

## **TOM PRICE HOSPITAL**

### *Grievance*

**MS M. BEARD (North West Central)** [9.42 am]: I grieve today to the Minister for Health, and I thank the minister for taking my grievance. I am seeking answers about the long-awaited rebuild of the dilapidated Tom Price Hospital, an issue that not only is negatively impacting and putting at risk patients and their families, but also has a flow-on effect on population retention and attraction and the broader economic development of our regions. In recent weeks, the Shire of Ashburton, along with the Western Mine Workers Alliance, has called on the Minister for Health to deliver on Labor's promise for a new fit-for-purpose hospital for Tom Price. The hospital services around 3 000 residents and thousands of workers from across the region. In addition, it is a minimum 45-minute trip under lights in an ambulance, as long as there are no lengthy waits for train crossings, to Paraburdoo Hospital, which is also very dilapidated. Should a person need to be transferred there or to be flown out by the Royal Flying Doctor Service, they need to make that trip. At a time of billion-dollar surpluses built on the back of regional WA, why are towns like Tom Price, which is part of the north west powerhouse of the Australian and state economies, continuing to be plagued by inadequate health services?

In 2021, the government promised \$32.8 million for the hospital, in partnership with a \$20 million contribution from Rio Tinto. The Shire of Ashburton has been left asking, "Where is the money?", as millions of dollars in funding for the Tom Price Hospital have seemingly disappeared from the books. In the 2023–24 budget, an allocation of \$25.5 million was to be spent in 2024–25. However, the 2023–24 *Government mid-year financial projections statement*, released in December, clearly showed that the government would not spend anything in 2024–25. Of the original \$25.5 million allocated in the May budget, \$4.9 million seems to have been designated for 2026–27, according to the December 2023–24 midyear review. According to this information, it would seem that the plan is to not spend anything over the next two years on the hospital redevelopment. In reality, it seems that any substantial progress has been postponed beyond the forward estimates for the foreseeable future. Despite the significant \$3.7 billion surplus in Western Australia's budget, the minister's office has cited increased construction costs as a barrier, which we understand. However, that claim seems to be unfounded, given the substantial overspend on metropolitan projects like Metronet. The office has also advised that the WA Country Health Service is working closely with the Department of Health and the Department of Finance to address the funding needs. It is disappointing that the government cannot find the money for a critical regional hospital that is in dire need of redevelopment but can find the money for blowouts on projects in the metro area.

In question time on 12 October, the minister advised that she was working through the land tenure issues with the Shire of Ashburton. I am pleased to advise that the CEO of the Ashburton shire has advised that they are ready to receive plans for the hospital redevelopment and have been in a position to do so for some time. The Shire of Ashburton produces 38 per cent of the state's gross domestic product, with significant contributions from mining, tourism and pastoral activities. That underscores the critical importance of ensuring that all residents in that region have access to quality health care. The outdated state of our current hospital facility is no longer acceptable; it is imperative that we have modern medical facilities capable of providing the standard of care that those communities deserve. Our miners, particularly those who work in high-risk areas, do not believe that they have appropriate health facilities should a serious or major incident occur that results in serious harm or injury. The Shire of Ashburton and the Western Mine Workers Alliance are deeply troubled by the prolonged delay of this commitment, which is vital to the health and wellbeing of our community. I join the shire president, Audra Smith, and the Western Mine Workers Alliance in urging the government to fulfil the promise without delay.

The time for action is now. The people of Tom Price cannot afford to wait. This has been a very long wait for the region, with the previous government committing \$38.24 million under the North West Health Initiative back in 2016–17. The Labor government seems to have made similar commitments to replace the ageing hospital since that time and repeated the commitment in the 2021 election campaign, yet the community is still waiting for tangible progress to address the dire state of the hospital. As I am sure the minister will appreciate, it is difficult for those in the regions to see those in the city being provided with nice-to-have facilities, such as illuminated light displays on footbridges, when their basic needs are being overlooked and they are without critical fit-for-purpose health infrastructure, placing people's lives at risk. I recognise the challenges—I absolutely do—but I urge the minister to fulfil this commitment by visiting Tom Price Hospital and the community as soon as possible; meeting with the shire and the Western Mine Workers Alliance to provide some clear answers on comprehensive time frames, commencement dates and the scope of work; and providing a commitment that this will be funded in the next budget.

**MS A. SANDERSON (Morley — Minister for Health)** [9.47 am]: I thank the member for North West Central for her grievance. The Cook Labor government has a very clear commitment to building world-class health infrastructure in the regions. We have a strong record of building world-class infrastructure in regional Western Australia. We have the biggest health infrastructure program in the history of the state. It is an ambitious infrastructure program that includes upgrades to and redevelopment of a number of major hospitals in the regions, including Tom Price

Hospital. We are in a constrained construction environment and we are still working through those challenges, but we continue to deliver excellent infrastructure. We have been innovative and agile where we can be—for example, by using modular wards at Bentley, Rockingham, Osborne Park and Bunbury—but those solutions do not work in every location, particularly in some of the harsher environments. I acknowledge the WA Country Health Service and its incredible staff for the work that they do. They provide health care in some of the most remote regional locations in the world.

Planning for the Tom Price Hospital continues. We have settled the land tenure issue and found the land. I want to thank our partner in this hospital, Rio Tinto, which has contributed \$20 million. We are working with Rio to progress the project. To say that the money is not in the budget is a complete falsehood; \$32 million has been allocated towards this project. Once a managing contractor is appointed, we can work with them to establish a program of works and time frames for construction. I acknowledge that it takes time to progress significant infrastructure projects and it can be frustrating for communities, and we share that frustration. We are working with the available construction market, which is there to actually build these things.

My office has extended an invitation to meet with the Shire of Ashburton's newly appointed president. I am happy to have an ongoing briefing of Australian Workers' Union representatives to ensure that their members and the community are kept up-to-date on this important project. The member is certainly whipping up a scare campaign by saying that money has not been committed to the project because that is not true. The money is there and it is dishonest to claim that it is not.

In addition to our investment in Tom Price Hospital, we have completed the \$61 million redevelopment of the Newman Health Service. The former Premier Mark McGowan and I opened that service last year. It is a purpose-built facility with a \$15 million contribution from BHP. There have also been some completely false claims that there has been a reduction of frontline services. There has been no reduction of frontline services at Tom Price or Paraburdoo hospitals. Tom Price is a small public facility. It has a 24-hour nurse-led emergency department, providing inpatient medical imaging, pathology and outpatient care, including child health, occupational therapy, speech pathology, physiotherapy, dietetics and audiology. It is not true to say that it provides a substandard service. It hosts a number of visiting specialties such as paediatrics, gynaecology and general surgery and it also has a population health unit providing immunisations, child health screenings, sexual health services and a range of other services. Claims were made that it was without power. It has not been without power at any point. Some cabling and electrical mains required ongoing maintenance. That has occurred, as it should. Rather than taking a productive and constructive approach to reaching out to the office to see whether she could get a briefing, the member seeks to raise her own profile and score political points. That is all that is.

More broadly, I am very proud of the government's record on regional infrastructure achievements. We have doubled access to cancer services in the regions. One of the biggest issues I have heard in regional Western Australia is that people have to travel for cancer services because treatment is ongoing. Since 2007, we have doubled access to those services. We have delivered the modern Newman Health Service with a \$61 million investment. We have also delivered a radiation oncology service in Albany. It is a fantastic service that is highly valued by the community. We have upgraded birthing suites at Broome Health Campus, including waterbirthing facilities for use during labour, and upgrades to outdoor spaces.

We have delivered upgrades at Dongara Health Centre and Collie Hospital. The upgrades at Collie Hospital are beautiful; its theatres are spectacular. We have delivered upgrades to emergency departments at Plantagenet Cranbrook Health Service and at Boddington, Dalwallinu and Wongan Hills. We added 30 beds to Bunbury Regional Hospital and we are delivering a major redevelopment. We are delivering a major redevelopment at Geraldton Health Campus. We have delivered a rural psychiatry pathway, increasing the number of trainee psychiatrists by 300 per cent. We are delivering more paid paramedics to the regions, in Geraldton, Bunbury, Busselton, Esperance, Margaret River, Harvey, Northam, Narrogin and Newman. We have bolstered the number of midwifery group practices operating in the regions in Carnarvon, Manjimup, Bridgetown, Northam, Collie, Margaret River, Bunbury, Narrogin and Broome. Unlike the member's government, we increased the patient assisted travel scheme accommodation subsidy by 66 per cent. We increased that.

Our record stands strong on regional health care and we continue to support the residents of Tom Price and the incredible work that they do to contribute to our community. We are absolutely dedicated to building that hospital and we will do so.