

CHILD DEVELOPMENT SERVICE

**216. Ms R.S. STEPHENS to the Minister for Health:**

I refer to the Cook Labor government's ongoing commitment and investment to improve Western Australia's child health system.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house how the state budget's significant funding boost for child development services will improve the delivery of paediatric and child health services in Western Australia?
- (2) Can the minister advise how this significant investment will facilitate a rapid expansion of services and significantly increase WA's children's health workforce?

**Ms A. SANDERSON replied:**

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for Albany for her question on this incredibly important service. As we know, the child development service is a unique service in Australia. Western Australia is the only state that provides a publicly funded service that provides both assessment as well as ongoing treatment for children experiencing developmental and learning delays. That is why it is important that we continue to keep up with demand, which has overwhelmed the service over the last 10 years. We have seen demand for referrals to paediatricians increase by 123 per cent over the last 10 years and clinical psychology referrals by 114 per cent. With that increased demand, we are also seeing increased patient complexity and social factors within families that require multidisciplinary treatment and care plans to support these children in their learning journeys. It is important that the community knows that the child development service is priority for the Cook Labor government. As part of the upcoming budget, the government has announced the significant investment of \$39 million, which is one of the single biggest injections of funding into the service, to support ongoing service delivery in our communities. The investment will fund more than 100 medical, nursing and allied health FTEs in both metropolitan and regional Western Australia to provide better and quicker access for people who need to have their children seen. We know that children need to be seen in those early developmental years so that they receive the full impact of treatments. The earlier the intervention, the better the outcomes and the more impactful those treatments will be.

Over the last number of years, the child development service has been piloting a number of new ways to deliver assessments, care and support for children with developmental challenges, including the piloting of a joint nurse and paediatrician medication pathway. Rather than children having a medication review with a paediatrician, the pathway involves a clinical nurse specialist who monitors and manages ongoing medication issues. Often that is an assessment. If there are no complications or challenges, the child can essentially get another prescription. That is seeing nurse practitioners working at the top of their scope, which is something we are keen to do more of in the system because it will free up paediatricians to see more children for assessment. We are also piloting the combination of service planning and assessment appointments to allow families to have fewer appointments and reduce waiting times. We have also opened a number of child development service centres on weekends to open up appointments on Saturdays, which is incredibly important for working families in terms of access and flexibility. We are transitioning to electronic referrals to reduce the administrative burden and we are implementing the hub-and-spoke model, which will allow child development services to sit alongside child and adolescent mental health services. The experience of patients is that they are siloed, and people are bounced between those services. The hub model, which opened recently opened in the south west in Bunbury, will allow many of those services to be assessed alongside mental health services under one roof.

I spoke to one practitioner who has been working in the CDS for 17 years because that is where she feels that she can make the most difference. People love working in the child development service area. They see many, many children and have a genuine impact on people's lives. I am very proud that the government's 2024–25 budget will deliver a significant increase in the assessment and ongoing treatment for children with developmental challenges.