

**BREASTSCREEN WA — BUNBURY**

*Grievance*

**MS L. METTAM (Vasse — Leader of the Liberal Party)** [9.54 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Health. I thank the minister for taking my grievance on the growing concerns amongst women in Bunbury and the south west region and their questions surrounding the future of the breast screening facilities in Bunbury. The minister's office is aware of this matter and I am hoping she can provide some clarity for residents in Bunbury and the south west region. Breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer amongst women in Australia and one in seven Australian women are expected to be diagnosed with the cancer in their lifetime. Every day, nine Australians lose their lives to breast cancer. In Western Australia, about 1 300 women are diagnosed with breast cancer each year and 250 will die of the disease. Death rates have reduced thanks to medical research improvements, new breast cancer treatments and early detection. We all know how important early detection is for breast cancer treatment. Unfortunately, according to recent reports, many women are increasingly facing agonisingly long wait times for ultrasound and mammogram appointments. In some cases, women in the state are waiting for up to four months, leaving cancellations as the only hope for many to get an appointment. This is obviously a significant concern, which I hope the minister may be able to address in her response, in addition to the specific local issue that has been raised with me directly.

Early intervention is critically important to identify and treat this disease without delay. We also need to ensure that treatment is close to home and easily accessible, which is central to my grievance. That is why dedicated breast screening centres like the one in Bunbury are so important. Sadly, women in the south west region fear that the dedicated breast screening facility that is co-located at St John of God Bunbury Hospital will be closed or downsized with the offering of services being limited. BreastScreen WA does a terrific job providing mammograms to over 120 000 Western Australian women a year. As women across Australia know, the breast screening experience can be daunting and uncomfortable. There is generally a high level of anxiety associated with it. BreastScreen WA Bunbury at the St John of God health campus provides women with a friendly, comfortable and supportive experience. Women from all over the south west travel to Bunbury to have their preventive and diagnostic procedural needs—biopsies—met locally in a purpose-built facility. It also saves them having to drive to Perth or wait for a BreastScreen WA bus to visit the area. As the former Minister for Health stated in a media release —

It is vital that women have access as much as possible to clinics near where they live for both early detection and treatment.

In light of that, I raise concerns that St John of God's expansion plans will leave BreastScreen WA Bunbury without a home. This is worrying local women and I understand that staff at the breast screen centre are also concerned. As one woman put it to me, and I quote, according to my notes —

The value of the existing service cannot be understated. Women can have their preventative and diagnostic procedural needs ... met locally, by local women, in a purpose-built facility with the upmost of respect, dignity, professionalism, and skill. It would be more than a shame if women are required to have this service replaced only in part with a bus in the carpark until an equivalent service can be funded and built for purpose years down the track, if at all.

South west women who need biopsies will be required to take additional time away from their work, small business or families to travel to Perth. As we all know, families will also be impacted by cancer, with family members required to take time away from their jobs to support their loved ones as they travel to and from Perth. My understanding is that the costs associated with travelling to Perth are not currently compensated adequately through the patient assisted travel scheme. At a time of high cost of living, no longer being able to visit a local breast screening centre and having to drive the four-plus hour round trip is another financial burden that regional women and their families are being asked to bear.

Further, I wonder whether this would deter or discourage women who may choose to postpone necessary diagnostic breast procedures as a result. Comprehensive regional healthcare, provided by skilled and dedicated locals, needs to be protected and expanded if the south west stands a chance of meeting the healthcare needs of its community members in a timely manner.

I note the minister's previous responses to questions in this house that BreastScreen WA is a private organisation and where it provides screening is a matter for BreastScreen WA. But as the minister responsible for better health outcomes for Western Australian women and as a minister in the government that provides funding to BreastScreen WA and has credited itself in the past for opening BreastScreen clinics in Albany, I sincerely hope that the minister can give the women of the south west region confidence in ongoing BreastScreen services for this region. Bunbury requires and deserves a permanent dedicated BreastScreen facility that provides all required services, including biopsies, and, furthermore, is co-located with the local health campus.

In raising this grievance, I hope that the minister will be able to provide clarity on when the existing Bunbury BreastScreen centre is expected to close and what plans are in place to ensure that the services the facility provides will continue. On behalf of the women impacted by this closure, it is hoped that the minister will be able to outline what plans the government has for a new permanent BreastScreen centre in Bunbury, when this is expected to be delivered and what extra support the government may be able to provide BreastScreen WA to ensure that this new facility in Bunbury will be delivered in a timely manner. I thank the minister again for taking my grievance.

**MS A. SANDERSON (Morley — Minister for Health)** [10.00 am]: I thank the member for her grievance and I also acknowledge the advocacy of the member for Bunbury for this very important service. BreastScreen WA provides really important screening and early detection for women who may have breast cancer or have a history of breast cancer or are in the eligible age range. It is an incredibly important service. BreastScreen provides a fantastic service across the state from Albany up to Broome and all over Western Australia via its mobile service. Its all-female team—it really is women caring for women—has provided over 120 000 mammograms a year. There is a mix of clinics. Some are hybrid, permanent clinics, and others are mobile. Its vans visit over a hundred locations in the bush and it has 12 permanent screening locations.

I can provide reassurance for the women in the south west. I will put a few facts on the record. As we know, BreastScreen WA runs a comprehensive screening and assessment service in Bunbury. It has been purpose-built and aligned with the specialist services provided locally. It is serviced by a wide range of professionals and actually services around 5 000 women every year. BreastScreen has been asked to vacate the building by St John of God Health Care, which has ended its lease. This is not a decision of the government. BreastScreen has been asked to vacate the building by 2025. We have been given two years' notice to do that, and we are working with BreastScreen to find another suitable location in the area. It takes around two years from planning to commissioning, so there is plenty of time. This service is not at risk of imminent closure. It will continue in Bunbury and it will continue to provide services for women in the south west.

The North Metropolitan Health Service is responsible for managing BreastScreen WA. It is clinically independent. The member is quite right: it is funded largely by the government, but it makes decisions based on clinical outcomes. The government is absolutely committed to maintaining its presence in Bunbury and ensuring that women have a continuity of service. We are working with BreastScreen to find a suitable location. As I said, we have two years to do that. It is important that we have continuity of care. We have some catch-up to do with screening because of the COVID pandemic and some of the shutdown of outpatient services, and there is some increase in wait times for targeted high-risk women, so, obviously, maintaining that service is key. I have asked the North Metropolitan Health Service to continue to update me as planning progresses, and, as I said, we will continue to work with it to find a suitable location.

Certainly, St John of God made this decision based on its requirements to expand. The member is more than welcome to advocate to St John of God directly on its decision to ask BreastScreen to relocate.

We will find BreastScreen a new home, we will work with it, and there is no risk to the continuity of service. We have two years for this planning. We will ensure that this service continues for women and continues to provide a comprehensive and continuous close-to-home service in the south west.