

CORONAVIRUS — PUBLIC HEALTH MESSAGING

**903. Hon Dr STEVE THOMAS to the Leader of the House representing the Premier:**

I refer to the 2021–22 annual report tabled by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and the \$18.1 million declared in accordance with section 175ZE of the Electoral Act 1907 for expenditure in relation to advertising agencies, market research organisations, polling organisations, direct mail organisations and media advertising organisations.

- (1) Can the Premier advise why the department's expenditure across these areas has increased sixtyfold, from \$307 000 in 2016–17 to \$18.1 million in 2021–22?
- (2) If the increase is COVID-related, why did expenditure increase threefold, from \$6 million in 2020–21 to \$18.1 million in the last financial year, when similar messaging would have been utilised over both periods?
- (3) Why could these services not have been provided by the \$31.7 million COVID-19 coordination and communications team within the same department?

**The PRESIDENT:** Before I give the call to the Leader of the House, I would like to remind the honourable member about the requirement for questions to be brief.

**Hon SUE ELLERY replied:**

I thank the honourable member for some notice of the question.

- (1)–(3) Communications and public health messaging is a critical area of the COVID-19 pandemic response, which has been led by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet in partnership with the Department of Health and the Western Australia Police Force. The rollout of the vaccination program was a significant element of WA's pandemic response and successful COVID-19 management, especially given that cases in the community did not start to spread until early 2022. Therefore, the public messaging and promotion of the vaccination program and the Roll up for WA campaign was a crucial tool to drive up WA's vaccination rates and helped WA to achieve world-leading vaccination levels. The Roll up for WA campaign was first launched in April 2021 and continued to grow as vaccine supply arrived and eligibility opened up to more Western Australians. COVID-19 cases in the WA community began to grow in February 2022 and peaked in May 2022. As a result, various public health messages were adjusted and communicated to the community in a timely manner. This included changing public health measures and adjustment to border controls. Therefore, in the 2021–22 financial year, pandemic communications scaled up in accordance with the public health advice and to meet the context at the time. This allowed for appropriate communication of ongoing public health and safety measures and emergency response information during outbreaks as well as educating about and encouraging the uptake of COVID-19 vaccinations. In addition, expenditure also included communicating WA's safe transition plan, workforce recruitment campaigns due to WA's strong economy and important safety information on how to live with and manage COVID-19.

Expenditure unrelated to the COVID-19 pandemic and public health messaging includes work commissioned by the Leader of the Opposition for work provided by Marketforce. The company was engaged at a cost of nearly \$180 000 to provide market research and advertising for the Liberal and National alliance. Any further information regarding this expenditure will need to be disclosed by the Leader of the Opposition.

**The PRESIDENT:** A long question often gets a long answer.