to make an adjustment for the cost-of-living and gets around a longstanding anomaly by giving assistance to people who do not have a direct billing arrangement with Synergy and Horizon. This is good news.