

HOSPITALS — EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS

**631. Mr S.A. MILLMAN to the Premier:**

Before I ask my question, on behalf of the diligent and hardworking member for Churchlands, can I please acknowledge in the public gallery the year 11 students from Newman Senior High School, and everyone else who is in the public gallery this afternoon for question time.

I refer to the Cook Labor government's investment and reforms to enhance Western Australia's emergency departments.

- (1) Can the Premier update the house on this government's efforts to reduce ambulance ramping hours?
- (2) Can the Premier outline how reforms will continue to optimise emergency care across to Western Australia's public hospitals?

**Mr R.H. COOK replied:**

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for the question. It is an important one. As we all know, health systems worldwide in recent years have experienced the biggest pressure test in more than a century. The after-effects of the COVID-19 pandemic globally have put health systems around the world under unprecedented pressure and our health system is not immune to that pressure. The pandemic was a major challenge in itself, but the after-shocks of COVID have been felt universally. Health service providers of more than 50 000 people who work in our public health system have done an incredible job throughout these difficulties, and we thank them for their incredible efforts. As a government, we are backing up their hard work with strong investment. We have dedicated significant funding to them, and the Minister for Health is delivering important reforms. We have committed more than \$452 million of new and continuing initiatives to improve emergency access to our hospitals. That investment is in this term of government alone and is starting to make a difference.

Changes are afoot in emergency care, and continuous improvement is the ongoing goal. The government is currently implementing major reforms, and I will go through a few of those. The government is establishing a virtual emergency department with new community-based services; implementing the first phase of the state health operations centre; introducing new dedicated teams in hospitals to address discharge delays and barriers to timely care; and reducing the number of long-stay patients awaiting aged-care or National Disability Insurance Scheme support. It is a broad approach because there is no simple fix for the wide range of issues impacting our health system, and all other health systems at the same time. It is about the patient journey as a whole, from the start to the finish.

The progress is incremental, but we believe that it is making inroads, particularly in the area of ambulance ramping. I will take the chamber through some of those details. At our metropolitan hospitals, we saw an 18 per cent reduction in ambulance ramping hours between February and July compared with the same period last year. This is particularly notable given an increase of nearly 150 per cent in flu hospitalisations in January to June compared with the same period in 2022. Even though we have had a nine per cent increase in the number of ambulances presenting to our EDs, the ramping times have reduced significantly. This was coupled with a significant surge in RSV cases and COVID-19 complications this winter season. In July alone, the number of hours that ambulances spent ramped outside hospitals dropped by 30 per cent—almost one-third. At the same time, Western Australia recorded the strongest population growth in the country. Even though we could anticipate, throughout the flu season and given we had population growth, that we would see an increase in emergency department presentations, ramping actually dropped by 30 per cent, and that is a great outcome for the health system.

I want to thank all those who have been involved as parts of this journey and the important work that is being done at all levels of our health system to continue to make sure that we improve the patient experience and journey. I commend the Minister for Health for the work that she and her team have been doing. This work is not going to change results overnight, but we can now see it starting to have an impact. Our health system has confronted these challenges and dealt with them better than most others, so we are really pleased to now see them taking effect. This is in sharp contrast to observations of our health system and these measures that other people have said are bandaid measures that achieve less than nothing.

**Ms L. Mettam** interjected.

**The SPEAKER:** Order, please!

Several members interjected.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** As we have shown time and again —

**The SPEAKER:** Order, members! I want to call the Leader of the Liberal Party to order. You did not ask this question. Your interjections are incessant. You are just provoking other people to respond to them. That is not acceptable. Please discontinue.

**Mr R.H. COOK:** I did not even refer to the member for Vasse, but I was going to observe that, once again, we have demonstrated that the member for Vasse is wrong.