

BUSSELTON STUDY

Statement by the Premier

MR COURT (Nedlands - Premier) [2.11 pm]: Many members in the House will be aware that for over three decades, the people of Busselton have willingly lived under a microscope to make it possible to collect and analyse data for medical research. On a regular basis the people of Busselton have been required to undergo a range of health tests, divulge personal information and answer long lists of questions about their lifestyle.

I am pleased to report to the House that last Friday the people of Busselton were rewarded for the role they played in Australia's longest running health study with the launch of the publication "The Busselton Study". The people of Busselton can be proud of the fact that their participation has provided the data for a document that will provide an invaluable reference for health care professionals in Australia and internationally as they seek to implement effective preventive health strategies for the benefit of the general population.

The study provides results which are of immense practical significance in the prevention of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and respiratory illness, and has assisted in research into a wide range of conditions including obesity, peptic ulcer, sleep apnoea and immunological disorders. The results of the study are very interesting and show that the introduction of health intervention programs in Busselton targeting high blood pressure, smoking, high blood cholesterol levels and obesity led to significant improvements in the health of the community. The results reveal an improved survival rate among regular survey attendees and a 30 per cent fall in death rates. The data also records a fall in death rates from cardiovascular disease in Busselton which researchers say is a direct result of treating high blood pressure and lowering the level of cigarette smoking. The interventions accounted for a fall of 67 per cent in men and 22 per cent in women.

Obviously the study has had many benefits for the participants and it has also led to an overall improvement in the health of the Busselton community due to an increased awareness of diseases and their treatments. In the longer term the study will reap benefits for governments around the world as the burden on health care systems ease following the implementation of more effective preventive health strategies that have been tried and tested in Western Australia. In our State alone, the potential savings from improved preventive health care strategies would calculate to many millions of dollars each year.

The State owes a great deal to those responsible for conducting the Busselton health study and the man who conceived the idea, the late Dr Kevin Cullen, a Busselton general practitioner who held a passionate belief in disease prevention. I am certain that the late Dr Cullen would have been very pleased with the achievements of the Busselton study and the significant contribution it continues to make to improving the health of our community.