



# Hospital upgrades

MORE doctors, more medical resources for nurses and major upgrades to the Merredin District Hospital are among the benefits announced in the state budget last week.

Merredin and its surrounding districts will be key benefactors of a \$565 million initiative to improve health services in regional Western Australia.

The funding will be provided through the state government's Royalties for Regions program in the 2011-2012 state budget.

State Health Minister Kim Hames and Regional Development Minister Brendon Grylls travelled to Merredin on Monday to make the announcement to health workers at the Merredin District Hospital.

Staff from the surrounding district hospitals Quairading, Narembeen, Bruce Rock, Corrigin, Kununoppin and Kellerberrin also attended the announcement via video-link.

WA Country Health Services Medical Workforce and Reform executive director Felicity Jefferys said it was the biggest funding injection she had seen in her more than 20 years working in the health industry in WA and it was a very positive sign for regional health.

Dr Hames and Mr Grylls said the new initiative, called the Southern Inland Health Initiative (SIHI) would reform and improve access to healthcare in the region.

Dr Hames said that the package includes a \$240 million investment in the health workforce and the provision of health services over four years and \$325 million in capital works over five

years.

"Merredin will become a key hospital in the \$182 million District Medical Workforce Investment Program, which is part of the initiative, to improve medical services and to provide a 24-hour emergency response across the district," Dr Hames said.

Mr Grylls said the initiative was developed after extensive discussion with communities, local government, and health professionals in the southern inland area over several years.

"It includes an incentive plan for doctors and would deliver more private GPs into the country and engage them in a new way of working to support the district network and the changing nature of the workforce and medical practice," Mr Grylls said.

Dr Hames said the SIHI would deliver exactly what regional communities wanted in health services.

"A key focus in the first year will be to address the lack of private doctors across the region with financial incentives for private medical practitioners to improve the sustainability of their practices in rural areas," he said.

Dr Hames said more private GPs servicing inland country hospitals will mean better support to nurses who, due to the lack of doctors in this region, carry greater responsibilities.

"Nurses do a fantastic job and have a key role in rural health, and we will provide them with higher levels of medical and Telehealth support," he said.

Dr Hames said the District Medical Workforce Investment Program would significantly improve medical resources and 24 hour emergency response across the district.

"It will include around-the-clock on call medical care and a regular medical presence at eight key hospitals – Northam, Narrogin, Merredin, Meekatharra, Katanning, Manjimup (Warren Hospital), Collie and Esperance." The District Hospital and Health Services Investment program will also provide \$147.4 million for major upgrades at six district hospitals - Northam, Narrogin, Merredin, Katanning, Manjimup (Warren Hospital) and Collie.

"In addition to the capital upgrades, this program will include funding to network with and support the delivery of primary care and medical services across the district," Dr Hames said.

"We want to develop and improve medical services that are able to respond to changing community needs.

"The Southern Inland Health Initiative will ensure that all elements of the health system, both public and private, can continue to provide quality health care in regional settings.

"Strong district centres supporting district networks will be developed to give medical support to smaller towns.

There will be extensive consultation with local communities to plan the services.

"Recognising that GP recruitment and retention is the responsibility of the Federal Government, the recruitment of GPs to country areas has been a long-term problem.

"Unlike the metropolitan area, GPs in the country provide care in their surgeries in addition to emergency care and inpatient care in hospitals.



Merredin-Wheatbelt Mercury  
Wednesday 25/5/2011  
Page: 1  
Section: General News  
Region: Merredin WA Circulation: 1,135  
Type: Regional  
Size: 453.81 sq.cms.  
Frequency: --W----

Brief: PARLWA-WA1  
Page 2 of 2  
  
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**Health boost:** WA Deputy Premier and Health Minister Kim Hames (second from right) announced major funding for upgrades at Merredin Hospital on Monday. With him are Agricultural Region Member Mia Davies, Regional Development and Lands Minister Brendon Grylls, Merredin District Hospital Health Service manager C Stones, Merredin District Hospital eastern Operations Manager Terry Horne, and Agricultural Region member Jim Chown.