

SENIORS — COST OF LIVING

**522. Mr M.J. FOLKARD to the Minister for Seniors and Ageing:**

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's strong record in supporting our seniors. Can the minister update the house on how this government is helping to ease the cost of living for our older Western Australians?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH replied:**

I thank the member for the question.

I am always delighted to stand up and talk about what this government is providing for seniors. In fact, I would like to thank all those members who posted on forums about the seniors strategy and met with over 2 000 seniors over the past few months to gain their views about what it is like to be on the journey of growing old in Western Australia.

Of course, we like to give our seniors a helping hand. The WA Seniors Card provides members in the state with access to, on average, \$650 in value annually in state government concessions. Furthermore, for around three-quarters of seniors who currently hold a WA Seniors Card, a Commonwealth Seniors Health Card, a Department of Veterans' Affairs card or a Pensioner Concession Card, the value of those benefits and concessions can reach up to \$2 000. That is very significant. The impact of that investment by our state government cannot be underestimated.

In late July and early August, more than 310 000 WA seniors received the cost-of-living rebate, with payments totalling approximately \$26 million. This year, singles received \$95.69 and couples received \$143.50. That is direct assistance to seniors. The WA Seniors Card program also provides to members, through the generosity of our small businesses, concessions in the form of over 800 businesses discounts. We are providing great savings every day and assisting seniors with the cost of living.

No doubt members are fully aware, because I have briefed members in the past, of the introduction by the McGowan government of the safety and security rebate. The program allows WA Seniors Card holders to claim up to \$400 towards installing or buying home safety or security devices. Demand for that program has far exceeded initial expectations, with over \$5.5 million paid to almost 14 000 Seniors Card holders. I remind the house that applications for the free WA Seniors Card can be made by any Australian citizen or permanent resident aged over 65 years residing in WA and working fewer than 25 hours a week.

But there is more! This McGowan government has an excellent ministry that cares for seniors. The \$400 household electricity credit for all households, which Minister Johnston and the Premier commenced in July, combined with the energy assistance payment, means that some households can save up to \$710. The provision of free RATs to all households is the most comprehensive initiative of its kind in the country. There is also the Country Age Pension Fuel Card, administered by Hon Alannah MacTiernan, and the grandcarers support scheme funded through Minister McGurk in which grandcarers will be eligible for payments of up to \$1 000. But one minister has gone above and beyond. One minister has stood out—getting up at the crack of dawn at four o'clock every morning and walking 1 000 kilometres down the Bibbulmun Track. He has faced the wind and the rain, copping the odd spider in the boot, to raise \$20 000 for Alzheimer's WA. Congratulations, Minister Buti!