

# WA's health system is still better than most of Australia, declares Cook

CHARLTON HART

Roger Cook has defended his Government's handling of WA's health crisis, promising to get ahead of the curve next year to prevent another winter flu-induced meltdown.

As ambulance ramping continues to reach record levels and health workers sound the alarm on ballooning emergency department wait times, the Premier said the pressures facing the State's hospital system were not just a WA problem.

"The headlines that we've seen in WA. They've been appearing in The Sydney Morning Herald, they've been appearing in the Adelaide Advertiser, they've been appearing in Queensland's Courier Mail. All health systems, all hospital systems in Australia," Mr Cook told a full house at The West Australian's Leadership Matters breakfast yesterday at Crown.

"I think our hospital system is kind of better than most health systems, but there's more work to be done.

"One of the things I've asked the Health Minister Meredith Hammat to do is to undertake early work in relation with the planning for next year and to bring that strategy forward early next year, so we have a better line of sight on how we will move to ensure that the system is more robust."

Mr Cook admitted while the hospital system will be "under pressure" next winter it will be "resilient".

He was also questioned by The West Australian's State political editor Jessica Page over the \$97 million Royal Perth Hospital redevelopment and why only \$5 million had been committed for planning.

"Well, no, we announced that we will undertake the process in relation to RPH," Mr Cook said.

"There's no business case that has been done for it. We have an estimation of the cost

of that will be just around that \$100 million."

That was despite then-health minister Amber-Jade Sanderson saying the project was ready to go in February.

"The business case is already done. We've done the work necessary to make sure that we've got the right plan in place to ensure that this ED can continue operating as well as it can," Ms Sanderson said at the time.

"We're working through the definition plan so that we'll be ready, so that we will be ready and a re-elected ... Labor Government to take this to budget and get it to tender."

When confronted with Ms Sanderson's comments, Mr Cook appeared to contradict her. "I don't think it's fair to characterise it as a complete business case," he said.

"They are complex documents and processes."

## BURSWOOD RACETRACK

The Premier also faced questions from business attendees about his Government's priorities and the decision to build a racetrack and amphitheatre at Burswood.

"We want Western Australia to continue to be an events destination, to make sure that we're attracting great opportunities, acts and events to this State," he said, backing in the \$217m Perth Entertainment Precinct project.

"We do that for a range of reasons. Obviously, it continues to make us a thriving and vibrant community, but it can bring tourists and it brings economic activity to the heart of our economy."

Mr Cook denied the project has become a problem for his Government following criticism from Federal Perth MP Patrick Gorman, who urged the State Government to "not proceed" with the proposal.

"Obviously that was, you know, discussed in great gusto during the election campaign, and the people of Western Australia made up their mind," Mr Cook said.

"Everyone's got views about these things, but I'm not bothered about that. What I am bothered about is, how do we as a State set ourselves up for the future, to make sure we seize the opportunity."

