

BRIEF MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

MINISTER FOR HEALTH

National Health Performance Authority report

Mr Speaker, I rise to advise the house on the unexpected findings of the National Health Performance Authority report, Healthy Communities, 2011-2012.

Before I provide details of the report, Members of the House may recall in recent weeks a literature review released by HealthFix Consulting which investigated available information on the number of doctors in Western Australia, including both GPs and salaried doctors in the public health system.

It is no secret that Western Australia has fewer doctors per head capita than other States, in fact there is an argument that some of the Eastern States are over-doctored. Health Fix Consulting found that WA is about 950 doctors short of what we require.

The financial outcome of this is that Western Australians are losing about \$500million in funding from the Commonwealth in the form of medicare benefits.

In this context, it is perhaps not surprising to find the National Health Performance Authority's latest report has revealed that Western Australians are indeed having fewer GP attendances per person than almost every other State.

Even our metropolitan areas like Fremantle, Bentley-Armadale, Perth metropolitan area and Perth central and East Metro all reported in the lowest quadrant of number of GP attendances nationally.

However, this report has a flip-side. All four of these catchments reported better health in patients than almost all other areas.

So at one end of the scale, you have South Western Sydney where people have many GP attendances, but report poor health. In the other corner is Fremantle, which has few GP attendances, but reports one of the healthiest patient cohorts nationally.

In regional areas the story was the same for the South West of WA – few GP attendances, but better health.

Critically, the percentage of people who delayed seeing a GP, dental professional or medical specialist was no higher in WA than in any other State. For those who do visit a GP, more than two-thirds are regularly bulk-billed. That means most Western Australians are not necessarily paying more to visit a GP than patients in other States.

The key thing I can conclude from this report is that we are, by and large, a pretty healthy bunch.

Of course it's not all beer and skittles.

The Kimberley and Pilbara has a lowest rate of standardised GP attendances per person nationally, just 2.9. The highest nationally was 7.5, in South-Western Sydney. The whole of WA fell into the lowest bracket, between 2.9 and 4.5.

Disappointingly, this report could not report information from the Medicare Locals to make any judgement on the overall health of people living in the Kimberley.

The question obviously follows: What are we doing about it?

What I can tell you is the number of medical students has increased under this Government to more than 300.

As this new generation of doctors goes through training, we will continue to rely on overseas-trained doctors but I expect the future of our medical system is in these home-grown recruits.

This Government also made the first major investment into doctor training with \$75million over five years allocated in the 2011-12 Budget.

We have been able to provide every appropriate graduate of WA medical schools a place in our system as an intern if they want it. This is an achievement of which I am particularly proud.

The future does present difficulties: We are investigating new ways to provide the sort of procedural training doctors require for the future, particularly those looking to become GPs in rural and regional areas.

It's an exciting time to be Health Minister, with so many new and talented doctors joining the State's health system, whether in public hospitals, as GPs or in the private system.