

PATIENT ASSISTED TRAVEL SCHEME

813. Ms M.J. DAVIES to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the minister's answer to a question in the Legislative Council on 13 September 2018, in relation to the patient assisted travel scheme, in which he stated that the government was prepared to revisit increases in PATS subsidy in the future, when there is financial capacity to do so. I also note the minister's commentary in his previous answer, and also the windfall funding into the state government coffers over the past 12 months. When can regional Western Australians expect an increase to the PATS subsidy, as the minister promised?

Mr R.H. COOK replied:

I want to clarify one point that the member made, and that is describing the current state of our finances as a windfall. There is only one reason why the government is in a position to be able to invest more in our schools and hospitals in regional communities, and that is because we took the hard decisions to get the state's finances right, after members opposite destroyed the state's finances and its credit rating, and drove deficit after deficit in the state's budget. We are now in a position to start the investment cycle again, and we are very proud to do so. The other thing that we have been doing is continuing to roll out emergency telehealth, mental health telehealth, and other telehealth services, particularly for outpatients. That is saving WA patients miles upon miles of flight time and travel time to the big cities, because it means that they can get the care they need without leaving the communities in which they live. That continues to make sure that we have resources available for the patient assisted travel scheme. The member reminds me of the report that was delivered in 2016 from the Legislative Council, which recommended changes to PATS, which the previous government never responded to.

[Interruption from the gallery.]

The SPEAKER: Excuse me. Can you please sit down? You are not allowed to stand up there. Thank you.

Mr R.H. COOK: As I said in this place and the Legislative Council before, we will continue to make sure that WA country patients get the support they need, as we can afford it. We will continue to make sure that we examine the PATS so that it represents a proper subsidy for WA patients.