

MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION

779. Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE to the Minister for Mental Health:

I refer to the hard work of the McGowan Labor government in keeping WA safe and strong, which includes delivering a record investment in mental health and alcohol and other drug services.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house what this record investment will mean for suicide prevention programs and services across WA?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house how this record investment will help our hospitals manage the demand for mental health services in our community?

Mr R.H. COOK replied:

I thank the member for his question.

- (1)–(2) During Mental Health Week 2020, it is a very good opportunity to remind ourselves just how important mental health is and how important it is that we have good investment in mental health services, which is the reason I am very pleased to announce that for the first time in WA's history, the WA government will invest more than \$1 billion in mental health services in a year—an increase of 17 per cent in funding since we came to office.

The member is right; suicide has a dreadful impact on our society. On average in WA, around one person each day loses their life to suicide. Each death is a tragic event that has heartbreaking consequences for families and the community. It affects the whole community and a whole-of-community approach is required to prevent it. We understand that there is no easy fix, but we also know that we have to do more when it comes to funding, which is the reason that this year we have announced and committed more than \$49.6 million for suicide prevention initiatives. This includes services across prevention and early intervention, such as public education and training; support and after care for people experiencing a suicide crisis or following a suicide attempt; and postvention to build community capacity. One of the things that I am particularly proud of is the \$10 million investment to develop and implement a region-by-region approach to Aboriginal suicide prevention in Western Australia. It is the first time it has been undertaken and it will mean that we have a tailor-made suicide prevention program for each community, which they will co-design.

As I said, the budget for 2020 is a great opportunity to celebrate a \$1 billion investment in mental health services, which provides us with an opportunity to rebalance the system. What we can do in this context is invest heavily in prevention, with \$17.3 million in 2020–21, and provide a major boost of \$30.9 million in community bed-based services, a \$54.2 million investment in community support, \$427 million for community treatment and \$426.5 million for hospital-based services. As part of rebalancing the system, we have to address the fact that so many people with very complex and difficult mental health issues are coming into our emergency departments, and our EDs are struggling under that demand. That is the reason we are looking beyond simply the amount of services we need and at how we can do things differently.

I would like to speak about two programs in particular. The assertive recovery team is a \$14 million pilot program that aims to support people with significant mental health issues who have exited or are at risk of re-entering EDs. It will integrate hospital and community services and provide relief for ED services by keeping very unwell people from needing to continually re-present in crisis. The ART also aims to improve consumers' mental health and confidence in their ability to prevent avoidable admissions. This will mean that we have our community mental health services working in tandem with our hospital services to ensure that we can reach out to those people in the community who need our support.

Another program I am particularly proud of is our peer support program at Fiona Stanley Hospital. This is a pilot that will utilise the services of those with lived experience to sit by, care for and assist those with mental health issues who are in the ED to make sure that they can navigate their way through the system in a much more secure and cohesive way. EDs are distressing places. We hope that having a peer support worker there will make a huge difference to their experience in the emergency department.

At the moment, there are 806 active mental health beds in Western Australia's hospitals. Over the last four years, the total number of specialised mental health beds has increased by 58. But we need to continue to work to make sure that we have all the services we need in the community and that we are investing in prevention and support. I am proud of a government that has invested record amounts in mental health services so that we can continue to go forward and make these very important policy developments.