

“CANCER OF THE BUSH OR SALVATION FOR OUR CITIES?” — REPORT FINDINGS

472. Hon SALLY TALBOT to the Minister for Mental Health:

- (1) Is the minister aware of the findings of the House of Representatives’ report of February 2013, “Cancer of the bush or salvation for our cities?”, that depression and anxiety are a serious concern for fly in, fly out workers and that the health effects of alcohol and other substance misuse and depression and anxiety appear to require particular attention?
- (2) Does the minister agree with the findings?
- (3) What attempts are being made in WA to assess the mental health of fly in, fly out and drive in, drive out workers?
- (4) What programs are in place or planned to provide mental health services to FIFO and DIDO workers?
- (5) How is the effectiveness of these programs measured?

Hon HELEN MORTON replied:

I thank the member for some notice of this question.

- (1) Yes, the report has been referred to the Mental Health Commission and the Drug and Alcohol Office for consideration.
- (2) The majority of the report’s recommendations relate to commonwealth responsibilities and actions. The state government welcomes the opportunity to work collaboratively and consultatively with the commonwealth to address mental health and alcohol and other drug issues affecting FIFO and DIDO workers. The merger of the MHC and DAO provides a further opportunity to improve the coordination and delivery of mental health and alcohol and other drug services to improve mental health outcomes for Western Australians.
- (3)–(4) FIFO and DIDO workers and their families are able to access public community mental health services throughout the state for appropriate assessment and treatment. There is an existing network of community drug services throughout Western Australia. The state government has also made significant investments in the expansion of alcohol and other drug services and programs in Pilbara and Kimberley communities through the royalties for regions program. This has provided 27 additional full-time equivalent positions in the Kimberley and Pilbara areas, of which 19 are currently filled. Significant resourcing is also being applied to the development and implementation of alcohol and other drug management plans in the goldfields region through the commonwealth Breaking the Cycle program.

The state strategic policy for mental health reform—“Mental Health 2020: Making it personal and everybody’s business”—identifies fly in, fly out workers and their families as a population requiring specialist responses to improve their mental health outcomes.

The \$13 million “Western Australian Suicide Prevention Strategy 2009–2010: Everybody’s Business” includes several community action plans that encompass FIFO source communities and mining towns.

In 2013, the Mental Health Commission provided \$80 000 to the Mental Illness Fellowship of WA to run forums and develop mental health multimedia resources for fly in, fly out workers and their families.

On 1 August 2013, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Mental Health, Andrea Mitchell, MLA, launched FIVE, a two-year pilot project funded by Rio Tinto’s community investment program and delivered by Disability in the Arts, Disadvantage in the Arts Australia. Covering Derby, Paraburdoo, Geraldton, Busselton and Esperance, it will look at FIFO issues and community impacts; young people with mental illness; farmers experiencing isolation and depression; and remote Aboriginal people.

On 1 August 2013, the Mental Health Commissioner and Rio Tinto also launched their memorandum of understanding for 2013–2015 to contribute to mental health in line with Mental Health 2020. The partnership aims to share expertise across sectors and to improve mental health and reduce stigma within the industry and broader community.

- (5) The state suicide prevention strategy is being independently evaluated by Edith Cowan University. Programs funded by the Mental Health Commission and the Drug and Alcohol Office are required to provide interim and final reports and financial acquittals to demonstrate that the project objectives have been met.