

HEALTH — WORKFORCE — RECRUITMENT

157. Ms J.J. SHAW to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's significant investment in increasing staff and resources in our health system.

- (1) Can the minister update this house on the government's Belong campaign and how it is helping attract international and interstate medical professionals to Western Australia?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house on the efforts of this government to bolster the WA Health workforce since it was elected in 2017?

Ms A. SANDERSON replied:

I thank the member for Swan Hills for her question.

- (1)–(2) Our healthcare workforce in Western Australia is world class. There is no question about that. I want to thank all our frontline healthcare workers—our doctors, nurses, allied health staff, patient support staff, cleaners, administration staff and, of course, our paramedics, our first responders, for the incredible work that they do in our system, particularly for the last two years when we have been dealing with some of the impacts of lockdowns and the COVID pandemic across the world.

I have visited state public hospitals in both metropolitan and regional areas over the last couple of months to talk to people there myself and see their dedication and perseverance. There is no doubt that working in health care is incredibly rewarding, but it is not without its challenges. We know that it has been a tough couple of years for the healthcare workforce, particularly with some of our staffing challenges that not just those in the healthcare sector have faced; almost every sector in Western Australia has faced staffing challenges over the last two years.

The state government launched a \$2 million advertising campaign towards the end of last year called the Belong campaign to attract people back to Western Australia or back into the workforce who may have retired or moved on. That has been incredibly successful. I am very pleased to report to the house some of the success of that campaign so far. We have by no means finished, but we have certainly made huge gains in recruitment into our workforce. Overall, since January 2021, there has been an increase of 1 018 FTE in nursing and midwifery positions filled and an increase of 424 FTE allied health professionals. When we break that down into the various health service providers, that is quite a significant increase. In child and adolescent services alone, that is an increase of 55.5 FTE just in allied health services. In the North Metropolitan Health Service, there has been an increase of 60 FTE, and in the South Metropolitan Health Service, there has been an increase of 108 FTE just in allied health professionals. There has also been an increase of 129 FTE in the medical workforce.

One of the initiatives started by my predecessor in the health portfolio was the refresher program, particularly for nursing staff, to encourage nurses to come back into the profession. I am pleased to say that 56 applications were received. Most of them are registered nurses and most of them will be put into the workforce in WA. This is a great response. We need many of these nurses in vaccination clinics. We are bringing people back into the workforce to provide critical vaccinations.

In mental health, we have also seen a significant increase in staffing across the health service providers, with 177 appointments in mental health, 102 of those in the medical area alone. That is a really tight workforce. We are competing internationally. We are working hard to make sure that we can attract people. The WA Country Health Service had an increase of 42 medical mental health professionals, the North Metropolitan Health Service had 152 and it goes on. I am very pleased to say that 400 medical graduates were onboarded in February and 110 non-intern doctors were also onboarded earlier this year.

The work continues. We continue to support our workforce with new recruits to help relieve some of those pressures, including overtime pressures, that we are seeing in the system. We need the commonwealth to lift its game by recruiting and incentivising GPs to Western Australia. We have the lowest number of GPs per capita of any state, and the regions in particular suffer significantly. I want to thank all those people who have joined the WA Health workforce in the public sector over the last six to 12 months. I thank our very important healthcare workforce for the work that it will do over the next couple of months in particular.