

Health spending unchanged

Peter de Kruijff and Daniel Emerson

Health spending in the Pilbara through the Royalties for Regions fund will stay on target, according to forward estimates in this year's State Budget.

Spending on Karratha Health Campus and Onslow Hospital remained unchanged with \$32 million towards the development of both in the 2015-16 financial year.

The \$161 million North West Health Initiative, which funds the development of new hospitals and redevelopment of old ones in inland Pilbara, has also remained unchanged compared to the previous Budget, with the last of the funding to come in 2018-19.

However, the North West Health Initiative has been delayed in previous budgets, a fact Mining and Pastoral Labor MLC Stephen Dawson says is not good enough.

"Those poor inland towns (Tom Price and Newman) — the next election is in 2017, two years after the next election those towns will have a hospital promised them years before," he said.

"It's disappointing in the Budget you've got \$1.6 billion for a Perth Freight Link ... yet we can't get a

hospital in Tom Price and Newman.

"Those communities have the right to be saying where's our Royalties for Regions."

The WA Health Budget will increase just 1.4 per cent next year, its lowest annual rise in history.

And WA Health's huge task to reduce the cost of services in line with national benchmarks has become harder because other States have improved.

A widening gap between WA's efficiency and the rest of Australia came as the Australian Medical Association of WA bemoaned a "paltry" \$100 million rise in overall health funding in 2015-16.

Last year's Budget set the department the task of delivering its services 8 per cent cheaper by 2017-18, described by doctors as impossible given WA's remoteness.

But all other States have since become more efficient, led by Queensland with a 12 per cent improvement.

WA is now 10.3 per cent dearer than the national average.

States have been given more time to fall to the national average in recognition of the goalposts being moved, but WA's targets over the next five financial years are to be 9.1 per cent above the national average in 2015-16.