

SENIORS, PHYSIOTHERAPY AND MOBILITY CLASSES

**1113. Mr R.F. JOHNSON to the Minister for Health:**

I refer the minister to a speech the Premier gave at the WA Seniors Award in which he is reported as saying that the State Government's policies and initiatives are based on valuing our seniors and that the Government wants to foster an inclusive community whereby seniors feel safe and appreciated and that the Government encourages healthy and positive ageing.

- (1) How does the minister reconcile this commitment to seniors with his decision to cut \$174 000 from community physiotherapy and mobility classes for 1 600 Western Australian citizens, which will see these classes cancelled altogether this week?
- (2) Is the minister aware that these classes teach seniors coordination and balance, which helps prevent falls and improves general health?
- (3) Why has the minister taken the easy option of targeting the most vulnerable people in our community instead of developing a long-term plan to fix the health system?

**Mr J.A. McGINTY replied:**

(1)-(3) The community physiotherapy program is thoroughly worthwhile; no-one has ever disputed that.

Mr R.F. Johnson: Why are you cutting it?

Mr J.A. McGINTY: We are cutting it because we are facing pressures in the health system, in part because of the cut in commonwealth funding, and also because of our own local budgetary pressures. The Government is trying to refocus health expenditure into the core areas of health provision.

Mr R.F. Johnson interjected.

Mr J.A. McGINTY: I would like to develop this. I am happy to take the member's interjection in a minute, but I would appreciate giving the member the substantial answer first. As I said, the mobility classes are thoroughly worthy. They are education and exercise classes for elderly people with the intention of keeping them relatively well, out of hospital and able to live in the community. Programs of this sort considerably reduce the risk of seniors falling and injuring themselves. Participants in the program are enrolled during school terms and attend a one-hour weekly session that includes tailored exercises and health education programs. The participants currently contribute \$10 per term or \$40 per year towards the cost of the program if they attend for the whole year. Currently, 25 sessional physiotherapists, a 0.28 full-time equivalent administrative officer at level 1.4 and one full-time equivalent physiotherapy coordinator at level 6.3 are employed for the program. I turn to the dollars involved. It costs \$219 965 to run the program, and the estimated income from the participants is \$45 600, which leaves a shortfall of \$174 365 - that is the saving to be made from cutting this project. Just over 1 000 elderly Western Australians participate in the program.

Mr C.J. Barnett: One thousand six hundred.

Mr J.A. McGINTY: If I can tell the Leader of the Opposition, \$40 per annum -

Mr R.F. Johnson: It was \$14.

Mr J.A. McGINTY: That might be the figures for one or so sessions in the member's area. However, I have just given the standard rate. If the rate is \$40 per annum - the members say it is higher than that, which would lower the figures - and the income is \$45 000, there are just over 1 000 participants. That is the basis of the calculation and the advice I have received.

It is performed at 55 locations throughout the city. I am told there was a program once run in the country, but it was cut during the 1990s as a budgeting measure. The participants attend during the school term only, so it runs for 40 weeks a year for one hour a week. Classes generally comprise 25 or 30 people who participate in various levels of supervised exercise. The physiotherapist who runs the one-hour session is paid for one hour and 30 minutes, which is appropriate because it allows time to set up and close down. The participants are assessed by the physiotherapist before they commence the program. It is a thoroughly worthy program.

The view I have taken is that, because of the budgetary pressures, we must focus our efforts in health to meet the needs within the community. People need to know that when they need the public health system on their side, it will be there and people will not be left in the back of an ambulance, left on a trolley and be neglected. They are hard decisions. Core health services include, very importantly, early intervention and preventive and community programs. Ultimately, it becomes a question of whether exercises for senior citizens are as important as some other areas of expenditure in health. I have made the simple call. One will always have people who say, "You must fund this." Demand in the health system is unlimited, and one cannot meet every single demand placed on

the system. An assessment must be made of the core areas that must be provided. The Government is doing exactly that.