

AGED-CARE ORAL HEALTH PROGRAM

684. Mr D.A. TEMPLEMAN to the Minister for Health:

Will the minister provide an update on the State Government's \$6 million aged-care oral health program?

Mr R.C. KUCERA replied:

Firstly, I thank the member for Mandurah for his question. I think our constituencies contain the greatest number of older people in the State based on the number of retirement homes in our electorates.

I am very proud of the contribution of our dental services to aged care in this State. Since March last year, close to 10 000 people in aged-care facilities have been approached for free dental examinations. Last month I visited a number of aged-care homes while the dentists were working on the teeth of some of the older people there. It was not until I made that visit that I realised the enormous consequences for older people when they cannot access dental services. I remind members that it is six years since the federal Government abolished the dental subsidy for older people. I am very proud to be a member of a Government that has recognised the need in this area and fixed the problem. Approximately 10 000 people have used the program and many elderly people have benefited from it already. Due to dementia and other health problems many people simply cannot get access to dental services.

The program offers preventive and restorative measures in a range of dental services. A total of 105 metropolitan and six country aged-care facilities have participated in the program so far. Seventy-one aged-care facilities have yet to take advantage of this program. Regardless of the side of the House on which members sit, I urge them to ensure their aged-care facilities participate in this excellent program. We have already funded it until 2005, when it will be reviewed. I expect that the strength of the program will reflect the necessity for it to continue.