

COST OF LIVING — FAMILIES AND CARERS SUPPORT

99. Ms C.M. ROWE to the Minister for Community Services:

I refer to the Cook Labor government's commitment to support Western Australian families with cost-of-living challenges.

- (1) Can the minister advise the house how this government has provided targeted measures to support vulnerable children and their carers?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house how this government's record of supporting vulnerable people compares with that of the Liberals–Nationals?

Ms S.E. WINTON replied:

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for Belmont for her question. I put on record again in this place her incredible advocacy for grandcarers in particular. I meet with them regularly, and they often mention the member for Belmont as a longstanding champion for their cause.

The Cook government recognises and values those who step up to look after vulnerable children and young people when they need it most. This includes people who open their homes to care for our vulnerable children—people like grandcarers who provide the primary care for their grandchildren; and foster carers, family carers and special guardianship carers who care for children and young people in out-of-home care.

Back in December, the Premier and I, together with the member for Belmont, announced a much-needed one-off cost-of-living payment that saw eligible carers receive a one-off payment of \$500 for the first child in their care and \$250 for any additional child as a cost-relief measure. In total, that is a \$3.6 million investment going to those families caring for our vulnerable children. That payment was delivered in late January. As any of us who are parents would know, January is one of the toughest times of the year when it comes to taking kids back to school. It was only on Monday that I met with Dianne and Alan from Grandparents Raising Grandchildren WA who said the feedback on the impact and importance of that payment at this time of year has been extraordinary. I am happy to report back to the house that that cost-of-living relief payment has delivered relief for 8 000 children across the state. Our government is proud to continue to support families caring for vulnerable children.

It builds on our other cost-of-living measures that impact in a positive way to support vulnerable families. We have delivered on our election commitment to boost the grandcarers payment because, under the previous government, it was only \$400, whereas now grandcarers get \$1 000 per year per child. This is a significant uplift from what was available under the previous government. Our flagship Home Stretch WA, a \$37 million investment, supports young people aged 18 to 21 years leaving out-of-home care. This is significant assistance providing those vulnerable people with much-needed support. We boosted the hardship utilities grant of course. In broader terms, we often hear in this house about the significant suite of cost-of-living measures that the Cook Labor government has delivered, including some \$1 400 worth of electricity credits; the cap on public transport fees to two zones; free public transport for schoolchildren; free public transport for all people on Sundays; and, one that sometimes gets forgotten, but I know my previous predecessor used to highlight in this place, delivering on a 2017 election commitment that reinstated financial counselling. That is something that the previous government took away. I know that when I talk to vulnerable families right now, financial counsel is a critical part as they face the challenges of the cost-of-living pressures with which they are dealing. We know what electricity prices were like under the previous government, and we also know what the opposition's position was when the federal Labor government recently made tax changes, which means the most vulnerable families in our society will receive a much-needed tax cut and which the opposition opposed.

Altogether, in five years, some \$2.7 billion worth of cost-of-living relief has been delivered by this Labor government. That is \$2.7 billion over five years, and each and every day, those measures are having a significant and positive impact on the most vulnerable families in Western Australia. I can reassure members that the Cook Labor government will continue to support vulnerable families and do everything it can to support them.