

HEALTH — COUNCIL FOR THE AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION MEETING

697. Ms C.M. COLLINS to the Premier:

On behalf of the member for Cockburn, I acknowledge students from Yangebup Primary School in the public gallery. I refer to the government's efforts to reform Western Australia's health system.

- (1) Can the Premier update the house on his recent meeting with state and territory leaders in Adelaide?
- (2) Can the Premier advise the house of any progress stemming from its record investment in the Western Australian health system?

Mr R.H. COOK replied:

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for the question; it is an important one. At least the member for Hillarys, unlike those opposite, understands the importance of the Western Australian government engaging with other governments in Australia and the commonwealth. We saw that members opposite could never resolve issues around the GST and could never attract funding from the commonwealth government. Indeed, when in government, they completely avoided the federal government, refusing to engage, and because of that, the state went backwards. That is not our approach.

Last week, I joined the other state leaders in Adelaide for the Council for the Australian Federation meeting, which built on the work by the Prime Minister and national cabinet's focus on health-related work this year. The pressures that we have experienced in our emergency departments are not unique. These are consistent challenges that are faced right across health systems throughout Australia and indeed the world. The Prime Minister has made it clear that we must take a unified approach to practical and tangible reforms to ensure we have affordable access to medical care, no matter where someone lives, and improve access to primary care through access to local general practitioners. There is a lot more work to be done, as we know, both at a national and state level. A lot has been done through tough economic conditions, inflationary pressures and high demand for skilled workers. The groundwork has been laid, and I am very proud to say that last week we made significant progress in continuing this national partnership.

Under the stewardship of the Minister for Health, Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson, we are seeing serious policy reform and record investment in our health system. Since 2021–22, we have invested a record \$10 billion towards health and mental health. This recently included \$75 million to reduce ambulance ramping and improve emergency care, a \$420 million boost to mental health services and the Graylands Hospital redevelopment, and an \$841 million investment in hospital services. This funding boost also covers the significant growth in the public sector workforce—the people who make our hospitals actually tick. In the past five years we have welcomed an extra 2 700 nurses and midwives, and an extra 1 500 medical practitioners. We are making the investments that will continue to see improvement in hospital care.

We acknowledge that there is always more to be done, but there are encouraging signs. Last month, I shared some ambulance ramping progress for July. I am pleased to report that we have seen further progress in the latest figures. In August, ramping decreased by 30 per cent compared with the same time last year, despite an ED presentation increase of 10 per cent. In addition, initial data for September shows a 34 per cent decrease compared with September last year. These are promising signs. That improvement—the 34 per cent decrease in ambulance ramping—is despite a record flu season, mixed with COVID-19 and other respiratory infections, that saw a 146 per cent increase in hospitalisations compared with the same time last year.

The ramping figures are still high but progress is incremental and the early signs are encouraging. I thank the Minister for Health for the amazing work that she has done, along with our healthcare leadership and, of course, the doctors and nurses working on the frontline, in continuing to bring our hospital system back into balance as we meet the challenges of this post-COVID period.

The health system is enormously complex and large, and the solutions are rarely simple. As we see, some prefer to spend their time playing politics around health, ignoring the fact that important work has to be done at both the national and state levels to continue to see improvement in our healthcare systems. We are not going to play politics. We will do the hard work, make the strong investments that are needed and continue to support our nurses and doctors on the frontline so that we can continue to see improvements, bring balance to the system and get the whole health system back into equilibrium.