

MEDICINAL CANNABIS

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

I refer to reports that no health professionals have applied to prescribe medicinal cannabis, despite being legally able to do so since 2016. Why has it taken so long for patients to be able to access medicinal cannabis, and how will the minister ensure that these patients suffering terminal or chronic conditions can access these products to help manage their conditions?

Mr R.H. COOK replied:

I thank the member for Kingsley for her question, because it is a very important question.

Today there is a very important, open community conversation going on locally at the state level, and nationally, about the role that medicinal cannabis can play in bringing relief, comfort and treatment to people with chronic conditions and terminal illnesses. I am very proud to say that it is a conversation that in large part had its genesis in 2014, when the now Premier—the then Leader of the Opposition—proposed that in Western Australia we legalise medicinal cannabis so that we can bring relief to people with painful conditions and terminal illnesses. It is a debate that we took some policy leadership on in opposition and it is one we are determined to continue to take a leadership role on in government.

We are facing two challenges to bringing medicinal cannabis into the lives of Western Australian patients. First of all is the issue around ensuring that we have a safe and available supply of medicinal-grade cannabis. That is around the capacity to produce the products locally, or within Australia, and I am very pleased to say that some progress has been made on that. As of March, 45 applications to cultivate or manufacture the drug have been received by the federal government, including six from Western Australia. It is very pleasing to see that we are making some progress on that.

The other challenge we face around this, of course, is the willingness and courage of medical practitioners to prescribe medicinal cannabis to those seeking relief from their pain. Despite the fact that we currently have a regime whereby doctors can become authorised prescribers of medicinal cannabis, to date we have not had the opportunity to process any applications. We will continue to take that leadership role. In June, the Premier and I will convene a round table of health leaders in Western Australia, to continue this public conversation about how we can ensure, as a government, that nothing stands in the way of people, from a prescriber's point of view or a patient's point of view, receiving medicinal cannabis to relieve their pain or address their chronic condition.

We will take this leadership role because it is important, but it stands in stark contrast, I must say, to the role that the previous government took on this. Indeed, in 2014 when the Leader of the Opposition at the time, the now Premier, proposed the legalisation of medicinal cannabis to treat people with terminal illness and chronic pain, the then Minister for Health said that the government considered, and I quote —

... legalising cannabis would send the wrong message to the community and undermine efforts to reduce illicit drug use and the harm it causes, particularly among young people.

What a dreadful approach to take to what is obviously a very important policy issue.

Mrs L.M. Harvey interjected.

The SPEAKER: Deputy Leader of the Opposition!

Mr R.H. COOK: The previous government was dragged kicking and screaming into this debate. As we know, the federal Liberal government took a much greater leadership and proactive role. In September, the shrill claims from the then Minister for Health were still being made even in this place, when he said —

Your attitude is soft on drugs. I will say it again—soft, soft, soft!

We need a much more mature approach from the Liberal Party on this.

But then—this is as late as September last year—the Minister for Health was disgracefully saying —

The opposition's stance is wrong and all the people who think the opposition is telling the right story are the people who want to smoke socially and get their marijuana, or their tablet, from a GP and as a substitute for marijuana.

What a dreadful attitude! We are talking about people with chronic diseases, pain and terminal illnesses, such as little Lily Poulter or little Sophie Martin—girls who are suffering from debilitating conditions that mean they suffer from multiple seizures on a daily basis. Medicinal cannabis is the only product their parents know will bring relief to their children's conditions. That is what this is about: ensuring that we bring medicinal cannabis to the lives of these people who have chronic pain and chronic and terminal diseases, because we will take the lead and make sure that medicinal cannabis —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Deputy Leader of the Opposition, I will tell someone if they have been too long, not you. I call you to order.

Mr R.H. COOK: We will take the lead to ensure that nothing stands in the way of the medical community and the families of sick patients with chronic and painful diseases to ensure that they get the help they need.