

## AGE-FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

### *Grievance*

**MRS J.M.C. STOJKOVSKI (Kingsley)** [9.47 am]: My grievance is to the Minister for Seniors and Ageing. I was prompted by an article in yesterday's *The West Australian*, 28 June 2017, entitled "Seniors fall victim to rail station escalators". This article states that a number of commuters suffer broken bones, cuts and abrasions on train station escalators and that many of those injured are elderly. A number of those injuries occur on the northern suburbs line, which services my constituents at Greenwood, Warwick and Whitfords.

In response, Transperth has launched an education campaign for elderly commuters. Advice to older train travellers will be given, including: at the end of the ride move away from the escalator to make room for any passengers who may be behind them; hold the handrail; consider using the lift if they are carrying bags, feeling unsteady, have issues with depth perception or use mobility aids.

I commend Transperth for wanting to ensure a safer ride for its elderly passengers; however, I cannot help but wonder whether many of those targeted may find it a little demeaning and patronising to be told these things, given that many of them have ridden escalators for many years. It led me to consider that maybe our station designs are not as "age friendly" as they might be. After all, prevention is better than cure, and this is the subject of this grievance: Are our communities age friendly? Are our public spaces age friendly? What are we doing to ensure that our infrastructure is age friendly and encourages our seniors to remain active and engaged in our communities?

It is highly relevant that the minister is also the Minister for Volunteering as more than one-third of our community volunteers are over the age of 60. I had the great pleasure of attending the volunteering awards in May, when the minister presented an award to one of my constituents, Ms Judy Hebiton, for 62 years' volunteer service to the Royal Agricultural Society of Western Australia.

As the member for Kingsley, I know from the 2016 census data that over 24 per cent of residents in my electorate are over 60 years old. I am mindful that almost one-quarter of my electorate benefits directly from ensuring that all levels of government comply with the World Health Organization's age-friendly criteria. I am aware that the minister is extremely familiar with the notion of making our community age friendly through his participation as a member of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee, particularly on the inquiry that produced the report "Age-friendly WA? A challenge for government", which was tabled in this house on 20 November 2014. As the minister is aware, the impetus for this inquiry was that an increasing cohort of the population was ageing, more of those people wished to remain in their own homes for longer and there was a need for accessible services and communities that could meet this demographic challenge.

The responsibility to ensure that government services are age friendly needs to occur at all three tiers of government—federal, state and local—and private enterprise should be strongly encouraged to adopt age-friendly practices. At the federal level, an increasing reliance on e-delivery of services, like contact with Centrelink through IT channels, can pose a challenge for many of the elderly. Likewise, information on state government services delivered solely in electronic form means that some are missing out on or are ignorant of their entitlements. The increasing push of utility organisations to deliver billing and correspondence in electronic formats and to charge customers for hard copy bills disproportionately adversely affects seniors. Then there is local government, where I have previously worked, which is in direct contact with seniors and delivers services such as footpaths, seniors' centres, management of local roads and learning and cultural engagement opportunities.

As a strategic planner, I have worked on age-friendly strategies and ageing in place strategies for the benefit of our ageing population. I note that a number of local governments have received formal World Health Organization recognition and accreditation as "age friendly". I commend the cities of Melville, Mandurah, Fremantle, Rockingham and Cockburn as leaders in implementing the age-friendly framework in the metropolitan area. I also note from a recent conversation with the Mayor of Swan that it has begun implementing a "Strategy for the Ageing Population", to which I am proud to have contributed research case studies while working in my former career.

Sadly, the northern suburbs councils lag behind. As the minister is well aware, things that are good for the elderly are good for the whole community, so there is simply no excuse for this. As an active member of a residents' association, I campaigned long and hard for a footpath to be constructed in the City of Wanneroo so that young mums like me were able to access the local parks, shops and the health nurse with our kids in prams. Such infrastructure is of equal assistance to seniors.

Seniors are an engaged and vibrant part of our community and often seek out opportunities to learn new skills and ensure that they are fully informed. This was demonstrated to me last Friday when I held a seniors cybersecurity morning tea in conjunction with the Council on the Ageing Western Australia for seniors in the suburb of Kingsley. The morning tea was booked out more than a week in advance and those who attended were responsive and

engaged with presenter David Cook from Edith Cowan University. Additionally, from my work in Wanneroo I know that the seniors tablet workshops were frequently booked out, with long waiting lists.

I note that the state government is now a WHO affiliate, and I welcome that development. However, that does not mean that we are now universally age friendly in WA but that this state has set it as an objective for the future. I ask the minister to outline what strategies he has for ensuring that all tiers of government and all agencies at the state level can better communicate and cooperate to make that objective of age-friendly communities a reality, ensuring that we do not have to take remedial action after the event, such as the case with the train stations, when more thought and care could have avoided the injuries in the first place.

**MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie–Preston — Minister for Seniors and Ageing)** [9.55 am]: I thank the member for Kingsley for raising the grievance, one that I am sure will be raised more often and with more detail in the future. We have to address the issue of our ageing population. I also congratulate the member on the seniors cybersecurity forum, which she mentioned, and which she ran with the Council on the Ageing Western Australia, a fantastic organisation that does great work for seniors. I am sure it was very useful for all who attended.

It is certainly no secret that one of the biggest challenges that we will face this century is the support and care of older Western Australians. We need to adapt our thinking, planning, policies and communities to address the challenges of an ageing population. This is exactly why having age-friendly local communities is very important. It is also important that members of Parliament take the lead, like the member for Kingsley is doing, and I again congratulate her on that.

The Department of Local Government and Communities has been working hard to build age-friendly communities for the last 10 years. Implementing the age-friendly communities approach and building communities in which seniors are valued, respected and connected is a key priority for our government. It is essential that we continue to develop age-friendly communities to give seniors the opportunity to age in place rather than having to move away from their communities to access essential services.

As the member for Kingsley mentioned, the state government recently had its application accepted to become an affiliate of the World Health Organization's Global Network for Age-friendly Cities and Communities. The global network works to promote the creation of age-friendly environments. Western Australia is the first jurisdiction in the country to join this program. The state government's membership reflects and acknowledges a commitment to listen to the needs of the ageing population and advocate for age-friendly communities. This approach values assessing and monitoring age friendliness and working across the community with older people and across sectors to create age-friendly environments. Work to build age-friendly communities by the department has involved collaboration across the state government, local governments and the community. It cannot be done through one process; it must be done across all those agencies. As the member mentioned, the Cities of Rockingham, Melville and Fremantle are part of the network. I commend these councils for their efforts to recognise the challenges of their ageing communities.

Hopefully, this important step taken by the state government will raise awareness of the importance of planning age-friendly environments and encourage other local councils and communities to create age-friendly environments. We need more councils to come on board. I encourage all members in this house to promote the importance of age-friendly communities to their local councils and shires.

As a regional member, I also understand the importance of the state government's commitment to strategies to support older people living in regional WA to remain in their communities and access the support and essential services they need, something I am very well aware of.

Through the promotion of age-friendly communities, housing, community aged care and residential aged-care initiatives, the state government, in collaboration with federal and local government, is striving to address the issues that prevent older people from remaining within their regional communities. In recent times a couple was separated due to health problems. They have been married for nearly 60 years. There was nowhere for one of those people to go so they could stay within the community so their partner could visit; they had to move over 100 kilometres out of town, which meant they were completely separated after nearly 60 years of living together. That would be a traumatic experience for any aged person.

As the member for Kingsley mentioned, I was a member of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee, which was chaired by the member for Girrawheen, a true champion of ageing groups and still working with all of us on this side of the house to address the issues of aged people, whether it relates to escalators or increasing by one or two seconds the time allocated for the lights at a crosswalk outside an aged-care facility so people can be safe in their communities. The committee tabled a report in this place outlining some of the issues facing seniors in WA and made 45 recommendations. If those recommendations are implemented, they will facilitate the development of age-friendly communities whilst also improving the quality of life for older Western Australians. It is very important that all sectors across government take action, and plan together to create age-friendly communities. That is why we need to implement the machinery of government reforms and agency

services review to break down the barriers between government departments and stakeholders to ensure collaboration across the whole of government, resulting in efficient delivery of the best possible services to seniors. Only then can we maximise every opportunity to implement age-friendly communities to support and care for all Western Australians.