



Health focus in WA race for votes

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Western Australian Labor has promised to throw another \$250m at resolving ongoing issues plaguing the state's health system, as the election campaign continues to centre on what is arguably the Cook government's most glaring weak spot.

WA Premier Roger Cook on Monday announced a \$105m upgrade for the emergency department at Midland Health Campus in Perth's east, just a day after making a similar commitment for the ageing Royal Perth Hospital in the CBD.

The government also promised \$36m for an expansion of its virtual emergency department program.

While iron ore royalties have delivered WA Treasury the strongest set of finances in the country, the state's hospital system has been marred by record-high rates of ambulance ramping, industrial action, and a number of high-profile incidents including the death of a young girl at Perth Children's Hospital.

Mr Cook described 1000 hours of ambulance ramping as a "crisis" when in opposition, but that figure spiked to almost 7000 hours in 2022, and sat at almost 5400 hours in January.

On Monday, Mr Cook - who was health minister from 2017 until the end of 2021 - said his government's latest plans would ensure WA could meet the increased demands on its healthcare system.

"Our plan will slash wait times, tackle ambulance ramping, upgrade facilities for patients and staff, and ensure that we can continue to deliver world-class healthcare here in Western Australia," he said.

Liberal leader Libby Mettam has also been campaigning hard on health, proposing a plan to divert less-urgent cases to private urgent care clinics, and flagging \$20,000 cash bonuses for nursing students.

She promised on Monday to build an eating disorder residential facility, saying WA was the only state in the country without such a service.

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Ms Mettam said Mr Cook's government was behind a long list of health infrastructure commitments that it had not met.

"The Cook Labor government cannot be trusted when it comes to delivering health infrastructure, and it raises the question, what have they been doing over the last eight years, during the largest boom our state has ever seen?," she said.

"It's like they've just woken up to the fact that health is a -priority." Health Minister Amber-Jade Sanderson said the issues in WA's health system were complex. "There is no silver bullet, but you need a party that's got a plan," Ms Sanderson said.

"What we've seen from the Liberal Party so far won't even nibble around the edges. It will barely make an impact â€¦ "So far, nothing that Libby Mettam has announced will actually address the issue of access to health care." A Newspann published in The Australian last week showed the Cook government was well on track to be re-elected, but suggested a swing that could result in the Liberals and Nationals picking up about 12 more lower-house seats between them. The Liberals won just two of 59 lower-house seats at the last election, when Labor rode the popularity of then-premier Mark McGowan to a record-breaking win.

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