

FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

175. Ms C.M. ROWE to the Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence:

I refer to the WA Police Force's recent crime statistics, which show that family and domestic violence continues to be an issue for communities right across Western Australia. Can the minister outline to the house how the McGowan government is addressing this issue and advise whether the federal government is adequately assisting the state in its work to support victims of family and domestic violence?

Ms S.F. McGURK replied:

I thank the member for Belmont and all those across the chamber who support action against domestic violence. As the current police statistics show, as well as statistics for the last couple of years, WA and Australia have a problem with domestic violence. We are determined to do something about it. In fact, one of the descriptions I saw recently in a video coordinated by the Western Australian Council of Social Service was that, currently, just under 300 000—297 000—Western Australians have been impacted by domestic violence. Whether that is the 50 000 cases that are reported to police each year or the high number of children—one in eight—who have experienced domestic violence before the age of 15, whichever way we look at it, this state has a problem, and we are determined to do something about it.

In relation to services, the public have heard, and I have spoken about it in this chamber, that we are building two new refuges—one in Peel and one in the south metropolitan area—we are establishing a second residential behaviour-change program for perpetrators, we have the Pets in Crisis program, and we are also making sure that we have appropriate responses for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, as well as for Aboriginal women, who are escaping violence. That is a real challenge—to understand the deeply held cultural issues that confront women from non-English speaking backgrounds when dealing with domestic violence. It is also about knowing that in Aboriginal communities, it might not be police or child protection services that Aboriginal women feel most at home going to to deal with these issues.

I was heartened to meet with representatives of Newmont Mining just last week. They wanted to report that as a result of a meeting I had with them early last year, when we talked about their agenda to improve the number of women working in their organisation and family friendly policies and they were interested to hear about our government initiative to have paid leave for victims of domestic violence, the company has now instigated 10 days' paid leave for victims of domestic violence and a range of other initiatives to support family friendly policies in the workplace. I was very pleased to hear that, just as I was to hear about the number of companies in the resources sector that are now white ribbon-accredited. I note that the Water Corporation is now white ribbon-accredited as well. It is actually a very rigorous accreditation program, which demands action from employers against domestic violence.

One comment I would like to make is that we need bold initiatives, but we also need continuity in our funding. Members would be aware that I was critical of the federal government for cutting the funding to Keeping Women Safe in their Home, which is a very effective program. We were pleased to hear the Morrison government announce that it would reinstate funding to a pool for programs, including Keeping Women Safe in their Home, but it has not announced the detail. That means there is a gap between the funding in the program that previously existed and local organisations—women's refuges and the like—applying for funding. As a state, we have stepped in and provided gap funding, but that is money that we cannot provide to other places. We need continuity. We need long-term funding for some of these programs, because once the workforce is up and running and there are relationships with the local community, we need to keep that going. We welcome the announcement by the federal government. Federal Labor has also committed money in that field, but we need to make sure that there is continuity and long-term funding. I have written to Minister Paul Fletcher asking for the details about when services are going to be able to apply for that funding and whether we are waiting for the federal budget, but I have not yet had a reply. We need a bipartisan approach to tackling domestic violence. I am very open to any sort of offers that come our way from either of the major parties federally to tackle this issue and to work with us on a cooperative basis to make sure that we are providing services across the state and, indeed, preventing violence from occurring in the first place.