

NURSES AND MIDWIVES — REGIONS

67. Ms M. BEARD to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the *Report on government services* that highlights that the remote and very remote nursing and midwifery workforce is now smaller at 949 full-time equivalents compared with when Labor came to power in 2017, when there were 960 FTEs. Why has the government allowed the nursing and midwifery workforce to fall to such a dangerously low level in the regions, to the point at which both staff and patient care, particularly for expectant mothers in Carnarvon over the last two years, has been compromised?

Ms A. SANDERSON replied:

There are a couple of things. First of all, I want to comment on the data from the *Report on government services*. It is 18 months old. It is old data. It is historic data. For six months of that data, we were very much well into the pandemic. The member needs to look at the latest data. That report is based on 2021 and 2022 figures. Everyone will remember what happened in 2022 from about January; in fact, the pandemic really started around the end of 2021 and then exponentially hit Western Australia. It was an extremely challenging time in the system; there is no question about that. But a lot has changed. What really matters is not that the system was under strain during the pandemic, because every single health system was under strain during the pandemic, but the recovery that it makes post-pandemic.

We have seen an outstanding recovery in our health system. We have seen a significant uplift in performance. We have seen a significant uplift in staff across regional and metropolitan health services. It is the recovery that matters. When they are hit hard, they are busy, and, yes, it hurts. It hurts the system and the staff are busy. But what really matters is how they were able to come through that, and they came through that due to a number of reasons. They came through that because we have massively increased our staffing capacity across the system. We have hugely increased our FTEs. I think around 4 000 FTE nurses, 1 600 FTE medical graduates and experienced doctors, and 1 700 allied health FTEs have been created since we came to government. We have increased the workforce by 30 per cent. We have increased the workforce across the health system by 30 per cent since we came to government. The 570 beds that we put on in 18 months is an increase of 900 staff alone, just with those beds.

The data is old. It is not relevant now. The point is that we are actively investing in our health services, we are seriously lifting our FTEs and we are doing the heavy lifting to make sure that communities have access to health services.