

HEALTH — WORKFORCE

40. Mr M. HUGHES to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's record investment in Western Australia's public health system.

- (1) Can the minister advise the house on the measures taken by the McGowan government to grow and strengthen Western Australia's public health workforce and the impacts they have in our hospitals?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house how this government's efforts to grow our public health workforce compare with that of the former Liberal–National government?

Ms A. SANDERSON replied:

I thank the member for Kalamunda for his question.

- (1)–(2) Most of us in this chamber understand that the workforce is the most important asset in the Western Australian health system. It is no secret that every health system around the world is challenged when it comes to workforce and every public health system is expanding and increasing its workforce significantly. This government has grown the health workforce with a 20 per cent increase in FTE since coming to government.

Since 2017, we have seen more than 3 300 new nurses, more than 1 200 new doctors and more than 1 400 new allied health workers added to our public health system. In WA, we are actively recruiting skilled and experienced health staff to strengthen our workforce. The Belong campaign, launched in October 2021, articulates the benefits and opportunities of working throughout WA Health across our state. In addition, WA Health will assist with the sponsorship for temporary and permanent visas for experienced nurses and midwives applying for positions.

Contrary to the claim made by the member for Cottesloe during the Premier's Statement debate earlier that we kept health workers and 100 doctors out of this state during the pandemic, the Chief Health Officer approved 700 travel exemptions for clinical staff alone. But we need to grow our own staff, and that is why we will commence in 2023 a range of new initiatives to support and upskill the current workforce. The first one is called Free in '23, which will help build WA's nursing workforce, with the diploma of nursing qualification now 100 per cent fee free in Western Australia. WA Health has also partnered with aged care, which we know is experiencing critical workforce shortages. In recognition of our partnership and how important it is to the entire health sector, our GradConnect recruitment system, which normally recruits graduates to the public health system and some private hospital operators, will provide GradConnect into aged-care facilities to help support that important sector. This will be funded by WA Health. Eligible WA nurses and midwives will be able to participate in a range of pathways to refresh their clinical knowledge and importantly upskill.

There are also a number of system-wide initiatives to support the health and wellbeing of our staff, including the Stop the Violence campaign, the code black emergency response system and free access to our employee assistance programs. Addressing a key claim item in the Australian Nursing Federation agreement negotiations, work has commenced on introducing nurse-to-patient ratios. We will also target financial assistance to support nurses and midwives for scholarships, ongoing education and upskilling, and we have recently authorised the fast-tracking of a one-off \$3 000 cost-of-living payment and a wage increase of three to 4.5 per cent backdated to October last year on top of the five per cent superannuation increase.

Supporting, upskilling and strengthening our nursing workforce is one of our most important challenges in the health system. Contrast this with the former government. Under the Colin Barnett Liberal–National coalition, Health FTE declined by 916 between 2014 and 2017. Over their eight years in office, it increased by just 1.4 per cent per year.