

HEALTH — AMBULANCE RAMPING — WAITLISTS — STAFF

881. Ms L. METTAM to the Premier:

I refer to the Premier's 2017 comments that the former government had failed on health and record ambulance ramping and record waitlists. Given that since 2017 ambulance ramping has blown out 575 per cent to its highest ever rate and elective surgery waitlists have blown out by 10 000, with almost 30 000 people now waiting, and the government cannot attract staff because our nurses are the lowest paid in the nation —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members! It is for the Premier, not other members, to respond. Please conclude your question.

Ms L. METTAM: Does the Premier stand by his comments that the health system is performing magnificently?

The SPEAKER: Before I give the Premier the call, Leader of the Liberal Party, your so-called question contains an awful lot of argument. You are attempting to present argument in your question. The preamble is vastly too long and although I am allowing the question on this occasion, I ask you to give some attention when drafting future questions not to have so much information and argument in the preamble to the question—the so-called question—before asking your question. Premier, please respond.

Mr R.H. COOK replied:

I do not want to take up the time of the chamber, but if the member for Vasse is going to talk about our achievements in health, this may take a while. Member, sit back and relax because I am very happy to talk about our record on health.

For the record, my comments in relation to performing magnificently refer to the great doctors and nurses who are working in our health system, providing incredible care, under very trying circumstances at that particular point in time. That is why we have recruited so many other doctors and nurses to make sure they have more people standing by their side, shoulder to shoulder, providing great care for Western Australians. Since coming to government, we have employed over 3 000 additional nurses and over 1 200 additional doctors. The workforce has grown by nearly 30 per cent compared with WA's population growth of just nine per cent in the same period. We have also expanded the number of beds in our hospital system by 547. That is the equivalent of building a whole new tertiary hospital since 2017. We are making sure we have beds available to treat Western Australians when they need it most. We spend more per capita on hospital services than any other state—17 per cent more than the national average, 27 per cent more than Victoria and 23 per cent more than New South Wales. This is a sign of a government that backs its health system and makes sure that we can do everything we can to ensure that we provide great care, and, Madam Speaker, we are.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, when we saw significant pressure on our hospital system, we have seen the minister take the system by the scruff of the neck to guide it to produce some great outcomes. Through the ministerial taskforce, which brought together system leaders and people in clinical settings, we have delivered practical solutions to reduce ambulance ramping and bed block. Over the past 18 months the ministerial taskforce has overseen a bold strategy to put patients first, expanding alternatives to emergency departments and offering more support to people stuck in hospital awaiting residential aged care. As a result, we see that strategy working. Ambulance ramping is down by 30 per cent, despite the fact that there has been an increase in hospital admissions. A record number of elective surgeries have been performed. We have implemented the recommendations of the parliamentary inquiry into ambulance services, modernising the government contract with St John WA and delivering more career paramedics into the regions, making sure that we support our great volunteer paramedics who work in rural and regional Western Australia.

We have seen a significant increase in the number of people having elective surgery—it is up by 10 per cent—and a reduction in the number of patients. Members, I know this is taking a while, but listen to this: we have reduced the number of patients waiting longer than is clinically recommended by a whopping 40 per cent. That is a system that is responding to the pressures of the post-COVID period. It is a system that is enjoying great leadership under the Minister for Health and it is a system that is responding to our strategies to make sure that we are providing great care.

That stands in stark contrast to the opposition when it was in government. During that time, we saw a decrease of 645 nurses between July 2015 and July 2016. Can members imagine a modern health environment that actually reduces the number of clinical staff who are working? The number of midwives also reduced by 60 per cent, and there was a decrease of 131 doctors between September 2015 and July 2016 and a decrease of 17 paediatricians between July 2015 and January 2017. Let us not forget that the former government could not even open a children's hospital. What we saw under that mob was a defunding of our system and chaotic management. Quite frankly, the

WA public threw it out of office for good reason. They wanted a world-class healthcare system and they know that under my WA Labor government, we have the best hospital system in the country. We have that because we provide the resources and the funding and we have great leadership to ensure that we put those things in place.