

MEDICINAL CANNABIS

857. Mrs J.M.C. STOJKOVSKI to the Minister for Health:

Before I ask my question, on behalf of the member for Southern River I acknowledge in the gallery today the students from St Munchin's Catholic Primary School.

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's long-held commitment to improving access to medicinal cannabis to alleviate the suffering of those with terminal or chronic conditions. Can the minister update the house on how this government is continuing to reduce red tape for those Western Australians to ensure that they get access to treatment in a timely manner?

Mr R.H. COOK replied:

I take great pleasure in updating the chamber on how we are continuing to make medicinal cannabis available to patients in Western Australia. Putting patients first is our fundamental priority. I take people back to 2014 when the then Leader of the Opposition, Mark McGowan, pledged that if we were to achieve government, we would move to give people suffering from terminal or chronic diseases and conditions access to medicinal cannabis. The Premier was the first leader of a major political party to make that pledge. I remember at the time Hon Kim Hames, the then Minister for Health, said that this sends the wrong message, this is the thin edge of the wedge and this will lead to people accessing cannabis on the streets and mayhem will break out.

It was not long after the now Premier made that commitment that other radical organisations also made that commitment, including the federal Liberal government! Upon achieving government, the Premier and I moved to fast-track prescriptions for medicinal cannabis for those Western Australians who need it. As members would be aware from constituent inquiries, that has been a fairly cumbersome process to date because we do not have a Therapeutic Goods Administration clearance for the vast majority of products on the market. As a result, we need special arrangements in place so that people can access these frontier therapeutic goods in a way that does not compromise their safety.

In April 2018, the Department of Health joined other jurisdictions in Australia that followed the lead that the Premier provided in approving work towards a single approval process for medicinal cannabis products to be managed by the Therapeutic Goods Administration. I am pleased to say that the new online system was launched in Western Australia on 2 October this year.

This means that those people who previously had to wait potentially up to three weeks to access medicinal cannabis can now do so in under 48 hours, achieving the clearances they need to gain through both the federal authorisation process and the state process. Prior to this introduction, prescribers were required to complete and submit paper forms to the Therapeutic Goods Administration and the state Department of Health separately and that, as I said, created some significant delays.

The prescribing of medicinal cannabis rightly remains the responsibility of a qualified medical professional. As I said, this is still a bit ahead of the medical research, and for those people who require it—many do because they have chronic conditions—it is important that they get it. This simply streamlines the approval process. As I have been keen to stress with other people, it does not resolve issues around price and availability. We have an emerging industry with medicinal cannabis and many people are still struggling to get the products they need at the quality they need. However, this is an important first step. It means that for those people who have a chronic condition, particularly epilepsy and other conditions that they want addressed, or who have a terminal condition and think they would benefit from some pain management or who have other issues that the cannabinoids can contribute to, this is an important step to make sure that they have a smooth pathway to get access to those products. This is an important step. I hope in the future we will continue to provide therapy and relief for these patients. It is all about our priority of putting patients first.