

HEALTH — PRIMARY CARE SERVICES

80. Ms J.L. HANNS to the Minister for Health:

I refer to action being taken by the Cook Labor government to address demand facing Western Australia's health system.

- (1) Can the minister outline how this government is delivering new initiatives to relieve pressure on primary care services, such as general practitioners?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house how these initiatives are allowing Western Australians to access timely, appropriate and convenient healthcare services?

Ms A. SANDERSON replied:

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for Collie–Preston for her question. We know that health care is busy and that access to primary care can be really challenging, particularly in regional areas. The cost of primary care and seeing a general practitioner is increasing. Many GPs are finding it harder to entirely bulk bill for their communities because of the increase in the cost of running those services. We know that the state has a small number of levers on healthcare costs, other than providing an outstanding public health system. However, one of those levers is to support pharmacists in their scope of practice. It was to deliver on a national cabinet commitment and agreement that all states would look at how they could expand the scope of practice for their pharmacy community. The first cab off the rank, if you like, in that expansion of scope of practice in Western Australia was the expansion of urinary tract infection prescribing, mostly for women. This was also part of the sustainable health review that was initiated by the former Minister for Health, now Premier, upon coming into government in 2017. It was chaired by Robyn Kruk, who is an independent expert in health administration with over 30 years of experience. Scope of practice and delivering care in the community was a big thing in the recommendations of that review. This is one program that is delivering on creating low-barrier access to affordable care.

Since January, we have had 250 participating pharmacies across the state, which is fantastic. Pharmacists have to undergo training at regular points to maintain their competencies. Not everyone gets prescribed. Sometimes, if the pharmacist is not quite sure that it meets the uncomplicated UTI description, they will refer them to a GP. The program is for when someone presents with an uncomplicated UTI. Quite frankly, 98 per cent of women who have had one before know when they get one again, and it can take up to two weeks to get in to see a GP. We have 250 participating pharmacies; two of those are in Collie, the member will be glad to know. We have delivered 600 occasions of service since we started the program. That has saved 600 GP appointments, which is an incredible uptake. This is just one of the many ways that the Cook Labor government is supporting women, and it also aligns with the national women's health strategy to give them faster and better access to health care.

We are working with pharmacists, the Australian Medical Association and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners on what the next round of scope expansion will be. It is likely to continue to support women and their health. I look forward to the outcome of that working group.