

CORONAVIRUS — HOSPITALS — RAPID ANTIGEN TESTS

6. Dr K. STRATTON to the Minister for Health:

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house what measures the McGowan Labor government has taken over the last two years to prepare our hospital system to deal with increased cases of COVID-19?
- (2) Can the minister update the house on the procurement of rapid antigen tests and how they will be used in Western Australia's emergency departments?

Ms A. SANDERSON replied:

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for Nedlands for the question. I know that she has a keen interest in the health system and all things health because, like me, she understands the fundamental importance of access to good quality health services to our population.

We all know that when coronavirus hit, the McGowan government put health first, and we continue to take the approach that puts the health of Western Australians first. That includes some of the highest vaccination rates in the world—99.3 per cent. I am waiting for the opposition's congratulations on that. We are seeing that other countries are now taking our lead in mandating these vaccination rates. We introduced public health and social measures, including the proof-of-vaccination requirements and mask wearing, and we have also introduced the COVID-care-at-home program. It is a free program for high-risk patients at home to receive medical advice and care whilst staying in their own homes. They are provided a kit with all the equipment that they need. Should their condition deteriorate, they will then be quickly transferred to hospital, not by the emergency department, but straight into hospital. We are adding an extra 530 beds to the system; 530 beds is the equivalent of a tertiary hospital. We have marquees outside emergency departments with plentiful supplies of rapid antigen tests for people coming into the emergency departments so that we can screen and test those patients. Building on the work of my predecessor and the Treasurer, we will see the roll out of a record \$3.2 billion investment in health. Last year, an additional 1 259 nurses and midwives were employed by the health sector, and nearly 600 doctors last year alone, and 400 graduate doctors were offered employment in February—400 in February, in this month. We have the capacity to surge up to 306 intensive care unit beds when needed.

We have also seen the outstanding success of our RAT procurement program. Around the world, we are competing globally with access to RATs and governments scrambling to get their hands on RATs so that people can be screened and tested and continue about their business and so that we do not see the critical breakdown of important public services, freight and logistics, and of our police service and health service. We have ordered 1.5 million RATs and we have 10 million to hand. We know that public emergency departments are using them now. They are being distributed around the state so that regional communities have access to rapid testing. There will be programs for remote communities to come into centres and pick up their RATs and kits. We have used this time well, and we know that RATs provide greater protection for patients, staff and community workers as we start to see increased numbers in hospitals. We saw the chaos in the eastern states hospitals where patients were walking into emergency departments without COVID and picking up COVID in hospital—and dying from COVID in some instances. That is why we are prepared and planning and taking an orderly approach to this outbreak and to the slow increase in cases we are seeing. We are making sure our hospitals, our regions and our communities have good access to RATs and good access to testing.