

MIDWIFERY WORK FORCE IN AUSTRALIA

750. Mr A.J. DEAN to the Minister for Health:

What action has the State Government taken since the release earlier this year of the Australian Medical Workforce Advisory Committee's report, "The Midwifery Workforce in Australia 2002-2012"?

The SPEAKER: Order! I call to order the Minister for Police and the member for Perth for the first time, and the member for Nedlands for the second time.

Mr R.C. KUCERA replied:

I thank the member for Bunbury for his question. While on my feet, I acknowledge the presence in the House of Mr Ted Wilkes, who was previously with the Derbal Yerrigan Health Service. I worked with him for many years; he is a person who does things for Aboriginal people. He is an icon in his community, and I welcome him to the people's House.

Members: Hear, hear!

Mr R.C. KUCERA: The report, "The Midwifery Workforce in Australia 2002-2012" identifies a number of barriers to people undertaking postgraduate midwifery education, including fees, difficulties being released from work and a lack of clinical placements. The national review of nursing education in 2002 also highlighted the need to provide assistance to nurses. I am pleased to advise that this Government has immediately responded to the issues. I enumerate these quickly.

The Government further enhanced its midwifery scholarship program, and now funds 40 students. It has committed \$1 million to fund clinical practice experience in accordance with the nurses' enterprise bargaining agreement, and increased the number of hospitals in which midwifery education can be undertaken. Also, the Government has established a course to enhance the role of midwives, so that they can initiate a range of medications and investigations. Free re-entry programs for midwives have been provided, which include grants of financial assistance. For the first time ever in Western Australia, a \$10 000 midwifery fellowship has been offered. These initiatives have put Western Australia on firm ground to meet the future clinical and midwifery work force needs.

Unfortunately, these action were necessary because of the Commonwealth's failure to act on any of the issues outlined in the report.

Mr M.F. Board: You were going well until that point.

Mr R.C. KUCERA: The Commonwealth has ignored it. These matters need to be put on the record, member for Murdoch. Instead of always referring to the negative issues, the member needs to realise the good things this Government has done for nurses in this State. The Commonwealth has ignored a series of national reports, not state reports, calling on a specialist nursing work force for all Australia. The 2003-04 federal budget is absolutely silent on postgraduate funding for nursing specialisation. Again, the State has picked up the cudgels for nurses and is pushing forward in this regard. I am proud to say the State is acting, despite the lack of action by the federal Government.