

HOSPITALS — EMERGENCY DEPARTMENTS — PERFORMANCE

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

I refer to reports that states across the country are dealing with escalating pressures on their emergency departments and health services. Can the minister update the house on how Western Australian hospitals have handled that increased activity, and how Western Australia is performing compared with the rest of the country?

**Mr R.H. COOK replied:**

I would like to thank the member for the question. She is absolutely right: emergency departments right across the country are really struggling with demand, and we are no orphan in that regard. In WA, overall attendances for the first seven months of the 2018–19 financial year are 1.5 per cent higher than for the same period in 2017–18, and 4.7 per cent higher than for the same period in 2016–17. It is true that all our emergency departments are under increasing pressure, but I am very proud to inform the house today that Western Australia’s emergency departments are the best performing of any state in Australia. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare’s report “Emergency department care 2017–18: Australian hospital statistics” and, of course, the Productivity Commission’s 2019 “Report on Government Services”, Western Australia achieved an average of 75.7 per cent of patients being seen within four hours and were either admitted or treated and discharged. That is a great result. It is obviously short of the 80 per cent that we all aim for, but it is a terrific result.

In particular, I am extremely proud of our doctors and nurses. Western Australia is the only jurisdiction to have seen an improvement on its four-hour rule performance in emergency departments—the only state in Australia that is actually getting better. We have to understand that this is in the context of difficult fiscal times. This is at a time when the Western Australian health system is working harder with a reduced fiscal capacity. Although expense growth in our health system for 2017–18 was just two per cent—down from the recent average growth rate of 8.9 per cent over the decade to 2016–17—our emergency departments are actually improving.

This is a victory for the doctors, nurses, allied health staff and support workers who work day and night to make sure that Western Australians get the health care they need. Nearly 100 000 people per month go to our emergency departments, either to get care for life-threatening conditions or simply to meet the needs of emergency situations. I am incredibly proud of the work that the doctors and nurses and others put in, and we should all be very proud. They have created a world-class health system that is, as I said, second to none in Australia.

In particular, I commend the staff and leadership at Fiona Stanley Hospital, Peel Health Campus, Armadale Health Service, Broome Health Campus, Busselton Health Campus, Derby Hospital and Kununurra Hospital, all of which have had Western Australian emergency access target performances either remain steady or improve over the last 13 months. In particular, I want to do a shout-out to Perth Children’s Hospital, which achieved a WAEAT score of 91 per cent in December 2018—a hospital that looks fantastic and is working even better. We should all, as Western Australians, be proud of what they are achieving on behalf of the sick people of Western Australia.

It is true that improvements continually need to be made. We want to continue to make sure that we implement urgent care clinic policies to ensure that we can take pressure away from EDs. As I said yesterday, we have to work harder to improve the facilities in our emergency departments to better treat the increasing number of mental health patients who are presenting for help and relief. Western Australia is doing outstandingly well in its emergency department performance, and we should all be very proud. I commend all those involved.