

EDUCATION AND HEALTH STANDING COMMITTEE

*Fourth Report — Report of the inquiry into the Esther Foundation and unregulated private health facilities —
Government Response — Statement by Minister for Health*

MS A. SANDERSON (Morley — Minister for Health) [1.20 pm]: I am pleased to table the government response to the Education and Health Standing Committee’s *Report of the inquiry into the Esther Foundation and unregulated private health facilities*. The government welcomes the committee’s report, tabled on 1 December 2022, and I thank the committee for the outstanding quality of its work. I am pleased to advise the house that the government supports in full or in principle all five recommendations outlined in the report.

Firstly, before going into the government response, I recognise the bravery and resilience of former residents of the Esther Foundation, their family members, staff and all those who shared their experiences with the committee. To these individuals, I say, “We hear you.” We recognise the imperative to drive changes to prevent others from having similar experiences in the future and are strongly committed to providing safe, quality services to the Western Australian public.

The committee found that unacceptable practices occurred at the Esther Foundation that caused harm to many people. The committee also received submissions with complaints and allegations against other unregulated private health facilities that continue to operate in Western Australia. It is clear we need major change in how private health services are regulated in Western Australia to adequately protect vulnerable consumers, and today I am pleased to confirm that we are committed to doing that.

Three recommendations related to licensing and regulation of private health facilities. The government strongly supports the development of contemporary legislation to ensure the efficient and effective regulation of private health facilities, including mental health and alcohol and drug services. This important reform will be led by a statutory review of the Private Hospitals and Health Services Act. The Department of Health has already commenced work to understand what is required and will undertake further consultation with the sector and with consumers as part of the review.

The committee also recommended regulatory reform to ensure that in the future, affected people can have their complaints dealt with by a dedicated body that is positioned to deliver better outcomes for individual complainants. We have already progressed amendments to the Health and Disability Services (Complaints) Act to implement the national code of conduct for healthcare workers in Western Australia who fall outside of existing regulatory arrangements.

I look forward to ongoing collaboration with the sector as we implement these recommendations to improve oversight of these important services for Western Australians.

[See paper [1856](#).]