

HOME AND COMMUNITY CARE SERVICES — FUNDING

Grievance

MRS J.M.C. STOJKOVSKI (Kingsley) [9.30 am]: My grievance today is to the Minister for Health. It relates to the commonwealth changes being undertaken in the provision of funding for home and community care services to local residents and the business decision taken by the City of Wanneroo to cease its provision of HACC services.

HACC services support older individuals and young people living with a disability to remain living in their own homes by providing assistance with tasks that could be difficult without help. These services include meal preparation, gardening, cleaning, nursing care, allied health, personal care, transport to undertake tasks such as shopping and even transport to social events to maintain community links. HACC also teaches residents to manage their daily tasks in recognition of their own limitations, which prevents disruption to daily life and activities. There is no denying Western Australia has a rapidly ageing population. Unfortunately, shortages of residential aged-care facilities are struggling to meet the demand for full-time care. There is also a preference for older people to continue living in their homes as long as possible. HACC is one way of reducing this demand. An added benefit of keeping people in their own homes is that it is an environment that is comfortable and familiar to them. I understand that the changes to HACC funding are being driven by the commonwealth government and disability and aged-care sectors, and that further work is being undertaken to develop the approach to the Commonwealth Home Support Programme funding. However, early indications show it is possible this will become an individual funding model that will require a significant effort to embed understanding into the community and support community members through these changes, in particular ensuring that they have an appropriate understanding of how to manage their funding allocations to ensure that they receive quality service provision.

It is my understanding that changes in the funding responsibility of HACC services are due to come into effect next financial year. Some local government service providers have elected to exit from HACC service delivery, including the City of Wanneroo. My concern relates to members of our community who require access to information and support to understand what these changes are and how the changes affect them now and into the future. At a recent joint commonwealth and WA Department of Health HACC transition service provider roadshow, providers were advised that the commonwealth government does not intend to communicate directly with the community—that onus would be on the providers. The My Aged Care website is the main source of self-directed information for residents; however, many older residents are unfamiliar and unconfident using technology. I am very concerned that these integral services may soon cease to be accessible to those in our community who need them the most. I acknowledge that the City of Wanneroo has provided high levels of care to its residents for a long time now and should be commended. But it is troubling that without an appropriate replacement of services, a gap in care delivery could be experienced in the area.

It is important to reiterate that HACC is wholly designed to maximise the ability of clients and their carers to live independently within their homes. I would like the house to note the strong evidence demonstrating the benefits of independence for older people and those with disabilities, including mental wellbeing, sustained social inclusion and improved quality of life as a whole. Ultimately, it is clear that the removal of HACC services in the City of Wanneroo will be of detriment to those in our community who have the greatest needs. I worry that these changes will affect the health and wellbeing of the city's residents. Older people are vulnerable to change, which can make them anxious and unresponsive to support. How does the minister propose we work to prevent this from happening?

My electorate of Kingsley may have only 10 streets in the City of Wanneroo, but I continue to have great worry for my constituents, and those of my colleagues, who will be adversely affected by this change. It has been estimated by the Australian Bureau of Statistics that 17 000 residents of the City of Wanneroo are aged over 65. We are obliged to provide high levels of timely, compassionate and reassuring care to each and every HACC service participant. HACC services are one way towards achieving this. Hence, I wish to ask the minister what he is doing to ensure that the residents of the City of Wanneroo are not adversely affected by this decision, and how we will work together to guarantee that replacement services are maintained at a high standard.

MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Minister for Health) [9.35 am]: I thank the member for Kingsley for her grievance today. It is another example of what a great advocate she is for her community, particularly for the older and more vulnerable members of her community.

As the member for Kingsley rightly pointed out, HACC services provide a very important contribution to the wellbeing of our community. It is an incredibly important program for our older community members. It allows people to continue to live independent lives as they mature and keeps them from having to move into high-care or aged-care facilities. That is good for them and it is good for government, because it is much cheaper. It is also good for the community generally because people can continue to live independent and healthy lives in their own homes amongst their friends and family. The HACC program is an incredibly important part of what we do in

government. The government shares responsibility and funding for this program with the commonwealth government. The member for Kingsley is correct in saying that the City of Wanneroo will move away from HACC service provision. That has come to light in the context of changes to the HACC program being brought in by the commonwealth government that will see HACC programs for patients aged over 65 transferred to the Commonwealth Home Support Programme from 1 July 2018. Services provided to people aged under 65 will be transferred to funding sources under the National Disability Insurance Scheme. This has occurred in a number of trial sites since 2015.

In anticipation of these changes, the commonwealth Department of Health has been liaising with current service providers about negotiated grant agreements to encourage the provision of commonwealth home support programs to current HACC clients. These reforms will also provide an opportunity for some providers to amalgamate or consolidate services and for some to determine that they no longer wish to provide the services. The member for Kingsley is right that the City of Wanneroo has decided that other people in the community are better placed to provide these services and has decided to move away from the provision of HACC services. I assure the chamber that the Department of Health is working closely with all local governments to make sure that local governments ceasing to provide HACC services do not adversely impact upon current clients. The Local Government Association HACC providers that have made the decision to exit from service delivery, including the City of Wanneroo, will be required to develop transition plans in close consultation with the Department of Health. This has been established with the aim of ensuring that every patient is supported on an individual basis during this transition period. In addition to communicating directly with clients to ensure that every client has a transition plan in place, clients who have had no significant changes in their support needs will not be required to undergo a new assessment under this transition plan. That is an important part of the continuity of service approach. It will make sure that people transitioning from local government services to private providers in particular are not adversely affected.

As the member for Kingsley observed, it is important for this particular client base to have that continuity of care, because it is distressing when they see these changes taking place. We want to make sure that that transition is as smooth as possible. The City of Wanneroo is to be commended for its commitment to providing high-level care through HACC over a number of decades. In particular, I want to note the work of the staff at the City of Wanneroo who are working with all HACC patients through written and face-to-face communication to make sure that this transition process is as smooth as possible, including providing interpreter services where appropriate. The City of Wanneroo has sought expressions of interest to see who wants to provide these services. A high number of applications have been received and an assessment panel has been set up in conjunction with the Department of Health to review all those applications and ensure that high-level operators work in that area. It is also important to highlight that the Shire of Kalamunda, the City of Subiaco and other local government authorities have chosen to transition out of the provision of HACC services. We are working with all these local governments and the City of Wanneroo to make sure that this transition is as seamless as possible. I commend the City of Wanneroo for its commitment around that area and it will continue to work closely with patients and families in a transparent manner around this area. The state government is committed to supporting the commonwealth in creating a national aged-care system and an integrated disability service. It will continue to work with organisations and individuals in our state to ensure that the outlined processes necessary to achieve this are conducted appropriately.

I want to thank the member for Kingsley for bringing this grievance into the chamber today. It is an important one that all members of Parliament should be aware of in their local areas because they will continue to get inquiries of this nature. I encourage all members of Parliament to contact me or the Department of Health if they have any inquiries from people in their community who are concerned about their ongoing aged-care services. I would like to thank the member for Kingsley for bringing this grievance to the house today.