

SOUTHERN INLAND HEALTH INITIATIVE

517. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Minister for Regional Development:

Could the minister please update the house on the progress of the Southern Inland Health Initiative primary healthcare demonstration pilot in Cunderdin and Pingelly?

Mr B.J. GRYLLS replied:

I thank the member for Central Wheatbelt for her important question, and I thank her for the leadership she is showing in helping drive this reform. The Premier has just referred to the best ever Minister for Health the state has had, and the Southern Inland Health Initiative is a really important part of that. I thank the Minister for Health for his leadership and determination to drive the Southern Inland Health Initiative.

It must be remembered that the Southern Inland Health Initiative area covers more than one million square kilometres and there is a population of more than 136 000 people living in more than 100 separate towns. This is the area that the previous Labor government decided did not need a hospital, and Bob Kucera went out and told them all that they did not need a hospital; the Liberal-National government knows how important that area is, and how important the delivery of primary health is. But we also know that there is not an advantage in having 12-bed hospitals, such as in my home town of Corrigin, that do not have a high bed average. We know we have to drive change and reform to get the best value for money from the dollars we put into health, and that is why the primary healthcare demonstration project is so important.

The \$43 million capital funding stream to develop these one-stop shop healthcare demonstration facilities, to provide communities with access to a range of health services and providers under the same roof, will bring together government, non-government, and not-for-profit health services, and also focus on the promotion of good health, prevention and the early detection of illness, and management of chronic disease. The mix of services at these sites will vary based on the needs of the community and may include, but is not limited to, general practitioners and other primary healthcare providers, emergency care and stabilisation services, new telehealth facilities, outpatient services and public dental services. Cunderdin and Pingelly have both nominated to take part in this process through an expression of interest. We recently signed memorandums of understanding with those communities to progress to the implementation phase of this project.

It is absolutely critical that we get it right. Many towns across regional Western Australia, like Cunderdin and Pingelly, are concerned about the delivery of health in their community. The current model is not delivering the best possible outcome in primary health. Delivering reform in health and regional communities is always difficult, and these are some of the tough decisions that the government and the community must work together on to get a positive outcome. The working relationship between the community, the WA Country Health Service and the Southern Inland Health Initiative project team has been really strong. One of the main areas of focus in moving from the old hospital model into these primary demonstration sites is how to manage aged care. Many regional communities have an ageing population, and we must provide good quality aged care as people transition through their later years in life. These demonstration sites provide a strong focus on getting that right.

We will continue to work with Cunderdin and Pingelly. We hope to build a model that is shown to be successful in terms of health outcomes and community support. If those demonstration sites can prove to have a positive outcome for health in the community, there will be an opportunity to drive that agenda further across regional Western Australia. This is another example of how the Liberal-National government is looking at reform across the board in health, education and all facets of government to give better service delivery to the community and sound financial management of the budget.