

WOMEN AND INFANTS RESEARCH FOUNDATION

Statement by Minister for Women's Interests

MS S.F. MCGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Women's Interests) [12.20 pm]: I rise to inform the house of the important work of the Women and Infants Research Foundation. I recently had the great honour to present a Lotterywest grant to the foundation of more than \$150 000. The Women and Infants Research Foundation—WIRF—is an independent Australian research institute dedicated to improving the health of women and infants. The foundation is leading the world in preterm birth prevention; discovering causes and cures of women's cancers and improving outcomes; improving access to mental health resources and enabling better mental health outcomes; and translating research findings into guidelines and resources. This grant will help WIRF achieve its vision for all women to enjoy the best health for themselves and their babies, by strengthening the foundation's infrastructure to better deal with the demands of its research and programs. The grant will also help WIRF to reach those in need of its work, including women and their families as well as the medical practitioners who treat them. WIRF's research and programs are focused on three principal areas: the prevention of preterm birth; gynaecological cancers; and women's mental health.

I was particularly interested in the world-leading study underway to trial a new diagnostic test to identify specific vaginal bacteria, which if present, predicts an almost one in two chance of preterm birth. Once identified, these bacteria can be treated with a simple course of antibiotics, to dramatically reduce the rate of spontaneous preterm birth. Preterm birth is the leading cause of death and disability among children under five years of age in the developed world. This program has the potential to benefit countless women and children, and their families, not only in WA, but globally.

The outstanding work of the foundation, led by chief scientific director and “baby whisperer” Professor John Newnham, is another example of the incredible and world-leading research coming out of Western Australia. At one of its recent fundraising events, Professor Newnham was telling those attending to imagine the delight of his board, committed as they are, when he spoke at length to them about the matter of vaginal bacteria. Later, I was challenged by Newnham to say “vaginal bacteria” in Parliament. Deputy Speaker, as I said to him, challenge accepted.