

THANK U NICU DAY

Statement by Minister for Health

MS A. SANDERSON (Morley — Minister for Health) [1.06 pm]: I rise to inform members of the house about Thank U NICU Day, which was celebrated throughout Australia on Friday, 25 November 2022. Thank U NICU Day highlights the tremendous work of neonatal and special care nursery staff in caring for our sickest and most vulnerable patients.

In Western Australia, around 3 000 families are affected by preterm births each year. One in 12 pregnancies end preterm, and this rate is about double within Aboriginal communities. Of note, preterm birth is the most common cause of infant death and disability in the first five years of life. Prematurity occurs for a variety of reasons. Most preterm births happen spontaneously, but some are due to early induction of labour or caesarean birth for medical reasons. Common causes of preterm birth include multiple pregnancies, infections and chronic conditions such as diabetes and high blood pressure. There could also be a genetic influence. Often no cause is identified. Better understanding of the causes and mechanisms will advance the development of solutions to prevent preterm birth.

Over the past year, neonatal services at the Child and Adolescent Health Service have cared for approximately 1 400 premature babies. CAHS neonatal services include the neonatal intensive care units at King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women and Perth Children's Hospital, the Neonatal Emergency Transport Service WA, the Perron Rotary Express Milk Bank and the Centre for Neonatal Research and Education. The NICU at King Edward Memorial Hospital has 94 beds and cares for babies who are born early or are unwell after birth and need intensive care. The Perth Children's Hospital NICU has 30 beds and cares for all babies who require surgery or specialist services. NETS WA is a mobile intensive care unit for sick newborns and young infants in need of transportation and services the largest transport area of any similar service in the world. In 2021–22, there were 3 342 babies admitted to the NICUs at King Edward Memorial Hospital and Perth Children's Hospital and 1 193 transfers through NETS WA. In addition to Perth Children's Hospital and King Edward Memorial Hospital, dedicated expert NICU staff are also located at Fiona Stanley Hospital.

I commend the dedication and commitment of our neonatal and special care nursery staff members across our health system and thank them for the invaluable and important work that they do.