

HARDSHIP UTILITY GRANT SCHEME — APPLICATIONS

453. Hon COLIN TINCKNELL to the minister representing the Treasurer:

During the past year we have seen a record number of WA households forced to apply for the hardship utility grant scheme, commonly referred to as HUGS. The increase in the utilisation of this scheme is a reflection of the government's increased fees and charges on household incomes.

- (1) How much funding has been allocated to the hardship utility grant scheme in the 2018–19 budget?
- (2) How much money was initially allocated to HUGS in the McGowan government's first budget in 2017–18?
- (3) What is the total funding allocated to HUGS in the 2017–18 financial budget? In other words, how much did the government end up spending compared with its budget forecast?
- (4) How many HUGS applications have been lodged to date in the 2017–18 financial year?
- (5) How many HUGS applications were lodged in the financial year 2016–17?

Hon STEPHEN DAWSON replied:

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question. This answer too was asked on 17 May, so the answer is current as of that date.

- (1) In the 2018–19 budget, \$16 million has been allocated for grant payments under HUGS in the 2018–19 financial year. It is expected that the reinstated financial counselling program, which was terminated by the former government, as well as a number of reforms to program administration by the utilities providers, will ensure that grant payments are made to those most in need.
- (2) At the time of the publication of the 2017–18 budget, \$20 million had been allocated for grant payments under HUGS in the 2017–18 financial year. In addition, \$5.6 million was allocated to reinstate financial counselling into the HUGS program.
- (3) In the 2017–18 midyear review process, an additional \$5 million was allocated for grant payments under HUGS in the 2017–18 financial year. This brings the total estimated expenditure to \$25 million in 2017–18.
- (4) As at 10 May 2018, 53 803 applications have been lodged.
- (5) In 2016–17, 42 127 applications were lodged.