

WA COUNTRY HEALTH SERVICE — AGENCY NURSES

832. Ms L. METTAM to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the astounding revelation that the WA Country Health Service spent almost \$100 million more on contract agency nurses in 2022–23 than it did the previous year—a fivefold increase—to fill vacancies in regional hospitals. Can the minister confirm that this is a result of the Cook Labor government running down our health system to the point that it is struggling to attract much needed permanent nursing staff for critical roles?

Ms A. SANDERSON replied:

It demonstrates our commitment to keeping regional health services open—that is what it does! The member will recall that in 2022–23, we had something called COVID that went through not only metropolitan Perth but the whole state. There were high levels of sick leave and other leave all through that year, right up to the end of 2022. We had another wave; I think it was the third wave. That leave also included regional hospitals, so, yes, agency staff were brought on to replace people on those rosters. What would the Leader of the Liberal Party prefer? Clearly, the Liberal–National opposition would prefer it if we just told the staff on the ground to make do: “Just make do with what you’ve got. People are off sick. This role is not filled. People are unwell or their children are unwell, so just make do with what you’ve got.” We have just had record amounts of sick leave and COVID furlough, and we are committed to keeping those services open. That is why.