

PATIENT ASSISTED TRAVEL SCHEME — FUNDING

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

I refer to comments the minister made in this place on 23 May 2018 during budget estimates when he said —

We need to make sure that PATS is properly funded, in terms of not only activity, but also meaningfully meeting people's travel expenses ... I would also like to see a digitisation of PATS ...

Why has the government failed to significantly increase funding for the patient assisted travel scheme budget to improve affordability and efficiency for regional patients having to travel to access specialist health services?

Mr R.H. COOK replied:

I thank the member for the question. Certainly, I have always scratched my head in this place at why a parliamentary committee of the Legislative Council came forward in 2015 with a range of recommendations about PATS. I sat and I waited for the government to respond and I waited for the government to respond and I waited, and 2017 came and there was no Liberal–National party policy at the election in response to PATS. It did nothing in relation to those recommendations, and a lot has changed since. We now have a McGowan Labor government that is investing more in telehealth services than any other government in history. This means that a lot of patients living in our regional communities do not have to travel to Perth to get the care they need, be it through telemental health, emergency telehealth services or the new telechemotherapy; and investments we are making in places such as Albany Hospital, with the new radiotherapy service, and a major redevelopment of Geraldton Health Campus, means that these patients will not need to travel to Perth at all. We continue to invest significantly in the patient assisted travel scheme to make sure that people have the support they need. As I said, this continues to be an area of concern for me, because I am alarmed at the previous government's neglect of PATS. It is the reason we made significant changes to ensure that we got through the waitlist. When we came into government, there was an actual waitlist for the processing of PATS claims because of the privatisation of the PATS service. First of all, we had to bring it back in-house to make sure that we got on top of all those people who were waiting for their PATS claims to be processed before we could get on and look at the system. We are continuing to digitise the system, and that process is going on at the moment. We will continue to look at how we can improve PATS to support WA country patients.