

PROSTATE CANCER FOUNDATION OF AUSTRALIA

Statement

HON PETER FOSTER (Mining and Pastoral) [6.48 pm]: I rise tonight to draw attention to the amazing work being done by the Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia, the national peak body for prostate cancer in Australia. I am sure everyone would agree that it would be nice if cancer would take some time off until the pandemic is over, but unfortunately we do not have that option. Prostate cancer is quietly killing 270 Western Australians each year, with about 2 000 men in WA being diagnosed annually. According to statistics provided by the Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia, that represents 12 per cent of all male cancer deaths.

Despite prostate cancer being the most diagnosed cancer for men, research funding lags far behind funding for other major cancer types. It is all too often the case that the chances of dying vary according to one's postcode or skin colour. If someone is Aboriginal, their chances of surviving five years after diagnosis are nine times lower than the average. The chances of dying from prostate cancer for people who live in rural or regional areas of Australia are 24 times higher than their metropolitan counterparts. Education and early detection dramatically improve chances of survival, but with 70 per cent of both men and women being unaware of the symptoms of prostate cancer, we clearly have some way to go. Nevertheless, inroads are being made. Western Australia has 12 prostate cancer specialist nurses providing specialised care to people impacted by prostate cancer. They are based at Fiona Stanley Hospital, Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and Joondalup Health Campus, but the Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia has plans to further expand this program into more public hospitals, with the encouragement of the WA Department of Health.

Further, the WA Department of Health's WA Cancer and Palliative Care Network Clinical Improvement Unit provides a statewide cancer nurse coordination service that comprises a team of specialist nurses located in both metropolitan and regional locations of Western Australia that provide support and information on diagnosis and treatments to patients. The McGowan government's WA Cancer Plan 2020–2025 provides a plan for the delivery of cancer controls and research to meet the needs of Western Australians impacted by cancer. Alongside this plan is the WA men's health and wellbeing policy that aims to deliver strategies to improve the physical, mental, social and emotional wellbeing of men and boys living in WA. I would like to thank both Minister Sanderson and her predecessor, Minister Cook, and the Western Australian Department of Health, for their ongoing efforts in ensuring that Western Australians get access to the services and care they need.

Meanwhile, the Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia continues to do its amazing work. Eighteen volunteer support groups bring together men and women who want to help those affected by prostate cancer. Most of those involved have either been patients themselves or are a partner or family member of someone affected. The foundation's prostate cancer telenursing service allows anyone anywhere in the country who has been impacted by prostate cancer to be connected to a prostate cancer nurse. The foundation also brings together men and women who have a passion for helping those impacted by prostate cancer through the volunteer-run prostate cancer support groups and MatesCONNECT, a phone-based peer support service connecting those who have recently been diagnosed with a trained volunteer who understands what they are going through.

If you have been affected by prostate cancer or know someone who has, please reach out to those services. I cannot imagine how much more difficult life would be for those diagnosed with prostate cancer if it were not for these people and organisations. Of course, there is still more to be done. Besides calling for a review of the national clinical guidelines for prostate-specific antigen testing to bring them in line with the current evidence so that GPs and patients can work together towards early detection, the Prostate Cancer Foundation of Australia also wants to see a doubling of prostate cancer research in Australia, and a targeted awareness strategy to reach those at risk. I hope that on a national level people are listening to the experts on this matter, because the McGowan government's response to the pandemic keeps on proving over and over again that the way to get it right when it comes to public health is to listen to the experts, and when we get it right, we save lives.