

## CHILDHOOD CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

### *Statement*

**HON MATTHEW SWINBOURN (East Metropolitan — Parliamentary Secretary)** [5.20 pm]: I rise because it is September, and members who have been in the chamber with me since 2017 will know that I rise every September for Childhood Cancer Awareness Month. I am wearing the gold pin or ribbon, or whatever you call these things, if you cannot afford the fancy pin!

Each year I rise to speak about childhood cancer, and for every one of those years it has been as a parent of a child with cancer. Although Mitchell is still my child—that remains the case!—he turned 18 this year, and as a consequence he has emphatically put it that he is no longer a child, so I am not allowed to refer to him as that. He tried to convince me that he was not a teenager, but I had to correct him on that, because at 18, he is still a teenager. I do not think he agrees with me, but we will leave that issue to one side! In any event, he has moved into the world of adulthood and, as a result, he has had to move away from paediatric care at Perth Children's Hospital and into adult cancer care. That is not easy, to put it mildly; the transition is difficult, for many reasons. We have worked our way through that, and I would like to recognise the great work of my wife, Glenda, who is Mitchell's primary carer and carries a more significant burden than I do in helping him to manage his care.

He has had to go through all the stresses, pains and difficulties of moving from what is, in some respects, the comforting environment of Perth Children's Hospital to the much broader environment of adult health care. I will say that I think there is a strong case to be made for there to be a wraparound young adult cancer service in this state—more than just a program, an actual service or even, potentially, a separate hospital. Obviously, I say that with self-interest; it would not be built in time for my purposes, but a small number of children live with their childhood cancer into adulthood and there are also young adults who are diagnosed with cancer between the ages of 17 and 20 and end up being put into adult cancer wards. If members have ever had the misfortune of visiting an adult cancer ward, they will know that it is not really a place for young people. That is not intended as a slur against those who are in adult cancer wards, but adult cancer tends to strike a much older cohort of people at a very different stage of their lives than people aged between 17 and 22. In time, when we have the economies of scale to support it in this state, a move towards that kind of model could be something that all sides of politics look at to enhance the level of care that is provided to those young people.

Notwithstanding the fact that Mitchell is no longer a child, and therefore no longer fits within the childhood cancer cohort, I will, of course, continue to be a voice and advocate for the children and families who suffer from childhood cancer; the health professionals who care for and support them; and, of course, the organisations, many of which members will be familiar with, that go out of their way to make a person's cancer journey so much more bearable. I would like to talk about one of those organisations this September. I may have mentioned it in previous years. I do I have a vested interest in this organisation as I am a member. I declare that membership; I do not mind being very open about it. I refer to the Child Cancer Research Foundation, formerly the Children's Leukaemia and Cancer Research Foundation. It has been around for more than 40 years now. It was set up in the late 1970s and early 1980s, at a time when no childhood cancer research, or specifically no childhood leukaemia research, was being conducted in this state. A group of parents, very noble and worthy people, joined efforts to put forward the foundation to raise money for childhood cancer research. Lots of childhood cancer organisations are focused on the more immediate needs, if I can put it that way, of families and children going through childhood cancer, but the foundation's primary goal is to raise money for medical research. I have spoken about medical research in the childhood cancer space before. It is, in many respects, the panacea for childhood cancer, because it is through medical research and the development of new treatments and therapies that we will ultimately see childhood cancer become a thing of the past.

I remind members that, sadly, more children die from cancer than any other disease in Australia. Every year, around 600 Australian children under the age of 15 are diagnosed with cancer. It is a significantly large cohort. I like to also remind people that although I focus very much on Western Australia and Australia, childhood cancer is a global issue. The work that we do in this state helps to elevate treatments not just for our own children here, but also globally. It is very important for that purpose. We also benefit greatly from the research and efforts done all around the world by others. But I like to think that in this state we punch above our weight with our research through the efforts of organisations like the Child Cancer Research Foundation and the establishment of the future health research and innovation fund to put money into these areas.

Fifty years ago, about 20 per cent of children survived childhood cancer. These days, it is much higher at 80 per cent, but we want to make it 100 per cent, of course. That improvement over the last 50 years is overwhelmingly due to medical research in this space, and it shows how, as humans, if we put our endeavours into these activities, we can make significant changes and improvements.

I acknowledge the work that my friend Kylie Dalton has been doing. She is a manager at the Child Cancer Research Foundation. She has set up a new activity and program for the foundation; she has kind of moved it out of its traditional fundraising role for medical research and established a new program—I seem to have lost my notes—called Back on Track. That program is essentially designed to help children and their families who have gone through the childhood cancer journey to get back to school and their schooling. Many people do not necessarily appreciate that if a child has cancer, it has a devastating impact on not only their health but also their life. They are often taken out of their schooling, social and family environments so that they can receive the treatment they need to address the cancer, and that has a significant impact on them at many levels. One of the more obvious ones is their education. They often struggle when they get back to school because they obviously have fallen behind, but they lose confidence, as well. The program that Kylie and her team have developed is about trying to assist children and their families to get those kids essentially back on the education track, because although it is very good to think about dealing with the disease, we also need to deal with the child as a whole and how they are supported into the future. One of the key things about this program is that it will really help to address that.

I am conscious that I do not have much time left to speak today, and I know that all members are eagerly waiting to hear how they can support Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, so I want to get to that point. One thing they can do is wear gold, like I am. They could wear a gold tie, if they are a gentleman, or perhaps another item of clothing for those who are not of that persuasion. They could also include something about childhood cancer awareness in their newsletters to their communities. They could share social media posts on their Facebook, Instagram or TikTok—whatever they choose to use. They could also create their own fundraising event. There are many things they could do. By searching “Childhood Cancer Awareness Month”, they will find groups that can support them in doing that. They could also share a story, as I have, about somebody in their community who has been on the childhood cancer journey, or a group within the community that supports those people. Finally, they could make a donation, of course, to a childhood cancer charity. I am happy to take any inquiries from members if they want to know where to send their money.