

HEALTH — WORKFORCE — RECRUITMENT

72. Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's work to recruit more nurses, midwives, doctors and allied health staff to WA public hospitals.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house the important measures the government is undertaking to support and strengthen our health workforce?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house how these measures are improving health outcomes in our hospitals?

Ms A. SANDERSON replied:

- (1)–(2) It is an excellent question. I thank the member for Bicton for her question and for the opportunity to talk about a range of initiatives running at the moment, in particular the nurse practitioner pilot that I announced with the commonwealth earlier this week. The first is GradConnect, a twice yearly intake in recruitment of newly qualified nurses. It is just one way that newly graduated nurses and midwives can connect with potential employers. We have connected aged care with GradConnect as well. A total of 1 130 grads were offered positions in the public health system last year, and 200 of those went to WA Country Health. It also supports nurses and midwives with transition into practice programs. These are funded by the government to support those new grads into transitioning into practice on the floor so that they get an opportunity to watch and learn and be paid before they get hands on. All that helps with retention and support for this incredibly important workforce. We had early feedback from our grads. With 137 graduate nurses employed in the east metropolitan region alone, I yesterday met 66; they are very excited. It was a great morning with lots of excitement and a bit of trepidation, but the early feedback was really good that they are feeling very supported, they are enjoying their placements and they are doing a range of placements, whether it is ICU, trauma, acute medical or geriatrics—they get a range of access to different clinical areas.

We also today launched the second stage of the Belong campaign, which expands on the original campaign launched internationally, that focuses on nurses and midwives who may not be practising currently, but are living in Western Australia. It builds on that first stage and highlights that the government has fast-tracked that cost-of-living payment to our nurses and midwives with a three per cent to 4.5 per cent pay increase. We have some of the highest penalty rates of any jurisdiction in the country, and we are importantly committed to implementing nurse-to-patient ratios. They are working, because we know that nurses are coming to WA Health to work, whether it is local or overseas. We are adding over 3 300 FTE. Since 2017, that is a 21 per cent increase in our nursing workforce. With 1 200 medical FTE, that is a 23 per cent increase, and the 1 400 allied health FTE is a 23 per cent increase. That is in contrast with the former Liberal–National government when FTE grew by one per cent in eight years in the public health system. That was over eight years of government.

I am very excited to inform the house of the nurse practitioner pilot launched early this week, funded by the commonwealth. National cabinet discussed some challenges around health occurring in every jurisdiction. The federal government put \$100 million on the table for innovation in health care. WA has come forward with the idea of providing nurse practitioners to deliver primary health care. These are highly skilled workers in our system, many of whom are not working to scope. We know that there are at least 60 employed in health care who are not employed as nurse practitioners. This is a two-year trial that will fund those nurse practitioners to prescribe, order pathology, order tests, interpret them and provide important care. This is just one of the many ways that the state government is partnering with the commonwealth government to provide an open access to health care for our community.