

SELECT COMMITTEE INTO CHILD DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Interim Report — Tabling

HON DR SALLY TALBOT (South West) [1.06 pm]: I am directed to present an interim report of the Select Committee into Child Development services entitled *Child development services in Western Australia: Valuing our children and their needs*. The Select Committee into Child Development Services was established against the background of widely acknowledged unacceptably long waiting times and gaps in the provision of child development services provided by the state’s public health system, and to some extent in the private sector as well. Although child development services can be delivered by a range of providers in various settings, the committee focused on secondary and tertiary-level child development services provided by the metropolitan Child and Adolescent Health Service and the WA Country Health Service. These services are referred to as CDS.

Many of the issues raised in the inquiry evidence are not new. There is a strong sense of frustration from everyone involved. In particular, the parents and caregivers of children referred to CDS are increasingly concerned about the effects of long waiting times on their children’s health and wellbeing. The often excessive waiting times are inconsistent with the well-established principle of early and timely intervention for CDS. This interim report highlights the very real impacts of excessive waiting times on children, families and their wider networks, as well as on CDS providers.

The evidence demonstrates a second equally problematic issue. Due to resourcing constraints and the importance placed on providing interventions in the early years of life, CAHS prioritises its allied health services for children aged under seven. This often leaves its paediatricians to manage older children with little or no allied health practitioner support.

The interim report discusses several causes of service deficiency in the CDS system, with a particular focus on what can be done “now for now” to address them. The final report will concentrate on other strategies to be implemented “now for later” to ensure that CDS is accessible and sustainable into the future.

In the report, the committee makes three recommendations. One recommendation is to continue to provide a free and publicly funded CDS. According to the report, the alternative to this would involve one or more of the following —

- privatisation of CDS
- a restriction of eligibility to exclude certain conditions
- a contraction of service provision.

Any such option would be unacceptable. The committee also concluded that, without additional funding, significant reductions in unacceptable waiting times and the expansion of CDS provision—particularly to children aged seven years and older—are unlikely. Therefore, a majority of the committee, comprising Hon Samantha Rowe and I, recommends that the government immediately consider providing the funding increase required to achieve these goals.

A minority of the committee, comprising Hon Donna Faragher, is of the strong view that the need to reduce unacceptably long waiting times and expand CDS provision, particularly to children aged seven years and older, is urgent. Therefore, the member recommends that a substantial funding increase be provided immediately and no later than the 2024–25 state budget.

Based on the findings in this report and the evidence received, all members are of the opinion that if the state government provides the funding increase required, it can be confident that waiting times will reduce and the provision of CDS can be expanded.

The committee stresses that the recommendations in this interim report about the “now for now” and those that will be made in the final report about the “now for later” are of equal weight. The committee expects that if the recommendations in this report are implemented, the Child and Adolescent Health Service and WA Country Health Service will concurrently plan to address the issues to be raised in the committee’s final report. Implementing those measures will go a long way to reducing the burden of developmental delay on children and families and help ensure that the development, health and wellbeing of Western Australian children meets the expectations of our community.

The committee seeks an extension of its final reporting date, from 31 December 2023 to 18 April 2024. Since the house first extended the reporting date, the committee has conducted another five hearings and three site visits and received more written evidence. The committee’s terms of reference are broad, and the inquiry evidence has raised a range of complex matters. Another extension is regrettable; however, it will ensure that the committee produces a final report that befits the importance of the inquiry and properly discharges its inquiry obligations to the Legislative Council. I commend this interim report to the house.

[See paper [2851](#).]

Extension of Reporting Time — Motion

HON DR SALLY TALBOT (South West) [1.10 pm] — without notice: I move —

That the reporting date for the Select Committee into Child Development Services inquiry into child development services be extended from 31 December 2023 to 18 April 2024.

I seek leave to continue my remarks at a later stage of this day's sitting.

[Leave granted for the member's speech to be continued at a later stage of the sitting.]