

EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS — REFORM

290. Ms E.L. HAMILTON to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's record investment to strengthen and improve Western Australia's health system.

- (1) Can the minister update the house on the impact of this government's reforms to improve access to emergency care and reduce ambulance ramping?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house how these reforms are improving the capacity of our emergency care services?

Visitors — Dawson Park Primary School

The SPEAKER: Minister, I want to acknowledge and welcome, on behalf of the member for Forrestfield, the students from Dawson Park Primary School and the staff member who is accompanying them. Welcome to the Western Australian Parliament.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Ms A. SANDERSON replied:

I thank the member for Joondalup for her question.

- (1)–(2) In last year's budget, the government announced a suite of measures spanning short, medium and long-term solutions to help address some of the pressures on our emergency departments. At the time we announced those measures, Dr Peter Allely from the Australasian College of Emergency Medicine told the media that they were pleased that they had a government that was listening and cares and is trying to make some improvements to a super-complicated issue.

In the last 12 months we have pursued reforms at a rapid pace across four areas: firstly, we have developed a WA virtual emergency department, or WAVED, with new community-based services, giving patients more options to access timely care without having to go to an emergency department. Secondly, a state health operations centre, which will improve the coordination of patient movements to reduce demands on frontline staff. We expect the first stage of that to be up and running for this winter. Thirdly, we are reinstating the dedicated reform teams that were previously in place under the four-hour rule to eliminate unnecessary barriers and to optimise patient care. Fourthly, we are reducing the number of long-stay patients awaiting aged care or NDIS support.

We have developed new and innovative measures such as paying aged-care providers to increase the number of temporary placements that they have and respite beds for those who are medically fit for discharge and ready to leave hospital. There are some promising early signs and green shoots, with ramping down for three consecutive months by an average of 25 per cent compared with last year. We know that winter will increase pressure on our system, as it does every single year. The impacts of deferred care and demand from the pandemic, an ageing population and an increase in chronic and complex disease will only increase pressure on our system, as they will on every other health system. That is why, in this budget, the government has committed another \$75 million to expand our reforms, which are starting to make an impact, and additional funding for things like geriatric outreach into the community. We are listening to our frontline healthcare workers and investing in the solutions they care about.

Last year I attended a summit run by the Australian Medical Association in which clinicians from across the system proposed a range of alternative pathways to ED, and greater use of in-reach teams. We did more than just listen to those clinicians; we have funded those proposals and we are getting on with the job of implementing them through major reforms. That is why the president of the AMA—not someone who is known for handing out compliments—recently congratulated the government on developing these proposals from clinicians into practical policies that will improve care.

We know that the opposition is increasingly out of touch on this issue and intent on spreading misinformation. The fact that the opposition has tried to score cheap political points on these recent announcements, which were developed by clinicians, shows how out of touch it is with frontline workers and the sector. Chris How, the CEO of Bethanie Aged Care, has said that WAVED will complement the existing services and allow for decisions based on residents' needs. Liz Behjat, state manager of the aged care peak body Aged and Community Care Providers Association and former member of the Western Australian Legislative Council, strongly supported WAVED and said that we are leading the way in our collaboration with the sector. Clare Mullen from the Health Consumers' Council of WA has been actively involved in the WAVED reforms and has said that there is general support from the consumers surveyed. Even Kim Hames, the

former Liberal Minister for Health, when asked about our reforms, said that it was easy to sit outside and say how it should be done, but that it was a lot harder from inside and that he knew we are trying to do some of those things.

I challenge the Leader of the Liberal Party to come up with some suggestions for how she would fix it and to tell us what she would do.