

**ST JOHN OF GOD MIDLAND PUBLIC HOSPITAL —
MAGNETIC RESONANCE IMAGING SERVICES**

Grievance

MS J.J. SHAW (Swan Hills) [9.21 am]: My grievance this morning is to the Minister for Health, and I thank him for taking it. It relates to the Turnbull Liberal government's failure to provide Medicare access to magnetic resonance imaging services at St John of God Midland Public Hospital. I acknowledge the advocacy and support in this matter from Hon Matthew Swinbourn, MLC, Member for East Metropolitan Region in the other place, and also the member for Kalamunda's interest in this very important matter and his ongoing advocacy. As an east metropolitan team, we are working really hard to try to achieve better outcomes for our constituents.

St John of God Midland Public Hospital opened in November 2015. The hospital's MRI services are operated by Perth Radiological Clinic. St John of God Midland's catchment area includes the major population centres of Ellenbrook and Midland, and extends out through the hills to the Shire of Mundaring and the City of Kalamunda—my part of the world where I have lived for over a decade now. Many people travel from as far afield as the wheatbelt to access St John of God Midland. It is a key facility for both east metropolitan and regional people alike. The minister will be aware that MRI machines are operated under full or partial licences, granted by the federal government. All scans undertaken on fully licensed machines are covered by Medicare. The full licensing scheme was introduced by the Gillard Labor government, enabling affordable access to these vital MRI services for all Australians. However, on election, the Abbott–Turnbull Liberal government quickly moved to dismantle the full licensing of MRI services, introducing partial licences, and eventually phasing licences out altogether, forcing patients to pay expensive fees for a range of essential MRI services. The MRI machine at Midland Public Hospital is only partially licensed. Because of the Liberals' attack on Medicare services, my constituents must now pay anywhere between \$350 to well over \$1 000 for classes of MRI services. There are fully licensed Medicare MRI services at Royal Perth Hospital, Fremantle Hospital, Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital and Joondalup Health Campus. Although that is great for those communities, the lack of a fully licensed MRI machine in the east metropolitan area—an area that is home to some of the most socioeconomically disadvantaged people in Western Australia—makes my constituents second-class citizens. Why does the east metropolitan area always miss out on essential services and infrastructure under successive Liberal governments, be they state or federal? They fail my community and it is simply not good enough. People in my electorate are really doing it tough—they simply cannot pay high private fees. Many people simply will not get MRIs. I am worried that serious conditions may go undiagnosed or patients may put off treatment for injuries, diabetes or cancer. My mum has had cancer three times. To access an MRI scan, she has to drive for an absolute age when she lives five minutes from Midland Public Hospital.

In the long term, the federal government's failure to act will have a negative impact on the state's health system because untreated medical conditions require higher, costlier levels of care when they are eventually discovered. My constituents are not flush. Many people often also depend on public transport to get around, and we all know how bad the public transport situation is in Ellenbrook. People cannot just hop in a car and particularly in Ellenbrook they cannot even hop on a train—yet—and drive over an hour to get to Fremantle. It is really hard for them to travel to distant hospitals.

In light of the population growth in the north east metropolitan region and the rising demand for health services at St John of God, a growing number of health service providers and specialists are moving to the area. This will compound the demand for services and, again, this demand will increase with the opening of the new Curtin University medical school campus in Midland. Local specialists are frustrated that their referrals to the local MRI service often lead to significant out-of-pocket costs for their patients for services that are covered by Medicare elsewhere in the metropolitan region. There is often confusion about where to appropriately send patients. My constituents need and deserve access to the same MRI services as people in the rest of the metropolitan area. We should not be treated as second-class citizens.

I am aware that a range of constituents and service providers have urged the Turnbull Liberal government to fully licence MRI services at St John of God Midland. Perth Radiological Clinic estimates that the conversion from a partial to a full licence would cost a mere \$500 000 per annum. That is such a small amount to make such a marked improvement on my constituents' health outcomes. The Turnbull Liberal government never misses an opportunity to attack Medicare or an opportunity to shirk its obligations to Western Australians. As is so often the case with both infrastructure and services, it is the people of my electorate who are suffering from their neglect. My electorate is represented at the federal level by the member for Pearce, Christian Porter, and the member for Hasluck, Ken Wyatt. They are the Ministers for Social Services and for Aged Care respectively. Both should be aware of the pressing need in our community. If they were in touch with their community, they would fight far harder for the sorts of services that we need, yet both have abjectly failed to deliver on this issue for my constituents. People in my electorate deserve a better deal. They deserve more from their federal representatives, that is for sure. They deserve equal access. We are not asking for anything special over and above what is available to other Western Australians. We are asking for equal access under Medicare to the health services that others in

the metropolitan area enjoy. Could the minister please advise what steps he can take to assist my community on this matter?

The ACTING SPEAKER (Mr T.J. Healy): Please, all members; it is a tradition that grievances will be heard in silence.

Several members interjected.

The ACTING SPEAKER: Members, grievances will be heard in silence.

MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Minister for Health) [9.28 am]: I would like to thank the member for Swan Hills for her characteristically powerful representation on behalf of the members of her community and the people of Swan Hills. This is an important issue. We are paying close attention to it because, as the member ably pointed out, the availability of MRI licences in Western Australia generally is lacking. We certainly identify a gap in full licences for MRIs in the north east metropolitan area. As the member pointed out, Perth Radiological Clinic currently provides radiological services for private and public patients at St John of God Midland Public Hospital. The magnetic resonance imaging machines can be licensed as either full or partial Medicare-eligible units for rebates, with the allocation of these licences being made by the commonwealth government. Members often talk about the need for MRI machines in their communities. Ultimately, the impact of an MRI machine comes not from the provision of the machine, but from the provision of the licence, which comes from the commonwealth government. Units with full licences are able to provide all MRI items that are listed on the Medicare Benefits Schedule, with Medicare rebates available to the patient. Partially licensed units, such as the one in place at St John of God Midland Public Hospital, can provide a subset of the MRI items listed on the MBS, with Medicare rebates available to the patient. These items are: six general practitioner-requested items for patients under 16 years of age; four GP-requested items for patients 16 years and over; five specialist and consultant physician-requested cancer-staging items and breast screening services for women at risk under 50 years of age; four modifying items; four interim-listed Poly Implant Prothese breast implant items; and six existing items for Crohn's disease. Perth Radiological Clinic provides radiological services for both public and private patients. Its services include the provision of MRI scans at the Midland site.

As the member pointed out, a partial MRI licence means that many patients who could otherwise be treated at St John of God Midland Public Hospital have to travel further into the metropolitan area to reach other units either at Joondalup Health Campus or at Royal Perth Hospital, and that is simply because of federal government regulations. I understand that in Western Australia, 16 MRI units have full licences and a further 16 units have partial licences. The closest facility with a full MRI licence for patients in the Midland catchment area is either in the CBD or in Kelmscott.

In 2015, the former state government supported a request from PRC to the commonwealth government to change the licence for the MRI unit at Midland from a partial Medicare licence to a full Medicare licence. That request was not approved by the commonwealth government. The federal Liberal Minister for Health refused to increase the eligibility of the Midland MRI machine. At the time, the minister stated that there were no open processes for PRC to apply for Medicare eligibility for an MRI unit. Herein is the problem. We have an ad hoc process in which the commonwealth government does not have a framework for people to apply for these licences. It simply offers them occasionally. There is no avenue to apply for a licence based on need. The federal government essentially simply hands out the dollars based on political will. The last round of tenders occurred in 2012 for 12 licences that should have been awarded over a four-year period. However, they were all simply awarded prior to the 2013 election. I think members can see what was going on there. That is why we are in the situation we are in today. As a consequence of that ad hoc process, emerging communities such as Ellenbrook and other areas with large population growth are not getting the services that they need.

I will correct the member for Swan Hills on one point. Both sides of this chamber were committed to the Midland hospital redevelopment. It was envisaged and processes were put in place by the previous Labor government under the Reid vision. Construction was completed utilising state government and federal Labor government funds. Of course, we parted from our friends on the other side of the chamber in the privatisation of that hospital. As the member is all too aware, that came with a whole range of complications.

There is an opportunity for all members here. We can all see the storm clouds of a federal election starting to gather on the horizon. Nothing is more interesting for federal government funding opportunities than a federal election! I implore all members—I am sorry that the member for Nedlands is not in the chamber. Here is an opportunity for us all. Nothing is more interesting than a federal election and the opportunities that it provides to both sides of Parliament to get our friends in Canberra to pay more attention to the needs of Western Australian patients. Western Australia has some key marginal seats. We should all be aware of that.

Mr A. Krsticevic: The government should have put the wish list in the forward estimates.

Mr R.H. COOK: Just hung them out there with a question mark—to be filled by a future federal government!

There is an opportunity here. I implore all members to contact their local federal member, be it Hon Christian Porter in Pearce or Hon Ken Wyatt in Hasluck, to make sure that they are aware of the needs of patients in the Midland area. I know that the member for Swan Hills is aware of those needs. We should all make sure that the federal government is aware of the needs of Western Australian patients.

The ACTING SPEAKER: I remind members that grievances are heard in silence. In line with standing order 146, this is not an opportunity for debate. Please listen to grievances and the replies in silence. If I need to call people to order, I shall.