

URINARY TRACT INFECTIONS

473. Ms C.M. COLLINS to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the action taken by the Cook Labor government to address record demand facing our health system and improve access to primary healthcare services.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house how the recent decision to allow pharmacists to prescribe antibiotics for women with uncomplicated urinary tract infection symptoms will improve access to primary care services such as general practitioners?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house how this initiative will help women in WA access timely, appropriate and convenient health care?

Ms A. SANDERSON replied:

I thank the member for Hillarys for her question and note her strong advocacy for women and women's health care, particularly in her electorate.

- (1)–(2) The government, under the former minister and now Premier, commenced the sustainable health review in 2017. That review over two years was overseen by Robyn Kruk, who is an independent expert and has more than 30 years' experience in the public health system. The final report included eight enduring strategies and 30 recommendations. We have reset that review since the COVID pandemic and revisited the implementation plan. One of the core priorities of that implementation plan is improving access to care. As we know, primary care is incredibly stretched at this point, and the federal government is doing what it can to support our colleagues in primary care. That is why this government is also trialling pharmacist-led UTI management. Essentially, the 30 women in this chamber will have all been there. It is incredibly uncomfortable and painful and it is very difficult sometimes to get quick treatment when immediate relief is needed. Women often have to wait for days or weeks to see a GP. When you know what it is, you know what it is.

Several members interjected.

Ms A. SANDERSON: Indeed.

Those women with an uncomplicated UTI will now be able to present to participating pharmacists, who will be able to prescribe antibiotics. This is a common complaint. It is a very simple measure and it is being done in partnership with community pharmacy. This was developed through a working group with the Australian Medical Association, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, the Chief Pharmacist, health consumers and pharmacists. Pharmacists will need to undergo training, and that is available now. They will then notify on the Find a Pharmacy website or app that they are participating in this program. Essentially, it is based on the Queensland program but with WA-specific elements, and Victoria and New South Wales are progressing similar programs. This is important work that has been led by the Chief Pharmacist. This is a safe program that will allow women with uncomplicated UTI symptoms to present to their pharmacy and get the immediate relief that they need. It is a great step forward in women's health care. Of course, it does not negate the need to see a GP should those symptoms recur or they have further complications.

We are also looking at ways to extend access to oral contraceptives in WA via pharmacists. Currently, pharmacists are restricted to one usual supply of the quantity in an emergency situation once a year. We are looking at a trial based on other jurisdictions that will allow expanded resupply if it was prescribed within the last two years for those who are on a stable medication to ensure greater convenience for women in Western Australia. The department is leading this work and we expect it to be finalised in early 2024. It strongly aligns with the national women's health strategy, which includes improving access to reproductive health care for women.