

NURSES AND MIDWIVES

257. Ms L. DALTON to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's commitment to supporting Western Australia's health workforce throughout our public health system.

- (1) Can the minister advise the house how this government is supporting nursing and midwifery graduates whilst boosting our regional and remote health workforce?
- (2) Can the minister also advise the house of how these initiatives will bolster and support WA's health workforce, particularly in regional Western Australia?

Ms A. SANDERSON replied:

I thank the member for her question.

- (1)–(2) The government is, as we know, investing heavily in our public health infrastructure, with hundreds of new hospital beds that have come online within the last 18 months, a new maternity hospital, improved access to emergency care and investment in new technology to keep us healthy. However, we all know that, whilst buildings and infrastructure are important, our health workforce is the backbone of our health care sector. It has faced significant challenges over the last couple of years and has worked incredibly hard, around the world and in Western Australia, supporting the whole community.

We are already doing a significant amount to attract and retain a workforce to Western Australia. We have the Belong campaign, launched under the former Minister for Health, which supports recruitment of overseas healthcare workers and upskilling the WA healthcare workforce, and that will continue. In 2021 we expanded the skilled migration list for priority jobs, which included 46 medical and health-related occupations, for 2022–23. We all know that Minister Papalia led a very successful delegation to the United Kingdom, particularly attracting critical core public sector workers to Western Australia, and we are funding upgrades to the WA Country Health Service accommodation to the tune of more than \$8 million. We also have a targeted retention fund of \$15 million, which is allocated to hard-to-staff areas to incentivise our midwives and nursing staff to stay in those areas and support their communities. Many of these initiatives complement existing initiatives.

All graduate midwives are offered employment in WA hospitals. We have scholarships for undergraduate midwives and courses for midwives who are registered but do not have recency. Our wages policy is more generous than those of New South Wales, Victoria, the Northern Territory and Tasmania; we have more flexible working hours and increased training; and, of course, we are introducing historic nurse-to-patient ratios. All of these measures mean that our workforce is growing. We have seen a 22 per cent increase in Western Australia's FTE over the last three years. That includes 1 784 nursing staff and 779 more medical FTE staff.

Yesterday, with the Premier, I announced another really important incentive for our healthcare workforce: up to 350 newly qualified nurses and midwives who choose to work in regional public hospitals will receive up to \$12 000 towards their HECS fees over three years. This program means that nurses completing their studies at Edith Cowan University will have to pay only \$882 for their degree, if they choose to start their career in regional health. We know that when people start their career in regional health, they very often fall in love with it and choose to stay there, and that is what we want: we want those healthcare workers to make their homes in the regions and to support those communities.

This is also supported by an increase of \$306 million in initiatives to significantly boost the number of graduates across the whole system, give them more wraparound supports, and help them start their careers. This will bring our graduate intake to 1 200 newly qualified nurses and midwives across the health system in any one year. That is a significant increase. This is one of the many initiatives that we have in place to encourage new nurses and midwives to take up the exciting challenges in regional healthcare, and to support those who want to enter our metropolitan healthcare institutions as well.