

KIMBERLEY RESIDENTS, HEALTH STATUS

643. Mrs C.A. MARTIN to the Minister for Health:

Will the minister provide information on what is being done to improve the significantly worse health status of Kimberley residents compared with that of other Western Australians?

Mr R.C. KUCERA replied:

I acknowledge a huge debt of gratitude to the member for Kimberley for the excellent work she has done in that area to make sure that for the very first time a specialist general physician will live and work in the Kimberley, from 28 April. The Aboriginal people of the Kimberley owe the member for Kimberley an enormous debt of gratitude also. An eminent physician, Dr Maguire, has been appointed, and he has extensive experience in indigenous health and community-based specialist services. He will help alleviate some significant health problems in the region. Dr Maguire will provide regular visiting services to communities across the region. Services will be delivered in a culturally appropriate manner, and patients will receive continuing care from a specialist who lives in the region and understands their conditions. More people will be able to remain in the Kimberley instead of having to travel many hundreds of kilometres from their homes to attend physicians in Perth.

Western Australia has a severe doctor shortage. We are not training enough doctors. I call on the Commonwealth to increase funding for medical places in Western Australian universities. Official requests have already been lodged with the Commonwealth and I call on it to honour those requests. This is a serious situation that the Commonwealth must address as a national priority. I am very thankful to the member for Kimberley for her efforts in making sure that Dr Maguire will be made welcome. The people of the Kimberley at long last will have a resident physician.