

# Lack of cardiac services blamed for baby deaths

FROM PAGE 1

Children who would normally have emergency transfers to Melbourne's Royal Children's Hospital for heart surgery can no longer go there because of COVID, and the alternative to Westmead Hospital in Sydney is done on a case-by-case basis.

WCH staff had presented a business case for paediatric cardiac surgery services last year that was rejected after an independent report concluded the number of cases would not be enough to keep surgeons' skill levels up to standard.

Noting SA was the only mainland state without such a service, Prof Svigos, pic-

tured, told the committee three children had died in the past month due to lack of such a service.

SA Salaried Medical Officers Association chief industrial officer Bernadette Mulholland told the hearing a fourth had died on Friday.

Both witnesses said the impact had been devastating on the families and also on staff, who were "beside themselves" with anguish at not being able to save the lives.

"I shall leave it to you to imagine the profound effect

of these deaths on the parents, their families and the dedicated medical and nursing staff dealing with these tragedies," Dr Svigos said.

Prof Svigos said SA Health budgeted \$5m a year to transfer such children but a unit at the WCH would cost \$6m to establish and \$1m annually to operate. "If we are not self-sufficient, we are going to run into this problem again - it would be crazy to think we are not going to have another pandemic at some stage," he said.

Dr Svigos told the hearing of other concerns, including CHILDREN'S cancer services being "critically understaffed and under-resourced.

THE need for \$12.3m to replace outdated equipment but only \$800,000 is available a year.

THE Special Care Birthing Unit being empty since it opened on August 14 because of staffing issues, though it started accepting babies from yesterday.

PAYING consultants KPMG up to \$3m to deal with a \$8m budget overrun that is being resolved by reducing nurses' hours, which he described as "beyond comprehension".

He agreed with committee chairwoman Connie Bonaros that it appeared "the budget is being put ahead of children's lives".

Ms Bonaros has called for

an independent inquiry into the deaths of the children, noting Labor cut the cardiac surgery service and the Liberals have refused to reinstate it. WCH paediatric cardiologist Dr Gavin Wheaton said complex cardiac cases were transferred to Melbourne as "we don't have sufficient case numbers in SA to support and sustain a service".

The Women's and Children's Health Network released a statement saying the WCH provided the highest-quality care to all its patients, and "South Australian children will always have access to the health services they need".

PAGE 20: EDITORIAL

# Landmark building fetches \$446m

BRAD CROUCH

ADELAIDE'S SAHMRI 2 clinical research building has been sold for \$446.2m, making it the state's biggest real estate deal since the pandemic hit.

Developers Commercial & General agreed to sell the Australian Bragg Centre - also known as SAHMRI 2 - to health investors Dexus and the Healthcare Wholesale Property Fund as joint owners.

The building, under construction at the \$3.6bn BioMed City precinct on North Terrace, will house Australia's first proton therapy unit able to pulverise inoperable cancers without damaging surrounding tissues. It will also be home to research facilities for the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute and have lab and office space for SA Health and biomedical companies.

The deal does not change any of these arrangements. When construction by builders Lend Lease began in June, the project value was put at \$500m, up from \$330m in previous estimates.

The 12-storey building, now due for completion in August 2023 after delays, is 77 per cent pre-leased to customers either backed or supported by the State Government, according to a statement to the Australian Stock Exchange by the new owners.

Commercial & General chief executive Trevor Cooke, pictured, said the deal was a vote of confidence in the South Australian economy "and the quality opportunities we continue to create".

He said Commercial & General had added nearly \$1bn in privately owned health infrastructure in SA, including the Calvary Adelaide Hospital, and was looking for further local investment opportunities.



# LITTLE CHARLOTTE ON THE MEND AFTER LIFESAVING TRIP

BRAD CROUCH

DANIEL and Simone Winkless say Adelaide needs better cardiac services for children, after racing to Melbourne to save their daughter's life.

The Woodcroft couple watched healthy two-year-old Charlotte fall sick with a respiratory infection in August last year and end up in intensive care in the Women's and Children's Hospital.

Charlotte's condition worsened and she had multiple lung collapses, so a call was made to the retrieval team at the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne.

"We almost lost her while trying to arrange it," Mr Winkless said.

"The woman who arranges it in Melbourne was about to leave for the day but fortunately turned back when she heard the phone."

Once in Melbourne, Charlotte was hooked up to

an ECMO machine, which replaces the functions of a person's heart and lungs so they can breathe and pump oxygen around their body.

"Children's lives should not be left to chance - we would have lost her if there had been a delay until the next morning," Mr Winkless said.

"We need this sort of service here. I can't imagine it is cheap sending people to Melbourne, and it disrupts families."

Charlotte suffered a stroke from a clot during treatment but is on the mend.

Paediatric cardiac surgery services, including a proposed ECMO machine, are under review by the WCH network board.

A hospital spokesman said transferring patients to Melbourne for complex cardiac surgery "remains the safest option and offers the best care for our children and their families".



Woodcroft couple Daniel and Simone Winkless with their daughter Charlotte, who received lifesaving treatment in Melbourne. Picture: Tait Schmaal

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