

FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

37. Ms A.R. MITCHELL to the Minister for Police:

Could the minister please outline to the house what this government has done to tackle domestic violence?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY replied:

I thank the member for Kingsley for this question on a very important issue—that is, family and domestic violence in Western Australia. The state government certainly takes the matter of domestic and family violence very seriously. I would also like to take this opportunity to address some of the comments that were made in this house on Tuesday by the member for Armadale. It is very important that members in this house understand exactly what this government is doing in the family and domestic violence space. There is no denying that police are usually the first responders to incidents of family and domestic violence, but it is incorrect to say that WA Police has sole responsibility in this area. A lot is already happening. There is absolutely no denial by this government that we need to improve the very complex network of government and not-for-profit agency support networks that support families and victims of domestic violence. This is already happening, but I acknowledge that there is room for improvement in this space.

WA Police keeps the statistics and records the data for domestic violence attendance in Western Australia. The perception is often drawn that police are therefore accountable for the increased incidence of domestic violence in this state. It is a trap that those opposite continually fall into, but it is not an accurate reflection of where the sole responsibility for domestic violence lies in this state. The reality is that platitudes are just not helpful in this space. The government has taken some very active steps to ensure that we have better accountability for family and domestic violence and that we start to get better results and drive down the incidence of family and domestic violence in Western Australia.

I have personally directed WA Police to introduce a new key performance indicator for domestic violence. From next financial year, police will be required to report within seven days on the percentage of family and domestic violence-related incidents in which an offender was processed for an offence against the person. I have also directed police to investigate why there has been an increase in domestic violence incidents in Western Australia. Why have the figures increased and why are they continuing to increase? Although we have had better reporting, targeted policies and more proactive policing, I am yet to be convinced that this is the sole driver of increases in family and domestic violence in this state.

Other things the government is doing include the allocation of \$6.8 million to deliver support programs to enable women and children to remain in their homes after domestic violence incidences. Last financial year the government provided \$23 million for specialist family and domestic violence accommodation through an agreement on homelessness and housing. The government has also announced new initiatives to improve services and support to victims by expanding the child witness service, the victim support service and the family violence intervention service. In addition, the Attorney General has directed the Law Reform Commission to examine current legislation and to recommend potential reforms to enhance the interests of domestic violence victims in this state and ensure that they are protected by the state.

These are only some of the initiatives that the Liberal–National government is undertaking in the domestic violence space. We take it very seriously. I am the first to say that more needs to be done and I am very encouraged by the changing attitude of WA Police when responding appropriately to domestic violence incidences. I look forward in the future to updating the house on further initiatives in this area.