

COMMUNITY CARE — RESPITE BEDS

407. Dr J. KRISHNAN to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the WA Labor government's record investment to strengthen and improve Western Australia's health system.

- (1) Can the minister update the house on initiatives to help Western Australians out of hospital and into more appropriate community care for services?
- (2) Can the minister outline how these government initiatives are helping to address the root causes of ambulance ramping?

Ms A. SANDERSON replied:

I thank the member for Riverton for his question.

- (1)–(2) We are very committed to reforming a complex health system in Western Australia. We know that funding is one part of the puzzle, and increasing beds is another part, but doing things differently and changing the way we do things in the health system is really important. That is why we have partnered with our aged-care providers to provide important temporary respite beds, which is a first across the country. We are working cooperatively with the commonwealth on that funding. The funding available for those aged-care providers was not economic in order for them to provide respite; therefore, they had a range of beds that were not being used. Essentially, we are providing them a top-up of funding to make it more financially sustainable for them, and that will allow those beds to be used for patients medically fit for discharge and seeking an aged-care placement. That respite program is an important component of the government's mandatory policy that says that a person must take the first of their top three choices in aged care. This gives people time with their families to organise their personal affairs, to organise their assets and to organise their lives and gives families time to get used to the idea of mum and dad going into aged care, because it is a big decision. It is a hard decision. It is a tough decision, and often it is a catastrophic health event that triggers that decision. This gives them the opportunity to make that decision. I think it is around 30 days, as they make a decision about where they will go. This is a really important part of unblocking some of the discharge delays that we are seeing in our system, and aged care is one of those blocks.

To make this work as well as we possibly can, we have launched vacantbeds.com. The Cook Labor government has supported the peak body, the Aged and Community Care Providers Association, to deliver a brand new sector-owned initiative, which is a real-time aged-care bed availability tool, and to have the data to do that. Previously, social workers on the ward would have to ring every aged-care provider and ask whether they had a bed. It was extremely onerous; it took a lot of time and took them away from other important patient-facing roles. This is essentially a portal that immediately shows the geographic location of the beds. It will save a huge amount of time and be really helpful for those aged-care patients and their families.

The sector is very excited about it. I want to thank it for its partnership. It is a very mature sector to work with. Its members work well together, despite the fact that they are essentially in competition. It is very focused on the priorities of aged care and that makes it a great sector to work with. It will make the discharge process from hospital smoother and safer. We know that when older patients stay in hospital, they are at significant risk of reduced functioning. There is lots of evidence that shows that after two days, their functional decline is quite rapid, because tertiary hospitals are busy and people do not have the same support. This is a really important part of the transitional and respite pilots that the state government is investing in in partnership with the commonwealth to lift those discharge delays that we are seeing in our system.