

STATE BUDGET 2023–24 — HEALTH

304. Mr H.T. JONES to the Minister for Health:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government's record \$11.8 billion investment in Western Australia's health system.

- (1) Can the minister advise the house what this record investment, including an additional \$2.7 billion in last week's budget, means for WA's public health and mental health system?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house whether she is aware of anyone who does not support this record level of investment?

Ms A. SANDERSON replied:

I thank the member for his question.

- (1)–(2) It is ironic that we have heard the Leader of the Liberal Party, who has not put forward one single practical policy idea in the health portfolio for the last three years, accusing the government of spin. In this place she has frequently made references to so-called cuts to our health system when every single McGowan government budget has delivered an increase in health expenditure. Since coming to office, the health budget has increased by 33.4 per cent and the mental health budget by 57.3 per cent. That is the reality of the funding for health and mental health under this government. In fact, this year's budget commits a record \$2.7 billion in additional spending to health and mental health, and it includes—for the member for Darling Range, in that electorate—an additional \$36.3 million for the Byford health hub, bringing the total for that project to \$42.4 million. It will be a really important health hub in those outer suburbs that will provide a range of primary care, community, specialist and other services for people closer to home.

The spending in this budget includes a significant uplift in core public hospital services, which the Australian Medical Association welcomed, saying it would go a long way to improving our health system. The AMA is not one for giving out compliments lightly. For the Leader of the Liberal Party to claim that somehow this massive injection of extra funds for core services is spin shows that she fundamentally misunderstands the health budget and where the money goes—she just does not understand. In fact, her ignorance was proudly on display over the weekend in an op-ed that she penned in *The West Australian*, which claimed health was not a priority for the McGowan government because only six per cent of our infrastructure spend was on health while 35 per cent was on transport. That is an incredibly simplistic approach that equates two portfolios with entirely different spending profiles. The majority of health spending goes on wages for doctors, nurses, highly trained specialists, allied health staff and support staff—people who run our hospitals. The transport budget is skewed towards asset investment and has fundamentally been so for many governments.

Let us just make some comparisons. In the last budget of the Barnett government, 2016–17, the overall infrastructure spend for the state was \$22.9 billion. That is a fraction of this government's spend on state infrastructure. In health it was only \$1 billion, which was only four per cent of the infrastructure spend, whilst rail and road spending was 34 per cent. That is 34 per cent versus 35 per cent. When we use absolute figures, it looks even worse for the Liberals and Nationals WA. The \$1 billion commitment to health infrastructure by that former government, a fraction of what this government has, was less than half of what we have committed to infrastructure in this budget. We have not only put on 547 beds, the equivalent of a tertiary hospital, but also committed to an additional 600 beds, the equivalent of another tertiary hospital, in the forward estimates. In raw bed numbers that is two tertiary hospitals' worth of beds. Again, that is something the AMA has welcomed.

Hospitals take a long time to plan and commission. In fact, a major hospital takes around 10 years, so if we are doing any catch-up, it is due to the lack of planning and commissioning that was done by the former government. That is what we are playing catch-up on. The former government's final budget was an absolutely clear indication that it did not support a significant spend on health infrastructure. We do not need spin because our numbers speak for themselves. The next time the Leader of the Liberal Party wants to throw that term around, she might want to look at the facts or she will continue to find herself spinning into irrelevance.