

HOMELESSNESS

876. Mr C.J. TALLENTIRE to the Minister for Community Services:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's unprecedented investment in addressing homelessness, particularly as Western Australia recovers from the economic impacts of COVID-19. Can the minister outline to the house the McGowan Labor government's response in helping those experiencing homelessness to transition into long-term and secure accommodation, and can the minister advise the house how this response compares with the response in the rest of the country?

Ms S.F. MCGURK replied:

I can do that. I can address those issues, and I thank the member very much for the question. I know that people across Western Australia, and particularly in regional centres—wherever they see people sleeping rough—are concerned about homelessness, but I want them to understand that we take this issue seriously. We are investing in an evidence-based response to make sure that we are not only dealing with this emergency crisis situation, but also investing in long-term outcomes for those very vulnerable people. The Housing First Homelessness Initiative now has a coordinating organisation in Ruah Community Services, and Ruah is offering training and engaging with communities about their responses to rough sleeping. It is running its connections days. I was in Geraldton recently and I know that that has occurred there, and that Bunbury has its connections day coming up. Lotterywest has allocated \$18 million to homelessness services from its COVID-19 relief fund to provide immediate responses, and the state government has provided \$8.2 million in recovery funding for a range of different services, including the mental health and clinical outreach team advocated by the Minister for Mental Health, Foyer Oxford, and Tom Fisher House and Passages, which are run by the St Vincent de Paul Society. Of course, the housing minister is progressing over \$900 million in housing developments and works, a huge investment, and that will support people sleeping rough. Most importantly, we are rolling out new initiatives that, as I said, global evidence tells us works—not simply bandaid responses that plunge vulnerable people into a cycle of temporary arrangements. We are providing permanent homes and the wraparound supports to help people stay in those homes.

But, Mr Speaker, do not just take my word for it. The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute last week released a peer-reviewed research paper analysing what governments in Australia had done to respond to housing and homelessness during COVID-19. That report states very clearly through a very helpful table that WA implemented 17 housing and homelessness responses during COVID-19, which was more than any other state government in Australia or the federal government. The table also identified that WA invested over \$662 million in those 17 initiatives, which is more than New South Wales, a state with three times our population, and only the Victorian and federal governments outspent WA.

There is clear evidence that we are committing not only good policy grunt to this significant problem, but that we are funding it as well—putting the resources behind that. There is work to be done. We are partnering in a meaningful way with the community sector, which is now on the ground working with those most vulnerable Western Australians on an evidence-based response that will deliver real outcomes to them.