

WOMEN'S AND BABIES' HOSPITAL

**483. Ms J.L. HANNS to the Minister for Health:**

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's commitment to maternity care, including building a new women's and babies' hospital, and the establishment of Aboriginal midwifery group practices at King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women. Can the minister advise the house whether she is aware of anyone making false claims regarding maternity services in Carnarvon or attempting to whip up a scare campaign ahead of the by-election for North West Central?

**Ms A. SANDERSON replied:**

It is shocking to think that this opposition would be so flimsy as to make things up, but it happens regularly, unfortunately, because they do not actually do the work or bother to read the detail.

I want to start by outlining the McGowan government's commitment to maternity services and my personal commitment, as health minister, to expanding maternity choices and birthing choices in Western Australia. We have made the unprecedented commitment to fully fund the women's and newborns' hospital, with \$1.8 billion set aside. As a result of good financial management, we have been able to make that commitment to women and families in Western Australia and pay for that hospital up-front, just like the Gallop and Carpenter governments paid for the Fiona Stanley Hospital through good financial management.

We are also rolling out an additional Aboriginal midwifery and support program at King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women and boosting staffing levels by 15 more FTEs to make sure that we have secure services for women having their babies at King Edward. It includes a new Aboriginal midwifery group practice that provides services for women who prefer to be cared for by the same midwife and in a culturally safe and protected way. That is an important continuity of care model that has excellent evidence behind it that shows really good and solid outcomes. It is a trusting relationship with their known midwife for every appointment before, during and after the birth to help support them.

The McGowan government is also reinstating the strong links program, which was discontinued by the former Liberal-National government in 2014. The strong links program will employ Aboriginal staff to work in a culturally secure manner with clients and families to mitigate risk factors during pregnancy, birth and immediate postnatal care. Following the trial at King Edward in 2012-13, the pilot program resulted in better antenatal attendance, a decrease in the length of stay in hospital, an increase in staff cultural competence and a reduction in the number of babies entering state care. Shamefully, the former Liberal-National government axed the service, when it demonstrated the potential to improve outcomes for Aboriginal women and babies. Those two programs were allocated \$7 million in the 2022-23 budget, and this follows our commitment to implementing the sustainable health review.

I want to talk specifically about the Carnarvon maternity and birthing services. The Leader of the Opposition has repeatedly made, and continues to make, misleading and spurious claims about maternity services at the Carnarvon health campus, including during private members' business yesterday, which I listened to. In April this year, I received a letter from the now resigned member for North West Central about some changes to the maternity services. I wrote back to him on 25 May and stated very clearly that, regrettably, due to staffing pressures, women would need to travel down temporarily to Perth or Geraldton, depending on the complexity of their birth. Temporarily.

**Ms M.J. Davies** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**Ms A. SANDERSON:** I wrote that the WA Country Health Service fully funds the travel and accommodation of those women in recognition of the impost of the travel to them at the later stage of their pregnancy. I told the former member that antenatal and postnatal care was continuing as normal and that midwives were rostered on to accommodate any unplanned presentations. I was very clear about that. Later in June, I advised the house during debate on a matter of public interest that as of that date, 26 women had been fully reimbursed and that, at my office's request, WACHS was going back over the details of every single woman who had given birth to make sure that all their funds were reimbursed and that they were comfortable with their reimbursement. We are covering 100 per cent of their costs, members, because we recognise that this is challenging for them and their families, yet time and again, the opposition leader peddles claims that women are not having their costs covered. Instead of being constructive and pointing them to my office to fix this, on 10 August, the Leader of the Opposition stated —

... from February this year, 71 mothers have been forced to travel from the Gascoyne, Carnarvon and surrounding areas to deliver their babies in either Geraldton or Perth ... They have to pay for accommodation and travel. Some of that is reimbursed, but not all ...

That is not true. It is not true that they have to travel hundreds of kilometres and then, at their cost, cover accommodation and travel with only minimal input from the patient assisted travel scheme and government support. Again, that is

not true. Use the facts. Now we are getting messages from journalists saying that the opposition is saying that Carnarvon is closing maternity services permanently.

**Ms M.J. Davies** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**Ms A. SANDERSON:** The opposition is saying that in Carnarvon. It is whipping up unnecessary fear. It is a temporary scale-down for safe birthing. I guarantee that every woman in Western Australia will be provided with a safe birth, and that is what they want.

**Ms M.J. Davies** interjected.

**Ms A. SANDERSON:** They want a safe birth in the hands of an appropriately skilled and resourced midwifery team. That is what they want. If opposition members were truly committed to supporting those women, they would work with my office to make sure that no outstanding claims had gone missing, but instead they make cheap political points. They claim that, somehow trying to find division —

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please!

**Ms A. SANDERSON:** For the last two days, I have listened to them desperately trying to pick holes and find division in what is a united and disciplined government. The Leader of the Liberal Party and the Leader of the Nationals WA asked exactly the same question in question time on Tuesday and used exactly the same article in a by-election campaign that they are fighting each other in.

Several members interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please!