

HEALTH — WORKFORCE — RECRUITMENT

**453. Mr M. HUGHES to the Minister for Health:**

I refer to the Cook Labor government's ongoing efforts to recruit additional doctors and nurses across Western Australia.

- (1) Can the minister advise the house how the government's facilitation of a medical, nursing and midwifery workforce summit yesterday will help boost WA Health's workforce?
- (2) Can the minister outline to the house how this Labor government is working with the healthcare workforce to find solutions to challenges facing the sector?

**Ms A. SANDERSON replied:**

I thank the member for Kalamunda for the question.

- (1)–(2) It is not a surprise to anyone that we are facing a number of challenges in the healthcare workforce. In fact, the whole world is experiencing shortages of qualified healthcare workers—medical, nursing, allied health. A whole range of professions are highly sought after. In WA Health, we have certainly made excellent strides and moved forward, with a 30 per cent increase in our health FTE since coming to government—a 30 per cent increase—which is significantly more than the growth of under 1 000 FTE over the whole period of the former Liberal–National government. The biggest investment that we can make in our healthcare system is in those qualified healthcare workers, but the reality is that the international shortage will be here for the foreseeable future. It is a globally competitive market. The demand for healthcare workers in Australia is expected to grow significantly over the next 20 years. Across the whole nation, by 2049, there will be an FTE gap of 211 000 healthcare workers. That is across the nation. It is a significant challenge that we will face. The member would know that the WA Health workforce pipeline is not controlled by one entity. It is a very complex landscape. The state government, the federal government, medical colleges, unions, employers and registration bodies such as the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency all have either a lever or a foot on the pipeline. The way we work together will really demonstrate how we can move people in a safe way through our healthcare system.

Thankfully, we have a federal government that is absolutely committed to quality healthcare services and is willing to acknowledge the challenge in front of us. The Albanese government acted immediately when elected to tackle the healthcare workforce issues by convening national cabinet and working through a range of those priorities. The first action it took was to appoint Robyn Kruk, a highly regarded former public servant, to undertake a review of the health practitioner regulatory settings. It is not a very sexy name, but it is very important. She has come up with some really pragmatic recommendations for regulators, training colleges and state governments on what action is needed, including providing better flexibility on visa requirements and age limits; expanding expedited pathways, including of medical specialists; and better recognising the skills and experience of internationally trained practitioners. Every state is going to have to do their bit to support the important work of national cabinet and the priorities set by our national first ministers.

This workforce forum is the first of a number of forums that we will be holding to really start tackling this issue. It was a fantastic, constructive day of really good ideas, with everyone on the same page and wanting the best health system that we can possibly have. We also tackled WA Health as the employer of choice, and had honest and frank conversations about the administrative burden on doctors, drawing on solutions from the eastern states, and the need for greater flexibility in workplaces to encourage more female doctors back into the workforce. Working in our public hospitals is incredibly inflexible, so we are looking at innovative ways to improve flexibility. We are also looking at how we support our nurses and midwives to work to their full scope and at the way they are trained and the way they want to be.

There will be more work done in this space. Allied health is a key pillar of our healthcare services. I am looking forward to the further round tables and to implementing some of the great ideas we saw yesterday.