

CORONAVIRUS — GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Motion

HON ALISON XAMON (North Metropolitan) [11.07 am]: I move —

That this house —

- (1) notes the government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic in Western Australia;
- (2) acknowledges that there are sectors of our society and economy that remain in significant need of further support; and
- (3) calls on the government to address the needs of these sectors of our society and economy with targeted support and continued fiscal stimulus during this stressful period.

Two weeks is certainly a very long time in politics at any given point, but I think we can all agree that under the extraordinary circumstances in which we find ourselves, two weeks has felt like a lifetime; indeed, life is changing very quickly, sometimes on a two-hourly basis. When the Greens put up this motion two weeks ago, the community was in the early stages of feeling the devastating effects of the necessary measures that have been taken to address COVID-19, the first pandemic to have occurred in any member's lifetime. I am sure that as members stand to contribute to the debate on this motion, they will be able to give devastating stories of what is happening across our community, whether those stories are about people who are desperately concerned about their health and their lives, people who have lost their jobs or people who stand to lose their business. I think we can all agree that we are absolutely devastated to think what the future may hold for so many people in our community.

Every single one of us is affected by what is happening at the moment and this is a global issue. I begin by acknowledging those people on the frontline trying so hard to make sure that we are going to be safe, whether it be the people making the hard decisions that require people to self-isolate or the people in our hospital system who are waiting for what we know is going to come. There is no room for complacency around addressing COVID-19. Unfortunately, everything is telling us that even though we are starting to make real progress around flattening the curve, we will still see a massive influx of people presenting with COVID-19, and with that the risk that vulnerable people in our community will potentially lose their life. This weighs very heavily on my heart and, I am sure, on the hearts of everybody here. As a member of Parliament, I have been keeping a particularly close eye on the government response, both federal and state, to particular population groups. I understand that there are a wide variety of views within this chamber. I have no doubt that we will hear contributions from people who have expertise in particular areas that they will focus on. I particularly want to talk about a range of matters that I am keeping close tabs on. On some matters I will be giving bouquets to the state government and on others brickbats, but I also will be alerting the government to concerns coming from the sector and hoping to get some clarity for people.

From the outset, one of the areas I am particularly concerned to keep an eye on is what will happen within our community services sector. People know that I come from this area and I am particularly concerned to ensure that it has the capacity to respond. Our community and not-for-profit sector at the moment, to a large degree, is also at the forefront of delivering services to vulnerable people. There is a lot of focus, as there should be, on what is happening with our health professionals in the hospital system in particular, but we also know that those who work within the community sector are traditionally paid less than those in other community areas and they are predominantly women. How are they faring with what has now become a massively increased workload in the community sector that was already struggling for money and having to go through a lot of change? We know, for example, that services are coming under additional strain at the moment because there is a greater demand for their services at a time when the money has not necessarily been flowing. At the same time, they have had a significant reduction in the number of volunteers. Meals on Wheels is an example of this. It needs to provide more meals because more people need to self-isolate, yet, at the same time, it has funding pressures and reduced volunteer bases. These things are creating enormous pressures within organisations such as that one.

One of the things that our community sector is asking for is a greater flexibility to respond to need. That sector now has a suite of unanticipated costs, including for additional cleaning, cleaning products and also security. That sector is plagued by the same thing that plagues the health system, both locally and globally—that is, the lack of availability personal protective equipment. This is a huge problem. In the long term it probably goes to why we need to have a viable manufacturing base within Australia, but that is a discussion for after we have got through this crisis. This has seriously hampered the capacity of the community sector to deliver services. I know that this is firmly on the radar of government, as it is firmly on the radar of governments around the world. Nevertheless, it continues to be a massive problem and we have to acknowledge that even if there is not a ready solution. I applaud the many companies within Australia that are nimbly and swiftly stepping up to provide a range of PPE,

whether it be in the form of masks, ventilators or hand sanitiser. That is very encouraging. I hope that we get some resolution of that issue.

Concern exists across the community sector about the loss of high-profile fundraising opportunities. Ordinarily, a lot of our charitable organisations rely very heavily on the goodwill generated by the community participating in these high-profile events to produce their desperately needed income. Suddenly that has all dried up overnight. What does that mean for these services that provide essential services? Across the sector as a whole, the Australian Council of Social Service has been calling for program-level funding to community services that otherwise rely on individual funding arrangements so that they can have a more stabilised workforce. It has already asked particularly for additional funding for housing and homelessness services. I will speak to that a bit more in a moment. ACOSS wants guaranteed access to PPE, which I just spoke about. It also needs to have flexibility on the contract arrangements for services right now so that they can respond to what is a community need that is changing on a daily basis. As part of that request, it has asked that we either delay or relax reporting requirements and that any government reform, particularly around new tendering processes, be frozen. Ultimately, the services need to have flexibility in how their funds are being used so that they can support their community safely throughout this crisis.

I particularly want to acknowledge what has been a very important initiative by the state government that occurred over the last two weeks; that is, the establishment of an incident management team by the Department of Communities to lead the response. Bringing the various task forces together that will be addressing the issues around homelessness, Aboriginal people, people with disability, family and domestic violence, children in care, seniors and also residents in remote communities has shown great leadership. I also want to acknowledge that there are two components to the way in which Communities has chosen to do this. I applaud that and I really want to get this on the record—these are some of the bouquets. The first one has been a very genuine engagement with particularly the not-for-profit peak bodies. I have often said in this place that that is where a lot of the expertise lies, and clearly the government has taken that on board. In the many conversations that I am having across the peaks—people would not be surprised to know that I have ongoing relationships with these people because I come from that area—people are saying that the peaks are being looked to to provide leadership in this space. I applaud the government for doing that. The second thing I want to applaud the government on is, frankly, some of the personal appointments it has made to try to coordinate this response. The appointment of people of the calibre of Debra Zanella and Sue Ash has shown good leadership because these people are respected within the community and they are good at their job. When those announcements were made, it instilled a greater level of confidence within the community-based sector. That is really important and I am really hopeful that we are going to see some progress. I will talk a little more about some of those elements.

One of the questions being asked across that sector is: when are we likely to see a whole-of-government response or commitment to ensure that all vulnerable members of the community are going to be supported and protected from COVID-19? There is an issue around the time frame. People are concerned about how long some of these changes are taking to be enacted. They are also making it quite clear that we still need to get serious commitment around money, in particular, although I recognise that everyone is working incredibly quickly.

I particularly want to make some comments about what is happening in the homelessness space. I note the announcement that 20 people who are particularly at risk will be housed. That is welcome. I need to point out, though, that we are talking about another estimated 800 or so people in the Perth CBD alone who are sleeping rough. Also, having spoken to the Mayor of Fremantle, I am aware that there is a real concern about what is happening with the homeless population in Fremantle. For a whole range of reasons, we have seen a withdrawal of homelessness services—primarily because of the lack of protective personal equipment—at the same time that we need people to self-isolate. It is the case that this will have to be a particular area of priority. Feedback from the sector about the trial of housing people is that it is fantastic, and it has been very well received, but we need much more. We are going to have to make sure that we have urgent funding and resources, including access to housing, accommodation and support services, to meet the increased demand for care and also to help prevent the risk of transmission.

Likewise, I want to make some comments about mental health. There has, of course, been huge concern about what the long-term impacts will be for people with mental health issues. I am concerned about early reports of increased rates of suicide. We obviously do not have definitive figures, but that was always going to be a very serious risk. We will need to make sure that our mental health system is able to meet the growing need. We already had a community-managed mental health sector that was unable to meet the existing need, which was recognised in the 10-year plan. It has become even more critical than ever that we fund our community-managed mental health services because now, more than ever, we have to keep people away from hospitals. We do not need people with serious mental health issues turning up to our hospitals if there is any capacity to support them safely within the community. We have been saying this all along, but now is the time to do that. We have seen investment coming through from the federal government, and that has been welcomed. The community-managed mental health sector has certainly spoken about the goodwill that is coming from the Mental Health Commission to ensure that there is

engagement. But there is a concern that we are able to deal immediately with the crisis. There is a particular concern about the impact of coronavirus on people who are accommodated in our psychiatric hostels because they are particularly vulnerable. We have to be mindful that we will have to take a long-term approach to this.

I acknowledge the good work that is happening in the family and domestic violence space. Obviously, we will be dealing with legislation around this shortly. I recognise that, at the moment, instances of family and domestic violence are, unfortunately, well and truly on the increase, and concerns are coming through to me from people involved in child protection. I will have more to say about that, perhaps, in members' statements.

I want to acknowledge the good engagement that is happening around the disability space. The feedback that has come back to me has certainly been that the issues have been articulated, even if the problems have not been resolved. The disability peak bodies and people working within the space are saying that they need swifter movement from the National Disability Insurance Agency about how to respond to a lot of the issues that are emerging. This is a population group that is particularly at risk, and I think we need to be very mindful of making sure that their needs are met.

I also want to say that I have had a lot of feedback from, particularly, Aboriginal Noongar elders, who have said that they have felt as though many of the concerns within the community have not necessarily had an avenue to be heard, although I think that might be changing now. There has, necessarily, been a big focus on Aboriginal people who live in the Pilbara and the Kimberley. That is important, because it is about saving lives, but we also need to come back to remembering that the majority of Aboriginal people within Western Australia live in metropolitan Perth and have specific needs, particularly around issues of overcrowding in their homes, which creates serious risks. That is without even looking at the fact that a lot of Aboriginal people already live with comorbidities.

If I am going to give the brickbats, I will say that it is in the way that this government has chosen to respond to what is happening within our prisons. In other states, proactive legislation has been put forward to allow discretion for low-risk prisoners, in some circumstances, to be able to receive early release from prison, because it has been recognised by the World Health Organization that our prisons will be a hotbed of disease if disease gets in to them. We are talking about a population group who, largely, live with comorbidities, cannot self-isolate in the way that people in the community can, and, by definition, live in close proximity to each other. I have been very disheartened by the responses I have had from the minister that prisoners will still be able to access the health services that are ordinarily available to them. Those services are woefully inadequate at any given time.

The idea that we will, effectively, be sentencing some people to death by keeping them in prison when we could otherwise safely get them out into the community, defies belief. I particularly think of Bandyup Women's Prison and the number of women in that prison who are Aboriginal and have families that they need to take care of. I am hearing daily from families of prisoners because people have become aware that I am prepared to raise these issues. People are desperately upset about what will happen and want to know why Western Australia is taking a different position on this. This is aggravated by the fact that in Western Australia we do not have the right to have a judge-alone trial, so people who would otherwise be able to have their trials and potentially be subject to release are now looking at having to be kept on remand for a longer period than normal. I have also said that there needs to be a halt on people being sent to prison for fine default. I note that we have never had a chance to debate that legislation. I am really concerned about what this will mean for our prisons.

I could say much more about our schools. I am glad that the transition has finally been made to allow online learning, but I need to acknowledge that the transition has been anything but smooth for parents of public school students. I certainly hope that it goes better for those parents after Easter. I am also conscious that there is still great uncertainty about what is happening in TAFE, both for students and lecturers, because they are in regular contact with me.

Finally, I want to make some comments about the public sector. It has been concerning to me how inconsistent the capacity to work from home has been across the public sector, and the union has certainly been raising that with me. To a large degree, a lot of it seems to have been left up to the discretion of individual managers, and that has been less than satisfactory for people who work in our public sector. I recognise that these are terrible times and that everyone is working incredibly hard. It is up to all of us to make sure that we raise concerns as they come to our attention. I hope we are able to get through this as a community with as few people dying as possible and that we are able to recover.

HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan — Leader of the Opposition) [11.28 am]: I would like to make some comments on this motion, which the opposition will support. I thank Hon Alison Xamon for bringing it to the chamber. I think it is very pertinent that this place deals with this issue and gives members an opportunity to express what is going on in their communities, and our community. As we have said over and over again, this is something that none of us has ever experienced before and, hopefully, will never experience again. It is having a profound impact on literally everybody, and I will talk about that in a moment. I would like to bring it back to a personal anecdote, which will provide an avenue into where we are at. We all have these stories. No-one saw this coming.

We all had Christmas. I went over to the Aussie Open. We all came back ready to get back into work, got back into Parliament, did our sparring, and everything was normal. We got up in the morning and most people had jobs. Some people had the challenges that they have always had, but it was pretty much normal. Then it changed so swiftly. About three weeks ago my mother came over to my electorate office, which she does on a Friday whenever she possibly can. She is 86 years old and she is a beautiful lady. She loves having lunch with my electorate staff and me. I then take her shopping and take her home to Carine. It is a great occasion; I love it. I do all that I possibly can to make sure that I am there on a Friday. On this Friday about three weeks ago—it was mid-March—she came in. We had lunch in the office and then she said that she wanted to get a few things, so we went to Woolworths. The lack of produce on some of the shelves was stark. It was extraordinary; it was really confronting. I had seen a bit of it; I had seen it happening, but not like this. When we got there, I showed my mother that there were no toilet rolls, as we had heard about. Anyway, I saw a young man at the end of the aisle. My mother was pushing the trolley, because she likes to be independent, but I steer it because her wheel alignment is not too flash! I said to the guy, “Sorry, can you just tell me when is the best time to come in to get some toilet rolls?” He said, “Do you need it for the lady?” I said my mother wanted some but that I could come back and get it whenever it was available. He said he would go and get us some. He went out the back and got my mother this roll of toilet paper. Members should have seen what happened in the next five to 10 minutes—hell hath no fury. The angst and resentment of people who did not have toilet rolls, and what they expressed to us, was extraordinary. That is true. I turned around and said, “Beryl, we’re going home, darl.” That showed me that panic was really starting to set in in the community. That was the first time I really appreciated how bad things were getting.

The next night I went to my favourite restaurant in Subiaco, Squires Loft, which is magnificent. I went there, again with my mum, and with my sister and brother-in-law. It was wonderful. I asked Linc, the owner, “How are you going here, mate?” He said it was pretty good and there were no problems at that stage. Things were already starting to show a bit of vulnerability. Do members know what? Within a week I could not take my mother out again and Lincoln’s Squires Loft was closed. That all happened within the space of a week. Quite frankly, for most of us who are pretty healthy and have a job, this is confronting enough, but the issues that a vast majority of the population out there now faces are just absolutely daunting, because this has happened instantly. Overnight, the quality of their lives has changed. All restaurants are closed, cafes are closed, hotels are closed, the retail sector has pretty much come to a grinding halt and recreational workers have lost their jobs. This is the new paradigm, this is the new existence, and people have had to deal with this not just from an economic perspective, but from a psychological perspective, and that will have ramifications that will be absolutely profound for our society as we come out of this thing.

A direct result of COVID-19 is that there is a new sector of vulnerability. We have had vulnerable sectors of the community, most significantly people who have been marginalised pretty much all their lives—the Aboriginal community, those with a disability or the homeless. They are people who have struggled all their lives to live what they regard as a normal life. But we have a new sector of vulnerability now and it is called everyone, because this thing is not racist and it is not discriminatory. Everyone is open to it, and, as I said, the implications are absolutely profound. This is impacting on people’s lives, their relationships and their futures. That is what we have to deal with. We all have our challenges, and the mind is a battlefield. It is such a battlefield in so many spaces. All we need is that one negative seed, which we have all endured at some stage, that gets planted in there. Unless we have the coping strategies and the resilience to deal with that negative seed, it is like a cancer; it just grows, and all of a sudden something that might be minuscule completely consumes us and takes over our every being, everything we do. So many people with mental illness issues have to deal with this on a day-to-day basis, so they are used to it, and many people in a raft of other areas such as relationships and employment have to deal with this on a day-to-day basis, and they are quite used to it, but most of us do not. But it is there now. That vulnerability, that seed of doubt, that battlefield that is going on in the minds of literally millions of unemployed Australians now must be very daunting. The reason it is more daunting than ever before is that this thing is not finite. We cannot say, as some are saying, that this is going to be over by Easter. We cannot say it is going to be over by Christmas; we cannot say it is going to be over in three months. We simply do not know. We can take joy at the fact that we had only nine new cases in Western Australia yesterday, but tomorrow they might be 20, 30, 40 or 50; we just do not know, and that is the thing that is so confronting to so many members of the community. As I said, it is not just those who have their issues with controlling the mind, but all of us. We have a new class of vulnerability. Just have a look at those lines of unemployed people who are relentlessly shown in the media on a day-to-day basis. Let us not forget, guys, that thousands upon thousands of those people never in a million years would have imagined that they would be looking for welfare—ever. I know it is the job of the media to take footage of that, but it must be so disheartening for someone to be standing there and have a camera in their face, knowing it is going to be on the six o’clock news, and that they are unemployed and have to line up for welfare. Of course, it is nothing to be ashamed of—it is the new normal for a lot of people—but that is what we are faced with with this virus. We are faced with a virus that none of us have ever experienced before. We will come through it from an economic perspective, but my real concern is that we make sure that we look after those who are vulnerable and not just the

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traditional classes that I have talked about. Our friends, our neighbours, our mothers, our fathers and our cousins—everyone—are going to need to be asked, “Are you okay?” They really are, because this is creating a seed of doubt that a lot of people will have a lot of difficulty responding to.

Both the federal and state governments have responded very well, and that is very good. As I said yesterday, it is very good that our decision-makers are working together. I am in awe of the decision-making that is taking place at the federal level. The fact that the six states, the two territories and the federal government are working in unison is phenomenal. I really like that. I really like the hundreds of billions of dollars that the federal government is injecting into the economy. I really like the fact that people are being retained on employment contracts through employment rather than being put on welfare. I think that is a wonderful step forward. I really like the fact that the state government is doing likewise with fees and charges and payroll tax to try to stimulate the economy. Yes, that must help; that must have an impact. Of course, it is not going to impact necessarily at a social level, but it will in a way, because it will assist those people who would normally have been unemployed if that assistance had not been forthcoming. At least now it has given them something to look forward to. Guys, this is a significant proportion of the population now. People who five or 10 years ago bought a house for \$450 000 at the peak of the boom and have a mortgage of \$400 000 now find that their house is worth \$350 000 and they are unemployed. Just imagine that. Imagine how we would feel with two or three children with a mortgage of \$350 000 or \$400 000 with a house that is worth \$100 000 less than what was paid for it. Imagine a young girl who worked at Myer and who has just been on a holiday, has a \$20 000 or \$30 000 debt and is now unemployed. I am not just pulling these examples out of the air. These are real examples of what we have in our community now, and that is what we have to deal with. Imagine a recreational worker such as a tennis coach. A good mate of mine had an abundance of clients, and overnight, from last Saturday, they were gone—no more tennis coaching. It is the same right across the nation. Again, I am not saying that these people are more significant than anyone else; I am saying that this is affecting everyone. It is the new normal.

It is a new vulnerability.

My electorate office is in the Warwick shopping centre. When I walked through there the other day, it was hard not to get a tear. I saw the number of shops that were closed. The only shops open were the big retailers. That is good—at least it is providing some certainty that there will be food and supplies there for people, particularly the elderly et cetera, wondering whether they are still going to have a meal. That is the difficulty. Just imagine that. The good thing about it that I found particularly over the past week when I walked through that shopping centre is that there is almost a connectedness between everyone in the shopping centre. We were all feeding off each other’s vulnerabilities and at the same time feeding off each other’s desire to get over this thing—that inherent human nature of survival that we will get through this.

I am pleased that Hon Alison Xamon brought up the disability sector. As I mentioned to the minister yesterday, a number of people have contacted me about this. I am pleased that a lot of things have been done. I was going to read a couple of emails, but I will not now because I am running short of time. I got a bit carried away! Suffice to say, we are all very conscious of the fact that the disability sector is traditionally a vulnerable sector because it has had to very heavily rely on government, carers and providers. Now it is wondering whether this is going to get worse. I am really, really pleased that the government has taken some initiatives in that area. I draw members’ attention to yesterday’s response from the Minister for Disability Services, Hon Stephen Dawson, in which he outlined a number of those initiatives. I thank him and the government, and the federal government, for providing that certainty to people with disability.

Another area of concern is education, which is my passion. I am a former education minister and had 23 years in the classroom—I love it. Governments made the right decision about keeping kids in school—although they were pilloried by some in the community—until it got to the point at which it was pretty much parents in the community who made the decision. Initially, it was very important. Education is very important in a child’s life. We can talk about the educational value, the early intervention and the transition levels from one level to another, and then ultimately an education system that provides the best opportunity for employment. Education in the contemporary world does not only provide that. Pastoral care is equally as important as the curriculum in an education system. A multitude of social issues exist, with broken families, substance abuse et cetera. For a lot of children, school is a safe haven. They bring with them a multitude of issues. To put them back into the community or away from the safety of school at that time, perhaps when mum and dad were not going to be there, would have been the wrong course of action. I am pleased that education ministers across the nation did what they did. I think they made the right call in ultimately giving parents the responsibility. There will be a lot of online learning. There will be a lot of pressure on parents over the next two to three months with regard to having their children with them 24/7. Again, that is another vulnerability that we must be mindful of. I imagine that the Department of Communities will be a very busy department over the months ahead.

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Another area of concern is graduates. In any transition point in life, this is probably the most significant. To transition from compulsory education to employment or further education is massive in anyone's life. When finishing year 12, students are prepared either through certification through a training sector or ATAR to go on to get employment or go to university. Another area of vulnerability now is year 12 students. Imagine how year 12 students feel at the moment, not knowing what is going to happen. There is enough stress placed upon a 17 or 18-year-old student who is desperate to get into university or go to TAFE and now they do not know what is going to happen. Yesterday, the education minister provided some alternatives that the Education Council is looking at. I applaud those alternatives. I have my own opinions on this, but I am not going to stir up anything; I just think that they really do need to get a message out there with students to give them some certainty. At the moment, year 12 students do not know what is happening. They should be moving into their first semester exams at the moment. They do not know what is happening. I implore the education minister to plead with her colleagues, who may or may not agree with what she decides, to make a decision within the next month to give year 12 students some certainty. One option that the education minister mentioned yesterday was to condense the curriculum. That option is probably the most conducive to getting the best outcomes for an ATAR or a nationally based education system.

I have not provided any solutions here. As a member of Her Majesty's loyal opposition, I cannot do an enormous amount. On the part of the opposition, I have tried to work with the government to ensure that we do all we possibly can in the Parliament to ensure that all the COVID-19 legislation is passed in a seamless fashion. It is minuscule in terms of what is going on in the real world. I have almost a sense of self-guilt that my life is pretty much unchanged. In a way, that is confronting. I am not worried about that. I want to do all that I possibly can to assist those people in the community who are really struggling, those who really do have seeds of doubt, because I hope those battles in their minds do not turn into a war. Social issues will confront us as a community well beyond the time when the dark clouds of COVID-19 rise.

The human race is extraordinarily resilient—we always are and always have been. We have confronted adversity with strength for centuries. Through plagues, floods and world wars, we always emerge with strength. The health sector and the community will learn from this and we will emerge stronger. There is a big void at the moment between where we are and where we will end up in 12 months. The best thing we can do as a community and as a Parliament is provide as much certainty to people as we possibly can to say: yes, we have your back, we are going to look after you, we are going to work collectively and cooperatively as a Parliament to make sure we can assist as best we can. We are down in the trenches with you. We are shoulder to shoulder with you. When those seeds of doubt emerge, you are not alone. The government is going to look after you, the opposition is going to look after you, and the community is going to look after you, so that we emerge at a time when these terrible dark clouds of COVID-19 rise. We can emerge stronger and better than ever. Thank you very much to Hon Alison Xamon for bringing the motion to the chamber.

The PRESIDENT: Hon Tim Clifford did seek the call. Minister for Environment, I do not know whether you want to speak now or whether you want to wait.

Hon Stephen Dawson: I am relaxed. I need to speak. I am happy for Hon Tim Clifford to speak, but I do have some legislation to prepare for.

HON TIM CLIFFORD (East Metropolitan) [11.48 am]: I want to raise a couple of points. They are more of a reflection of what has been coming through my office from the community. I agree with the sentiment put forward by the Leader of the Opposition about what has happened to the world in recent weeks, particularly how surreal it has been. Walking down the street, people are looking aghast. They have a look of helplessness and fear. People just want to help others. There is a lot of confusion out there. That has been difficult to comprehend. I have reflected in this place on my position 12 years ago when we went through the global financial crisis and I lost my job. I had a mortgage and did not know what was going on. A conversation about my own experience was spurred on by looking at those Centrelink lines. I was chatting to a mate about it and just reflecting on that difficult time. As the Leader of the Opposition articulated, this is a different time. We have this unseen enemy in the community. We do not know where it is going to go. We see horrific images in other countries, in places such as Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Some systems that were built to deal with healthcare issues were not built to deal with a lot of people going into their emergency wards, and we have systems that have shown to be inadequate to stand up to the task of protecting people.

I said in my inaugural speech in this place that the role of the government is to protect people, and I would like to acknowledge that I was in shock when I saw some of the initiatives put out by the federal government. It is as if everything has been turned on its head within a matter of days and weeks, and the real task of helping people was implemented, and it kicked the government into gear. We need to stand together. It does not matter what political party we are in; we have to work together to ensure that the community is protected from the worst aspects of what is going on in the community. It is very difficult to respond to the questions that we have been asked. It is very difficult to look at a student who is saying, "I'm near the end of my studies; I do not know whether I should be

going to class. I am worried about sitting in a classroom next to another student who might have COVID-19.” Then single parents ask, “Should I take my kids out of school? What should I do?” It is hard to grasp to find the answers to give these people to reassure them that what they are doing is the right thing, because there is so much confusion going on.

One of the issues that has been continually raised with my office is the fact that there is uncertainty in housing, more relating back to what is going on with rentals and mortgages. How are we going to be protected throughout this unprecedented time? Will the government come in and help us? I acknowledge the federal government’s announcement on the weekend about the moratorium on evictions. I think that that is a really worthwhile step. It gave surety, but it also created a little bit more confusion with its mixed messages. We live in a political bubble. We follow what is going on. We know to some extent what the departments do, whose role is what, what the ministers do and how the state interacts with the federal Parliament. But a lot of the people in the community do not know that, so when the Prime Minister comes up, stands there and makes an announcement, people do not know that the machinery of government has to be kicked into gear down at the state level to ensure that the legislation goes through the state Parliament to ensure that people are protected in that space.

I acknowledge that a lot of people in the community are doing a right the right thing. They are self-isolating. They are staying at home. They are making sure that other people are going to be protected in this space, because they do not want their grandparents or people with underlying health issues to get sick or spread it more broadly in the community. But a lot of people in the community are in the position that they do not know whether they can pay their rent. We have seen the lines at the Centrelink offices. A lot of the people in those lines are people who were casual staff working in a cafe or people who relied on their casual wages to set up their music gear on the weekend to make sure that people were entertained. They are also the people who are in a broad range of different levels within the community. It is very hard to comprehend that so many people in so many different sectors suddenly do not know whether they will have a business tomorrow. It looked like we were getting out of what was a pretty flat period and it looked like things were turning up for a lot of people and then we had this shock. I drove past the Centrelink offices in my electorate and saw those people. They were in anguish, waiting for assistance. They did not know what they were going to get. There are people in those lines who are worried about not only navigating a system that they are not used to, but also making sure that they can pay their mortgage that is due at the end of the month or their rent. Although we acknowledge that it is the government’s role in this crisis to protect people, we also have to acknowledge that housing is a human right and we need to make sure that those people who are in those precarious situations, especially people who are renting, are going to be protected in this space. We have seen the statistics. We know that a lot of people in the community will be renting for the rest of their lives. They do not have a choice. It is something that they are doing. That is their life now. They have to rent; they do not have the option to buy a house, so I believe that they need more assistance. They need to be protected in this space.

If we are encouraging people to stay home, we also need to acknowledge the fact that there are real estate agents who are saying that they have not heard anything from the government to push this in a certain direction. People are still required to pay their rent; otherwise, they will still face the same eviction notices that anyone else would in normal times, until we hear anything else. In fact, we have seen examples in Victoria where people were sent pretty blunt notices and then some of those had to be retracted and the language softened because a lot of people’s anxiety levels were going through the roof.

On 9 March, I wrote to the Premier’s office. It was a pretty wideranging letter, but it is more of a reflection of the community—what people were asking for and indicating what they would like. It pretty much reflected their concerns. In the letter, I urged five measures, and I will read out each point to ensure that it is on the record and that everyone knows. The first point was an immediate moratorium on rental evictions and mortgage foreclosures. The second point was rent holidays or at least an immediate rent freeze with no increase in rent for the duration of the health crisis. The third point was mortgage holidays for homeowners who cannot make the regular payments for the duration of the health crisis. The fourth point was a plan for providing support and accommodation to people sleeping rough. The fifth point was additional support for public and social housing tenants.

As I mentioned before, the national cabinet agreed on Sunday to ban residential and commercial landlords from evicting tenants under the financial stress caused by the COVID-19 crisis, yet we still need to make amendments to acts to ensure that these people are going to be protected. I acknowledge that it is only a few days after that announcement, so, as we have seen in this place, a bunch of legislation is having to be put through in a rapid-fire fashion to ensure that other parts of the broader community are protected from this. But I think the forefront of people’s concern is that they will not have a home or a roof over their heads. I recognise that it is an enormous task for any government to respond to the crisis, but I believe that more can be done, especially around the mixed messages. Even up until this morning, I am still having people say, “I’ve lost my job and I don’t know whether I can pay my rent. I was a casual. My casual wage was supplemented. My partner was full-time waged to ensure

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that our mortgage was covered, but now they don't have a job either." That is the reality that we are seeing, so I believe that we, as members in this place, need to be clearer with how we are, and we need to be able to say to people that we are going to look after them. I think that more confusion comes out of the idea that hopefully we can make sure that renters can negotiate with their landlords, and landlords can negotiate through real estate agents to ensure that they come to some sort of mutual agreement. Someone mentioned to me that that just seems to be a bit of a delaying tactic. Hopefully, the industry can come up to the plate and provide some sort of solution, but there is not much faith in that when money is at stake. A lot of people do not have the nous or the ability to negotiate, especially someone like a student, for example, who might be subletting a room. Those people are in a vulnerable position. People are worrying about not only negotiating with their landlords, but also the crisis at hand, ensuring that their parents and grandparents will not get sick, or struggling with self-isolation because they have a strong network of friends and rely on them for many different things. It is important that we note that everyone deals with this differently. We can help by being very clear about exactly how we can support people.

I think we need to be a lot clearer with our language. What does it mean when the Prime Minister says that there will be a moratorium, and how does that apply to us in Western Australia? I think that is something we need to be really proactive about. I am sure that is being worked on now; however, as I said before, I am reflecting what is coming through my office, and that is a real concern for me. I think people deserve to have some sort of surety that if the Prime Minister is going to put something on the table, that is reinforced, and we explain to people exactly what that means for them within their communities and the state.

I look forward to seeing what is coming through to hopefully reform the Residential Tenancies Act. I will work with the government and do whatever I can to inform people about what the government is doing. But I think we need to make sure that we are clear—that we stand together and make sure that the community knows exactly where we stand on this issue.

These are unprecedented times. We do not yet know the health impacts of this virus and how it will affect everything. As I said before, having lived through the global financial crisis, at least when the government said, "We are going to put forward a stimulus package that means this, this and this", we could model how that would work and explain how it would protect workers, how we were trying to boost the economy and get people back into work, and what was the time frame. We are in an unprecedented crisis and we do not know what the end date will be. We need to make sure that we stand together, put forward exactly what we are going to do, translate what the federal government is putting forward, and make sure that people feel reassured that the members of Parliament, who they have elected to this place, are here to reassure people and fulfil their role to protect them.

I thank my colleague for putting this motion today. I believe it is very important and timely. I would not say it is a debate; I think we are reflecting on community concerns and how we can do the right thing to address them.

HON STEPHEN DAWSON (Mining and Pastoral — Minister for Environment) [12.03 pm]: I rise on behalf of the government to make a contribution to the motion moved by Hon Alison Xamon. I indicate from the outset that the government is supportive of the motion, and I thank the member for bringing the motion to the house.

It is, indeed, an unprecedented time. I want to echo the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition in his contribution on how the world has changed and how people are feeling at the moment. If someone had said to me in December that in three months' time, the world will have been engulfed by a crisis linked to a flu-like illness, I would have told them to go away. It is more like a Netflix movie or a sci-fi novel than the real world, but the reality is that this is real and it is having a real impact on everyone. I think the Leader of the Opposition in his contribution made the point that it is not just our normal vulnerable cohort of people who are being affected by this; it is every level of the economy and every person in the economy. It is affecting us all in different ways, but we are all affected. The world has changed. Hopefully it is only for a short time, but the fact is that thousands of people are schooling their children in the home. Who would have thought that? Who would have thought we would ever be able to do that, or that we would have to do that? There are no playgrounds open for our kids. Not only do we have to keep them in the house to care for them, look after them and keep them going, but also they cannot go out and play in playgrounds for risk of being affected by illness. Places such as cafes and restaurants that we rely on for food and social occasions are gone. Places such as the gym, where we go to keep our minds as well as our bodies active, are gone. All these things have gone. Shops are closed. We are social beings. We cannot shake hands. We cannot hug people unless they are immediate family. All those things are huge changes to us. Of course, there are many tens of thousands—in fact, at this stage, millions—across the country who have lost their jobs. This is totally unprecedented. We have to do our bit in this place and the government has to do its bit to make sure that we are taking care of the economy and taking care of each of the cohorts that are affected by the challenging situation that we find ourselves in.

I say at the outset that I appreciate the collegiate nature of the chamber and the members of this place in how we are dealing with the legislation before us at this time. Thank you. It is unprecedented, and I hope we do not have to do it like this again, but I value members' support.

I want to also thank those in the community who are providing essential services at this unprecedented time. As the Prime Minister said, at this time, people are in an essential service if they have a job. Whether someone is a healthcare worker, a disability worker, a shop assistant or a council worker collecting our household waste, each and every one of those people, and those I have not mentioned, are essential. If it were not for all those people, the world would be an even worse place than it is at the moment. Everybody is scared, particularly those frontline workers, shop assistants or disability workers who have to turn up on a daily basis, because if they do not, a person with a disability might get sicker, or a senior might not be able to get the food they need. Without them, we would truly, truly be in a worse place.

I acknowledge the comments made by Hon Tim Clifford in his contribution about getting the message out and keeping messages consistent. I urge the community to get its information from a reputable source. This is not the time for conspiracies, and there are a great number of conspiracies floating around the community, particularly on Facebook. There are all sorts of things. Somebody has a thought bubble, they post it on Facebook and it spreads, but it is not fact. I urge people to please get their information from a reputable source such as the government website. Many broadcasters such as Channel Seven, Channel Nine and ABC are now broadcasting live press conferences of the Premier, the Minister for Health and the Prime Minister. I urge people to watch those and to get their news from those sources. Do not get it from Facebook. It does not help anybody and I think it only adds to the level of anxiety in the community.

The Premier is working extremely closely with the Prime Minister and the leaders of the other states and territories, and, at this time, it is most appropriate that that happens. Again, it is great to see the collegiate nature at the federal or national cabinet level, and it is exactly what should be happening. Those leaders are working in lock step. They may come from different political stripes and different political colours, but they are truly working together and making decisions in the best interests of the state. Hon Tim Clifford is right; sometimes there is a lag between a decision being announced and the policy being put into place, but that is because processes such as Parliament have to be traversed before we can get policies in place or laws changed. Of course, the drafting continues on legislation for things such as residential tenancies or tenancy issues. The ideas come first and the action happens afterwards. In a normal world, someone would have the drafting done, they would bring it to Parliament, they would have their ducks lined up and would then announce. In this crazy place we are in at the moment, we are announcing first and then trying to catch up and bring the laws into place as quickly as possible so that people can benefit. I think that we are all on the same team in fighting COVID-19.

We all know how quickly this virus can spread and it has necessitated a rapid succession of decisions. In particular, I thank the Leader of the Opposition in this place for his support. As a state government, we continue to take every step necessary to respond to the pandemic and to protect the lives, and indeed the livelihoods, of Western Australians. On almost a daily basis, both the state and federal governments make further decisions and announcements as we respond to COVID-19. Honourable members in this place would be aware of many of those measures, but in light of Hon Alison Xamon's motion today, it is important for me to put some of those on the record. These are in no particular order, and obviously I have my own issues of preference or the things I am working on as the Minister for Disability Services in particular, but also as the Minister for Environment. Of course, I am responding on behalf of the government today, so these are in no particular order.

A great deal of concern and anxiety has been expressed in the community. One of the decisions that has been made relates to Western Australia's borders with other states. Restrictions have been put in place for those returning to Western Australia to enter isolation. That is because the evidence shows that many of the cases of COVID-19 in Western Australia have come from people who have come back into the state on a plane—many of them from overseas—or a cruise ship. We must act to stop the spread. We had a good day yesterday, and probably not as good a day today, in terms of the number of people who are being diagnosed with COVID-19.

These are extraordinary circumstances and it is an extraordinary action to put in place border restrictions. We are doing it because of health issues, but when I think about that, I could not have fathomed such a thing months ago. Border restrictions are in place and we have also imposed restrictions on the number of people who can travel outside the regions in the state. Obviously, exemptions apply for people travelling for work purposes, to attend medical appointments, for transporting freight or for approved compassionate grounds, but these restrictions are in place to stop the spread of the virus. The government has also put in place limitations on how many others people can hang with—be with. That is incredible. We would not have countenanced months ago having to do this, but these are some of the desperate measures that we are putting in place to stop the further spread of this virus.

We are also saying to people, "Please stay home unless you are shopping for what you need. Please stay home. Please stay home. Only go out if you need food or necessary supplies, or for medical or healthcare needs. Do not leave

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the house if you don't need to. Help us." I acknowledge the hard work of staff in Treasury in this state and federally to help roll out stimulus and relief measures to support Western Australian businesses through this difficult period. On 16 March, the state government announced a \$607 million economic stimulus package. That included freezing household fees and charges until at least 1 July 2021. That freeze applied to the entire household basket—that is, electricity, water, motor vehicle charges, the emergency services levy and public transport fares. This is the first time that there has been no annual increase in the basket in about 16 years.

We have doubled the energy assistance payment from \$305 to \$610. That is to support vulnerable Western Australians, including pensioners and other eligible concession cardholders, and that money will be credited against their energy bill. That measure has been brought forward to this financial year rather than being paid from 1 July 2020, which was initially announced would occur.

The government will also provide one-off grants to Western Australian businesses and make changes to the payroll tax exemption threshold, which is being increased. We dealt with the legislation for that yesterday. We have brought that forward, again with the idea of helping businesses keep their staff employed so that we are not putting pressure on more people and forcing those businesses to let those people go. The Leader of the Opposition in his contribution made the point that there are queues outside Centrelink offices of people who never in their wildest dreams would have imagined that they would need to access Centrelink or an allowance from the government. However, that is the place in which we find ourselves. I acknowledge the work of the federal government and its announcement yesterday of the \$1 500 payment to keep people employed, and the boost for the Newstart Allowance, which I think is long overdue and it is hoped will last longer than the next few months ahead of us. Those are the things that we absolutely needed to do, and if we did not do them, there would be social unrest in the community. People are already stressed and under the pump, so these are good announcements.

Just yesterday, the McGowan government announced a second package of stimulus and relief measures totalling \$1 billion, part of which is to reduce electricity bills for small businesses. That will provide a one-off \$2 500 credit available for customers who consume fewer than 50 megawatts per annum. The credit will be allocated from 1 May this year to reduce current and future electricity bills. I am told the measure will provide about \$236.8 million in relief to businesses such as cafes, delis, restaurants, beauticians and small retail stores that have been impacted by recent trading restrictions to contain COVID-19. There are also benefits for not-for-profit organisations.

An amount of \$100.4 million has been allocated to waive a wide range of licence fees for small and medium-sized businesses for the next 12 months. That applies to things such as licences for building services, for plumbers, for electricians, for tourism businesses operating in our parks, and boating registration and mooring fees for tourism operators and commercial fishers—all sorts of things. Again, it is focused on small to medium businesses to help them get through this difficult time.

Further changes have been made to waive payroll tax liabilities for the four-month period from 1 March until the end of June for businesses with total Australia-wide wages of less than \$7.5 million.

Changes have been made to Keystart so that Keystart customers facing financial hardship due to COVID-19 can apply to defer principal repayments and waive interest costs by up to six months. Assistance will be assessed on a case-by-case basis in line with Keystart's hardship assessment policy. This will mean that a customer borrowing \$350 000 over a 30-year loan, for example, can defer estimated repayments of over \$10 500 over six months, or about \$1 700 a month. The interest saving over a six-month period would be around \$7 000 for newly established loans.

Businesses can also apply for interest-free payment arrangements and for late payment penalties to be waived for payroll tax, transfer duty, landholder duty, vehicle licence duty or land tax. Members should bear in mind that these things are in place because these taxes or levies fund the Western Australian economy, but we are in extraordinary times and we have to give relief for these payments to help us get through the COVID-19 situation in which we find ourselves.

A further \$500 million has been allocated to health and other frontline service delivery, as well as to boost capacity for additional industry support to ensure that the government can continue to provide a strong response to COVID-19. This funding will go towards increasing supplies of personal protective equipment, for ventilators, for additional staff and hospital beds to cope with a surge in demand in the health system, and also for increased cleaning of public transport and schools.

In the community sector, an announcement has been made about Lotterywest: \$159 million has been directed from Lotterywest to support not-for-profit community groups, sporting groups and arts groups to help them deal with the coronavirus. This includes fast turnaround grants for organisations to deliver crisis and emergency support and payments for groups experiencing financial hardship due to cancelled events, and also repurposing the Lotterywest discretionary grants program to establish a COVID-19 crisis relief fund.

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As I indicated, electricity bills for charities will be reduced with a one-off \$2 500 credit. That credit will be allocated from 1 May. That is expected to provide an estimated \$6.9 million. For many not-for-profit organisations, that one-off credit will pay their electricity bill for most of the next 12 months.

Funding has also been provided to community service providers with government agencies continuing to pay contracts in the sector to at least 30 June 2020 even when providers are unable to deliver services due to impacts caused by COVID-19. That is something we will continue to watch and something that is warranted because it will benefit many, many Western Australians. Also, no not-for-profit organisation in Western Australia experiencing financial hardship as a result of COVID-19 will have their power disconnected or water restricted. In addition, no interest will be charged on deferred bill payments.

Since learning about the experience and the emergence of COVID-19, the Department of Health has been working tirelessly with its national and international counterparts to prepare WA for the likelihood of this virus becoming more widespread. I know many of us are not getting much sleep at the moment, but I want to acknowledge the Premier and, indeed, the Minister for Health, who have been working incredibly hard and long hours. There are many others, too, working those long hours, but I single those two out only because I see them on a daily basis and know that their days are long and the work is strenuous. However, everybody collectively is doing their best at this time to help Western Australians.

The Minister for Health declared a public health state of emergency for the whole of Western Australia following advice from the Chief Health Officer. That gives the Chief Health Officer additional powers to manage this public health emergency, including the power to quarantine people and to direct other public authorities to assist and manage the emergency. We are working to prioritise getting more personal protective equipment. We have more ventilators and more humidifiers and ICU beds. They are all in place.

The Western Australia Police Force has done and continues to do some incredible work, including in the family and domestic violence space. I know that some legislation is before us at the moment, but I want to pay my respects to the police officers and emergency services workers who are out there.

I am running out of time so I will finish on my own portfolio. I gave an answer to Hon Peter Collier yesterday in relation to the disability sector, but can I say that if it were not for the incredible workers in the disability sector, many, many more Western Australians would be at risk of losing their lives or indeed in acute beds in the hospital system. They go out there on a daily basis to provide services to people with disability, and I want to acknowledge and thank them for their incredible work. I am working with my colleagues nationally and the federal human services minister, Stuart Robert, and my federal colleagues to try to access more PPE for not only those who currently use it, but also those who might be at risk in the future. There has been an international shortage but we are getting that done.

Incredible work is happening at the Department of Communities and across all portfolios. I want to acknowledge the community services sector. There was a not-for-profit peak bodies roundtable with the Premier, Minister McGurk, Minister Tinley and myself last week. Hon Alison Xamon mentioned Debra Zanella and Sue Ash who have been appointed to help. Tarun Weeramanthri, a former Chief Health Officer, is helping the state as well. Everybody with experience has been drafted in. A big team has been established in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. People are well and truly focused on dealing with this pandemic that is before us at the moment. This is a very important motion to have before us. I thank Hon Alison Xamon for bringing it to our attention. I am sure that we will have more conversations about this over the weeks and months ahead.

HON MARTIN ALDRIDGE (Agricultural) [12.23 pm]: I understand a number of other people are seeking the call so I will contain my remarks and not use all the time. However, I would like to thank Hon Alison Xamon for bringing this timely motion to the house today—I said yesterday it is time to consider this matter—and I thank members who have spoken on the motion today. The first limb of this motion is about the government's response. Members will be aware that that response effort will be ongoing for some time, if not for weeks and months, but possibly even years, in terms of the economic recovery once the health pandemic passes.

I want to talk about some of the specific issues with the COVID-19 pandemic facing the regions. First of all, I appreciate that things are changing almost on an hourly basis, but access to timely and accurate information is really important at a time like this. I think the minister just made some comments about making sure that we obtain information from reliable sources and, where possible, from government sources to make sure that misinformation does not spread in the community. To that end, we all have a responsibility to make sure that we do not add to people's anxiety and fears, but that we help to support the spread of accurate information from reliable sources.

I am getting a lot of feedback from regional health service providers, private and public physicians, nurses and the like on what is happening in a regional context. We have seen emergency departments come under increasing pressure and we have seen the government stepping back from its commitment to establish a number of so-called COVID-19 clinics throughout Western Australia, beyond the one that has now been established in Bunbury. I think the Minister

for Health made a commitment to establish further clinics at Albany, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie, Broome, South Hedland and Karratha, if my memory serves me right, but Bunbury's has been established and the others have been put on ice by the government. Something I am certainly hearing from health practitioners is that that decision needs to be revisited because our emergency departments are only going to come under increasingly more pressure when the traditional flu season in Western Australia kicks in. Obviously, the government's commitment for urgent care clinics might aid this approach, but there has not been much movement on that election commitment outside what has already been announced in the Perth, Peel and Bunbury regions with respect to urgent care clinics.

The motion refers to sectors that remain vulnerable. A number of them have not really hit the media as such, but I am certainly getting a lot of activity, contact and communication on them. I do not think in my short time in this place, and as an elected member, that I have received as much contact with me personally and my office than I am receiving right now. The amount of contact that is being received and the number of people seeking help and advocacy on their behalf is quite extraordinary. Some of the aspects that I want to briefly mention in terms of vulnerable sectors of our community are childcare centres. There has been a lot of focus on schools and the operation of our public and private schools, but childcare centres are particularly vulnerable. More of them are closing and reducing their hours and days of operation and more staff are being laid off. I know that the federal government has moved to allow for a greater number of allowable absences from, I think, 46 to 62 days, but a greater number of parents, similar to what we saw in our schools, are un-enrolling their children from childcare sectors, which in turn affects the childcare subsidy paid to childcare centres. Obviously, in regional and remote areas a lot of childcare centres are run by not-for-profit or non-government organisations. They are not all commercial operators; in fact, very few of them in my electorate are commercial operators, so they are particularly vulnerable. If we are talking about making sure that our economy is able to rebound effectively post pandemic, childcare centres play a really important role in making sure that our mums and dads can remain engaged in the workforce.

One other thing that I think will be an enormous challenge is how we deliver education next term. I do not want to get into the nuts and bolts of the preparedness of the Department of Education to support that end, but I think that if classrooms do not resume in the normal sense in term 2, particularly vulnerable people in our community will be impacted more so than others. I think it is wrong for people to assume that every family has an internet connection, every family as a computer or a tablet, that every family has parents who are educated to a point that they can assist their children in their learning or that they have parents who are able to care for their children during these periods and to assist them in their learning. I think some families will be better prepared than others in this respect, and that will certainly have a significant impact on those more vulnerable families. As we know, regional and remote communities often have a higher degree of vulnerability as there is a lower socioeconomic index in many of those schools and communities. Some of my colleagues have reported an increase in homelessness in regional towns and centres. That is not something that I have seen for myself, but I have heard reports of increasing homelessness and homeless people moving into town centres in some parts of the state.

We also talk about the fact, and certainly hear from our leaders, that there is plenty of food to go around, that food security is not a problem and that people need to stop hoarding. We need to listen to the messages being delivered by really important organisations, like Foodbank in Western Australia, which are really short on supplies. They rely on our supermarkets and others to donate food and other products to their centres. They not only have significant demand on their services right now, but also have experienced an interruption of the supply to meet demand.

I am also hearing from our aged in the community who are in receipt of aged-care packages about service providers not being able to meet their obligations to them for a range of reasons. I think some of those providers are struggling with their workforce. There has also been some concern about the regional travel restrictions that were announced by the government last week. I think it is more a case of the former than the latter—that there appear to be some constraints on the deployment of their workforce. I am hearing from aged people in the community who are no longer getting continuity of service delivery through their aged-care packages, which is putting them at a higher risk and making them more vulnerable than they were. The aged-care sector and governments need to do what they can to ensure that those services continue to be delivered.

Members would be aware that late yesterday, the State Emergency Coordinator, who is also the Commissioner of Police—they are one and the same—issued the “Prohibition on Regional Travel Directions”. Despite the Premier saying that he would give people plenty of notice of the detail of the travel restrictions that would apply between regions in Western Australia, it was only last evening that the directions were published and then they came into effect at midnight last night. I am sure that over the last week, and more so overnight, regional members in the chamber will have been swamped with concerns about the application of those restrictions—about who is in, who is out and how it is going to be managed and policed. This motion refers to the vulnerable sections of our community. A number of aspects of these directions are a problem for vulnerable people. One issue that has been raised with me is that the government has advised people aged 70 and above to stay at home and to not leave their home. Someone may have an elderly parent, grandparent or somebody they have been caring for—they perhaps take them shopping

or to medical appointments or touch base with them on a weekly basis. I cannot see any provision in the directions issued by the State Emergency Coordinator that would allow somebody to cross a regional boundary to support their family member in those circumstances. That is clearly an oversight that ought to be addressed so that we can make sure that we continue to support family members in the circumstances that I described. I must say that I have identified a number of other examples of classes of people or particular activities that are not covered in the six pages of the directions notice issued last evening by the State Emergency Coordinator.

Other speakers have already mentioned the Lotterywest COVID-19 relief fund. A number of organisations in our community rely on fundraising efforts. As Hon Alison Xamon mentioned when moving this motion, not-for-profit organisations raise funds through events and other things. I have certainly fielded a lot of calls. I was in Melbourne a few weeks ago when I received a phone call from the chairman of the Merredin Show, which last year celebrated its 100th show. The Merredin Show was one week out from its 101st show when the new directions came in, which would have prevented the show from proceeding. It was facing financial ruin. A number of organisations were similarly affected at that time and will continue to be impacted across this sector. I know that the Goldfields Children Charity had persisted for some time with wanting to run its charity ball. I remember seeing a post that said that if it could not proceed with the ball, it would face financial ruin, and it would probably see the end of that charity event. A number of organisations, not for profit and otherwise, have been impacted by the pandemic. The Lotterywest fund will commit \$159 million to a range of areas, including crisis and emergency relief. It will provide support to organisations, including local governments and the not-for-profit community sector, to provide relief in these times of hardship. That is really important. I want to leave some time for other members, so I will conclude my remarks there. I also concur with many of the remarks that were made by previous speakers.

HON ROBIN SCOTT (Mining and Pastoral) [12.35 pm]: This is a very timely motion that has been brought on for debate by Hon Alison Xamon, and it is one that One Nation will wholeheartedly support. Coronavirus has brought out all the little cracks in our community. Most of the previous speakers have mentioned all the problems that this virus is creating with such things as housing and rent, and that our hospitals are at bursting point. As Hon Peter Collier mentioned, our year 12 students do not know what the next move will be. People are really worried about their mortgages. With the economy drying up, wages are disappearing, as jobs in our cafes, pubs and clubs are all going. One good thing is that we are paying attention to our most vulnerable homeless at the moment. The great thing that our state government is doing at the moment is freezing charges for our utilities. The other good thing is that payroll tax is on hold until the end of June. I would much rather payroll tax be on hold permanently, but a four-month break is just as good at the moment.

We all talk about how the community will get over this. The federal and state governments are doing their best. We have great health facilities and everything will work out in the end. But when we talk about communities, the word “community” means something completely different to me. To me, communities are places like Warakurna, Warburton, Tjuntjuntjara and Jameson. These are the places that I deal with and are real communities. This is where the most vulnerable people are. These people come to my office every single day. Last week, when I was in Boulder, one group of family members came into my office. There were six of them. One was an 11-year-old boy called Jonathan. They had been in Kalgoorlie–Boulder for five weeks. They cannot get back to their community. Every day they come in and make a quick two or three-minute phone call to their community to let them know that they are okay but that they are still having trouble getting back there. These people do not understand social distancing. They sit right next to each other and hug each other. They do not understand that if just one person gets this virus, it will go through the whole community like a bushfire. It is the family closeness of these people that makes them a very loving community. These are the people whom I am concerned about. I heard yesterday that Bega Garabirringu Health Service, which is an Aboriginal health service in Kalgoorlie, has closed its doors. We must ring the phone number for Bega at least six times a day to get it to send a vehicle to pick up people from our office and take them to utilise its service.

Although my staff in Boulder are working from home, on Monday morning when they went into the office to check the mail, they had to clear away blankets and rags basically because people are now sleeping at our front door and waiting for the office to open again so that they can make those phone calls. These are the communities that I am more concerned about. So far we have been lucky. I have not heard of any reports of coronavirus in the communities.

I would also like to mention the Leonora Pharmacy. The pharmacist there is having great problems in restocking his products. He gets everything from Australian Pharmaceutical Industries. He has had backorders now for more than a month. His backorders have just been cancelled and he is desperately trying everything he can to get his supplier to restock the pharmacy. He is not only the pharmacist for Leonora, but also a wholesale pharmacist who supplies the remote communities as well as the mine sites. John is the pharmacist in Leonora and he is desperate. I have been ringing API two or three times every day and all I get is an answering service. Although everybody is concerned about the impact of this virus, believe me when I say that the impact on metropolitan Perth will be huge if we allow this virus to extend to the remote communities.

Again, I want to thank the Premier, Mark McGowan, and his team for doing a great job. I just wish there was something I could do personally to help. I know there is not, but if there is, the Premier knows where I am. I thank the state government, and the federal government, of course, because it is handing out the big dollars. Let us hope that we get past this virus as quickly as possible.

HON DIANE EVERS (South West) [12.41 pm]: To everyone who has spoken on this motion, I really appreciate the thoughtful words and comments that have been made and that we are working together and really trying to beat the coronavirus in whatever way we can. I want to speak a little more for the regional people, as Hon Robin Scott did just then. Regional people are used to living without some services and they continue on in the best way they can. They are used to isolation, so for some people this is not as big a challenge as that faced by people who might be living in a small inner-city apartment. They are familiar with just getting on with things. I am not talking about people globally, but there is a general ability within regional and remote communities to help each other out and to work through things like this. However, that is no reason to not continue listening to them. What is really important to note is that when they do speak and say that they have a problem, it is pretty serious. I think that is what is happening. The government did really well when the regional people said, “We can’t let people into our regions. Please stop the city people from visiting their summer homes. We’ve really got to put those boundaries in place.” It did not take long for those boundaries to be set up and I really appreciate that. It is very important. I am now hearing individual cases of people saying, “Does this apply to me? I’ve read about the exemptions based on compassionate grounds. How compassionate does it have to be?” According to the ABC report this morning, there will be an online authorisation process. I hope that that is set up very quickly; otherwise, people will continue to ask questions. If they are thinking about seeing their grandmother, but then worrying about facing a \$50 000 fine, they may not end up making the visit. Perhaps that is a good thing, but each case will be different. People will need clarification so that they have the peace of mind that when they head out on the road, they will not face a fine of \$50 000 for the pleasure.

I want to refer to a couple of other issues that came up earlier. The government has tried to address the issue of farm workers. It has set up an online site where people can advertise jobs and others can seek employment and find those jobs. The Facebook page on this is great and it is being used. People are advertising for apple pickers, for example. In addition to the normal processes that we have for linking people together, this provides another option. One of the other issues that we still have involves backpackers—the people who were allowed into this state until not that long ago. Some towns do not want backpackers from overseas, which is understandable, but other towns really want backpackers because they need fruit pickers and farmhands. That issue still needs some finessing. Perhaps some caravan parks can provide backpackers with a safe place to stay to not only help them avoid having to go into town and possibly risk sharing the virus, but also avoid keeping them all together in one spot such as in a backpackers’ hostel. I do not have the answer but that is a problem. We cannot just ignore it and hope that it goes away because it is causing stress for a lot of people.

I will now speak on the peak bodies that were spoken about by my colleague and the minister. This is their chance to really shine, to show what they can do and to put the issues together as quickly as possible. If they have a conduit to someone within the Department of Communities, it will be easier to address those issues sooner. For example, Linkwest works with the community resource centres. Those centres are probably in every town, acting on their community’s needs at this time. If they can continue to address the numerous issues that may be coming forward, even if just to promote the government websites available for further information, it is really worthwhile supporting those peak bodies such as Linkwest and the community resource centres, because in the rural areas they are the organisations that know what is going on with a wide range of other groups.

Another issue that came up recently was the State Natural Resource Management Office and the natural resource management groups. I have spoken about these a number of times. Many are having to pull back from the jobs that they were doing, even if they were working with the rangers, because they cannot have people working together due to the social distancing restrictions. However, that is no reason to stop them from working. Those groups are doing a lot of significant work in the regions and they can enlist the support of volunteers, even on an individual basis. We know that people who adhere to the social distancing restrictions and try not to interact with others still need exercise, outdoor time and things like that. The NRM groups will know the areas that might need to be weeded, revegetated or have the rubbish collected. This is an opportunity for those people to get out there and keep doing things. It benefits not only those people, but also the state to continue to have these areas looked after. The NRM groups have an extensive volunteer network; they can do so much with so little. If a local community NRM group can coordinate that work, it makes it very interesting for those volunteers. Those groups may have had some projects lined up that have been canned, but they will still need the funding to keep things going and to coordinate new ideas. I hope that the State Natural Resource Management Office will be speaking with those community groups and working out what options are available.

We have also talked about the reasons for getting out of the house. I would like to promote the reason of giving blood or plasma. If a person is able to get out and is healthy, please get out there and donate. It does not take that long.

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The blood bank is desperate for donations and will continue to need them for a long time. Can people please try to stay healthy so that they can give blood.

I would also like to look to the future. We are going to come to the end of this crisis. We are going to find a vaccine, develop herd immunity or learn to live with the virus, which would be even more difficult and frightening. We are going to come out of this crisis and move into a new world in which our social customs may be different. We may not be so quick to hug and shake hands if we know that this virus is going to be with us forever. It will impact our social gatherings. We may not be as inclined to attend packed auditoriums and sporting venues. Sports will be different. We are now watching past sporting games and people are enjoying them almost as much as watching a current game. It is nice that we can do that but it shows how things are changing. We may not experience the same situations again. We are learning very much about education. The ability to educate online will not go away. Once we have adapted to that, once we have put those processes in place, the mind boggles as to where that can go, with the amount of training that people will be able to do in their own homes, in small groups or wherever they are or whenever they want to. We just have to work out the new paradigms of this. We may not have a university structure with lots of big buildings and lots of people coming to deliver the same lecture from one year to the next. It could be very different, and that is what we need to be thinking about and planning for.

Employment is another issue. Some of the jobs we are losing now are not going to come back, such as retail. We already knew that online shopping was coming in, and now it is going to be more familiar to more people. Maybe shopping centres will be a thing of the past as well. Sure, we will need to be able to get our groceries fresh each day, but even for that there are home deliveries. There are things that are going to be so different. Being in the position that we are, we need to plan for those, because they are going to need new legislation of one sort or another, and that is where I am hoping to go.

Our whole online system, our electronic communications, is going to be vastly different from now. Our ability to get data and to analyse that data and make decisions based on smart learning tools will be far advanced 12 months from now. Regardless of whether this virus is still with us and we still have to self-isolate in such great proportions, things are going to be very different. Even in this realm, in our little chamber here, we are now starting to contemplate doing things a little bit differently, and some of those things can lead us to a much more effective way of governing the state. I really appreciate the collaboration we are seeing this week. I think it is necessary and notable. It is a chance for us to really shine and show that we can move into the next century and adapt to the situation with the facilities and techniques that we have available. I hope this week we learn how valuable it is to get good legislation passed in a timely manner. I understand the need to make sure we go through all the processes, have them recorded in *Hansard*, say everything we want to say and represent the people who we want to represent, but really the point of this place is to get good legislation passed, and that is what I hope we are working for. A lot of these issues we will be discussing over the next couple of days are very important to address as soon as possible, so we can put things in place before a potential lockdown or anything like that. I have to say that I am enjoying working with everyone here more so now than ever, because I can see that ability to look towards the future and really work collaboratively, get a move on and make some good things happen.

HON ALISON XAMON (North Metropolitan) [12.52 pm] — in reply: I really want to thank the members who spoke—Hon Peter Collier, Hon Stephen Dawson, Hon Martin Aldridge, Hon Robin Scott and, of course, my colleagues Hon Tim Clifford and Hon Diane Evers. I think it was helpful to have people share the various perspectives that are coming through their offices. As the Leader of the Opposition made very clear, the reality is that all of us are affected by this and we are subject to some pretty devastating stories. The economic impacts of COVID-19 are going to be felt for some time and the stimulus packages proposed at both the state and federal levels are welcome. I imagine there is much more to come and we need to ensure that we cover all those areas that are being financially devastated so we do not end up with deeply undesirable consequences in the long term, because it is already going to be bad enough for many people.

As I said in my contribution, I rose to particularly talk about the people who are going to be the most affected from a health perspective. Of course, those people are older Australians; people with underlying health issues, particularly those who are immunocompromised; people with disability; Aboriginal people; and people who have been left in very vulnerable situations such as prisoners. I particularly want to mention those refugees, who I did not mention because I ran out of time, currently sitting in our detention centres. I am very concerned about them, as I am about people with disability living in group homes, people with psychosocial disabilities in psychiatric hostels and these sorts of situations. This is really complex and it requires complex, multifaceted solutions. As I said, I am pleased to see that the state government has led on some of these fronts and consulted with the peak bodies that are well-placed to be able to assist, but I remain very concerned about the lack of positive action for other groups in our population, particularly prisoners. The lack of compassion or understanding towards them has been galling, particularly when we compare our poor response with that of other states, which have been far more proactive in trying to deal with this.

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I recognise the complexities around the need to respond to rising instances of family and domestic violence, the implication for areas such as child protection and what happens with children who are currently in out-of-home care. One thing I did not get a chance to mention because of time was the alarming stories coming to me from people I know who work in child protection that a number of foster parents have had to give up their foster children because they have found themselves in quite dire financial straits. I want to flag that that is going to pose a very big challenge for government as we deal with these children who far too often go from pillar to post. They have already been taken out of traumatic situations and they then find themselves losing any further stability. These are the sorts of unforeseen consequences, which, as people in this chamber have spoken about, were unthinkable back in December. They are things that we did not think we would see happening in our community now in April, yet here we are and lives have been turned upside down.

I have a final comment. We will talk about this a little bit more when we get to the legislation, but broad concerns have been raised about the shutdown of a lot of the freedoms we have taken for granted our whole lives. Obviously that is alarming and distressing for people, but I want to stress once again that this is driven by public health measures. That is the only grounds on which these things have to occur. We are trying to save the lives of those vulnerable populations I have just listed. I say to people who are cavalier about this that it is very easy when it is not your life on the line. It is about us as a community recognising that everybody's life is valuable and that we have an obligation to work collectively to try to save as many lives as we can. I thank members for their contributions.

Question put and passed.