



NORTHAM



Roger Cook and Darren West at Northam Hospital.

Hospital upgrade on ice

Sophie Gabrielle

IN a further blow to the confidence surrounding Northam Hospital, the Government's promised upgrades have been pushed back from 2015-16 to 2017-18.

Agricultural Region MLC Darren West said the five deaths of discharged patients since 2010 had shaken the community's confidence in the hospital and politicians on all sides had been working hard to restore morale.

"The community's confidence in this hospital has been dented over the last few years," Mr West said.

"Of all Colin Barnett's promises, it's crucial that those in the area of health are actually delivered.

"I'm concerned the delay to the hospital upgrades will result in staff losses. If the hospital does not offer the services, doctors will not want to work here."

Under the Southern Inland Health Initiative, Northam Hospital was to receive \$31 million upgrades but the Government's mid-year review revealed that upgrades had been postponed.

Mr West questioned Alyssa Hayden MLC, the Parliamentary Secretary representing Health Minister Kim Hames, last week about the delay.

Ms Hayden said funding for the overall program had not been cut but timing of the program had been adjusted.

Opposition health spokesman Roger Cook said the Government went to the last election with the promised upgrades.

"What the Government is trying to do is leave as much money in the bank account as possible to make the debt situation look better than it is," Mr Cook said.

"The fact is that this hospital deserves these upgrades now.

"Everyone in politics is trying to rebuild public confidence in Northam Hospital and the Government has given that whole process a kick in the guts."

Mr Cook said changes had been made at the hospital following the five deaths but the Government needed to continue to invest in the physical infrastructure.

"People need to have the confidence that when they go to their hospitals they have fully funded hospitals, with the most modern equipment, staff that are supported with appropriate level of resources," he said.

"This should be treated as an outer metropolitan hospital not a country hospital - we need full-time doctors committed to the campus, not rostered on visiting GPs."

Shire of Northam President Steven Pollard said it was not good that such a substantial amount of money had been suspended.