



Pilbara health a budget winner

■ Peter de Kruijff

Pilbara health services were some of the biggest winners in this year's State Budget with the confirmed location of Karratha Health Campus in the CBD finalised and the allocation of \$161 million to the North West Health Initiative confirmed.

WA Regional Development Minister Brendon Grylls said Karratha Health Campus was one of the most expensive investments ever undertaken by Country Health in WA and was important to the growing Pilbara.

Mr Grylls did not have at hand the exact date for when construction of the hospital would begin, but said the lot it would be built on would not take long to take shape and a 2017 date was still scheduled for the start of construction.

The Northern Health Initiative which focuses on Roebourne, Tom Price, Paraburdoo, Newman and

Onslow would also receive funding from this year's Budget until 2016-17.

However, Mr Grylls said planning for infrastructure like a new Tom Price hospital was in the early stages where he was talking with WA Country Health.

"The preliminary advice I've received is the facility there is old; my previous visits have shown me the state of the infrastructure, I haven't seen any final plans so whether we've got new infrastructure and some remodelling of the old infrastructure or a complete new build, we are not at that stage yet," he said.

"Needless to say there will be a substantial investment into the Tom Price Hospital, full details to emerge in due course and probably in Paraburdoo an upgrade to their nursing post there."

He also said \$161 million should enable infrastructure upgrades as well as telehealth and incentives for attracting doctors to the area.

In terms of development of the road linking Karratha to Tom Price, Mr Grylls said it was an expensive project and there was no funding in this year's Budget for it.

"At some stage I think the commonwealth, the state, and the resource sector will come together and that important link will be completed but it is not in the announcements this year," he said.

Tom Price resident Cecilia Fernandez said it would take a joint effort from all players to tackle the road which she sees as a high priority for the community.

"When the boom goes we will be a phantom town, all the fly-ins, all the mining companies ... when they finish they will take away all of this infrastructure which is easy to remove but what will happen in this town," she said.

She thanked Mr Grylls and Vincent Catania for allocating the money to services which are truly needed, but said now was the time to address the road.



Tom Price resident Cecilia Fernandez last year collected signatures petitioning for the State Government to seal the Tom Price to Karratha road. Funding for the project was not included in this year's State Budget. Picture: Cameron Myles