



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL  
TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH, COMMUNITY AND  
SOCIAL SERVICES**

**(Reference: Annual and financial reports 2007-08)**

**Members:**

**MR S DOSZPOT (The Chair)  
MS J BURCH (The Deputy Chair)  
MS A BRESNAN**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**WEDNESDAY, 18 FEBRUARY 2009**

**Secretary to the committee:  
Ms G Concannon (Ph: 6205 0129)**

**By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Committee Office of the Legislative Assembly (Ph: 6205 0127).

## APPEARANCES

<b>Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services.....</b>	<b>1</b>
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## **Privilege statement**

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*Amended 21 January 2009*

## **The committee met at 9.31 am.**

Appearances:

Hargreaves, Mr John, Minister for Disability and Housing, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Industrial Relations and Minister for Corrections

Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

Hehir, Mr Martin, Chief Executive

Sheehan, Ms Maureen, Executive Director, Housing and Community Services

Ford, Ms Lois, Executive Director, Disability ACT

Whitten, Ms Meredith, Executive Director, Policy and Organisational Services

Hubbard, Mr Ian, Director, Finance and Budget

Collett, Mr David, Director, Asset Management

Whale, Mr Andrew, Director, Disability ACT

Manikis, Mr Nic, Director, Multicultural, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

**THE CHAIR:** Good morning, and welcome to the public hearing of the Standing Committee on Health, Community and Social Services in its inquiry into the annual and financial report of the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services 2007-08. I presume that you have all read the privilege statement many times over the last few years, so I will not ask you the obvious question as to whether you have read it.

Before committee members start asking questions, minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr Hargreaves:** Thank you very much, Mr Chairman, and good morning to members of the committee and visitors. I thank the committee for giving us the opportunity to appear before it and to further explore the DHCS annual report—in particular, programs and initiatives that pertain to my current portfolio responsibilities of housing, disability, ageing and multicultural affairs.

During 2007-08, the department continued to provide a broad range of services to assist thousands of Canberrans in need. This is no better illustrated than through the provision of public and community housing. Building on the reforms to the public rental housing assistance program introduced in June 2006, Housing ACT has maintained its focus on supporting those, especially families, who have urgent accommodation requirements.

To provide a fairer and more responsive housing system, changes were introduced to the allocation and assessment of tenants which have seen priority list applicants housed within three months. This is in no small part due to the effectiveness of the multidisciplinary panel drawn from ACT government agencies and the community sector. The panel assists in the determination of the comparative need of applicants in making appropriate property allocations.

Housing ACT has also invested considerable time and resources into supporting

tenants. Housing managers conducted 806 visits to tenants within the first 90 days of the commencement of their tenancy. During the year, housing managers also conducted some 10,500 client service visits to tenants. These visits enable Housing ACT to engage with both new tenants and existing tenants to ensure they are able to maintain their tenancies and assist in resolving any difficulties associated with their tenancy.

Where there are issues of concern to tenants, housing managers are able to provide appropriate referrals and assistance. Eviction numbers—always of interest to the committee—for breach of tenancy, including arrears of rent, decreased from 32 in 2006-07 to 27 in 2007-08. Further support is now provided through the client assessment and support team, the allocation of wait-list management and the client services team. In this way, the organisation is providing a more coordinated and consistent approach to tenant management.

In 2007-08, the department continued to fund six services under the community linkages program to assist public and community housing tenants to manage and sustain their tenancies and build community connections. In 2008, tenant initiated grants were provided to 26 public and community housing tenants to undertake projects of benefit to their communities. Projects included the development of community gardens, social gatherings and community rooms with internet access. New projects in 2008 included two choirs, inspired by the Choir of Hard Knocks, and a food cooperative. A range of services were funded to meet the needs of Indigenous tenants, including housing liaison services at the Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service.

For Housing ACT, engaging meaningfully with tenants is a priority. The Joint Champions Group has significantly assisted the management of public housing. The group comprises tenants and staff members and meets every six weeks to discuss issues of concern. A client satisfaction survey undertaken recorded a positive increase from 66 per cent overall client satisfaction in 2007 to 71 per cent in 2008. That is a significant increase. Particularly pleasing was the increase in satisfaction, from 67 per cent to 73 per cent, in the way public housing is perceived to have helped tenants to engage in the ACT community. That is also very significant.

In 2007-08, Housing ACT continued to effectively utilise its asset portfolio to meet ongoing public housing needs. A very successful element was the acquisition of funding via the sale of properties, netting some \$26.1 million. In addition, the sale of Fraser Court in July 2008 achieved a sale price of \$25.5 million. Housing ACT utilised these funds to either acquire or construct dwellings; 120 dwellings were acquired during the year, of which 26 dwellings were constructed and 94 were purchased on the open market. As well, \$28.3 million was delivered in repairs, maintenance and improvement works during the last financial year.

To achieve a more manageable repairs program, a greater emphasis has been placed on planned maintenance, for which \$20 million was delivered to 816 properties. The work included wet area upgrades, kitchen upgrades, major disabled modifications, internal and external painting, and replacement of floor coverings. Integration of the work of Social Housing and Homelessness Services within the work of Housing ACT has been vital in preventing homelessness, as well as delivering services to those who

are homeless. This has enabled Housing ACT to focus on the task of long-term accommodation.

The ACT homelessness strategy was evaluated in 2007-08, following four years of work in developing strategies targeted to break cycles of homelessness and improve service provision. The final evaluation of the strategy found that it had improved outcomes to specific groups of clients against a number of measures. Importantly, the strategy had been particularly effective in creating a strong, maturing service system.

The government, through the department, is strongly focused on meeting the continuum of need of the homeless. We have seen, for example, the establishment, in partnership with the Australian government, of the couch surfing and exiting detention pilot projects for young people. This provides a greater range of response options for young people. The domestic violence Christmas program was in place for the third year, providing short-term crisis support for women and children escaping domestic violence over the Christmas and new year period. The initiative provided an additional 1,112 bed nights over the 2007-08 Christmas period.

I believe the ACT leads the way in providing an integrated response to those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and this is largely due to the co-location of housing and homelessness services. We are in a good position to achieve the service delivery outcomes of the national affordable housing agreement. I would like to acknowledge the work of the staff of Housing ACT and Social Housing and Homelessness Services for the excellent outcomes they have achieved in the 2007-08 year. We have had recently significant reforms in the provision of homelessness and housing services, and we are now just starting to see the fruits of those reforms.

I now turn to my responsibility for disability services in the territory. As minister, I have had the opportunity to build on the substantial gains that this government has delivered through its disability reform agenda. We are driven by the ambition that people with disabilities have a valued and productive role in our community. This belief is fundamental in the development of our policies, practices and partnerships.

Disability ACT benefited from a series of negotiations with the Australian government, which agreed to match the ACT's commitment of \$15.8 million in 2007-08 by providing an additional \$15.23 million over four years. That contrasts, let me tell you, with 2005, when we had to fight tooth and nail to have some of the things that the ACT was doing recognised by the Australian government, and recognised in dollar terms.

The ACT government allocated significant additional funding in the 2007-08 budget to build service capacity. This was to assist with meeting an increased demand for services for young people and adults with high-level intellectual and physical disabilities. The funding provides increased respite care options, more supported accommodation places, increased community access places and individual support packages where practicable. A new disability awareness project commenced, scoping a three-year program of activities to raise the profile of people with disabilities. Our ambition is that people with disabilities are better valued and they are engaged and able to contribute to and share the benefits of living in our vibrant community.

A number of highly successful events assisted in the promotion of the contribution and achievements of people with disabilities, including the Chief Minister's inclusion awards, with more than 430 guests in attendance. The BLITS program continues to grow in stature. BLITS promotes initiatives that value people with disabilities as customers, suppliers, employees and employers in business, the arts and sport. The BLITS advisory board comprises local business owners, parents of people with a disability and staff of Disability ACT who share a passion for disability issues. In 2007-08, BLITS continued to develop its programs and its reach.

The 2007 International Day of People with a Disability featured celebrations held over two days and included the inaugural I-Day celebration breakfast held in the members' reception room at the ACT Legislative Assembly, attended by 68 guests. The fourth annual post-school options expo was held in June. The expo was attended by over 450 students from both government and non-government schools and their families. The exit survey confirmed that the event provided relevant and timely information to school leavers with a disability and their families. The Nour Amal Orchestra from Egypt, comprising blind and vision impaired female musicians, performed two concerts at the Canberra Theatre on 14 February 2008 as part of the 2008 National Multicultural Festival. As part of the sponsorship package, Disability ACT provided complimentary tickets enabling 200 people with disabilities to attend either the matinee or evening performances.

Community and client engagement is also a focus of the ACT Office for Ageing—another of my portfolio responsibilities. The office promotes and proposes policies that encourage positive ageing and supports events that celebrate older Canberrans. In 2008, the Chief Minister awarded more than \$85,000 to 10 organisations under the seniors grants program. Projects were actioned to promote senior participation in community activities, the sharing of skills with others and capacity building within the community.

In 2007-08, the government commissioned research on the important issue of social isolation amongst older people in the ACT, with the results to assist the ongoing development of policy. Older Canberrans are now benefiting from ACT government funding in 2007 of \$2.1 million over four years for an on-demand community minibus service provided by the six regional community services. Through ACTION, six wheelchair accessible minibuses were provided for the service to transport ACT seniors and people isolated through lack of transport options.

In 2007, a review was also conducted of the concessions program provided by the ACT government, ably assisted by community consultation. More importantly, given Canberra's rapidly ageing population, the Office for Ageing continued to provide support for and policy advice to the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing. Council deliberated on a range of issues affecting older Canberrans, including transport, housing and strategies to support older Canberrans in the workplace, including grandparental leave.

Finally, I turn to multiculturalism. The ACT government, through the Office of Multicultural Affairs, is committed to supporting and, indeed, enhancing multiculturalism through its policies and programs. The 2007-08 DHCS annual report highlights many achievements. Most people in this room, I suspect, would have

engaged in the recent National Multicultural Festival, a true celebration of our diversity. Final numbers are still being calculated for that festival, but indications are that they are up on last year in certain events and down in certain others. So we need to have some robust calculations about the numbers.

Each year, we keep refreshing the content of the festival, and few would disagree that it is a star that keeps rising. We had 250 stalls this year, there were 65 diplomatic missions involved and we spread from Garema Place and City Walk into Glebe Park. So the geography of the festival has increased. The engagement of 65 diplomatic missions was absolutely phenomenal. The first time I got involved in it, there were three—and there were 65 this year. As for the stalls, 250 stalls was just incredible. It is interesting that it was a really successful festival given the horrendous weather. We had 40-something-degree heat on the first Saturday and 19 degrees, I think, on the following Saturday. So it was amazing that people still came out, given those conditions.

The foundation for the success of the festival is the multicultural communities themselves. It is the thousands of individuals and their representative organisations that inspire and drive our endeavours. Many of these people would have contributed to consultations that led to the drafting last year of the 2009-12 ACT multicultural strategy. They would also have taken part in the 2008 multicultural summit. As Minister for Multicultural Affairs, it was my great pleasure to oversee the delivery and implementation of the 2006-09 ACT multicultural strategy, on which the new strategy builds.

During the summit, four key areas were identified to form the focus of the new strategy. They were language policy, ageing and aged-care issues, young people, and access and equity. The draft is currently open for community consultation.

The OMA is housed in, and manages, the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre, a wonderful facility which provides a focal point for multiculturalism in the ACT. In 2007-08, the tenants comprised four peak bodies and 26 community groups. The variety of community events, meetings and changing of exhibitions and displays in the gallery all combined to make it a truly multicultural experience.

While facilities such as the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre provide a physical location for multicultural activities in the ACT, the government is committed to funding other multicultural resources which are people-centric. This includes the ACT Muslim Advisory Council. The current council began in 2008 with an extended membership to include women and young people of Islamic faith. Actually, I think I have got that date wrong. I think it may have been constituted a bit earlier than that. I will get the department to check the actual date and provide it to the committee secretary.

In 2007-08, members of the council provided salient advice on a range of matters affecting the ACT Muslim community. They were also involved in a range of events offering leadership to their community members and which involved the broader community. Also benefiting the local Muslim community and the wider Canberra community were activities and achievements under the national action plan. Projects under the plan, also known as NAP, for 2007-08 included the *My Life—My Photos*

exhibition, an extension of the integrated sports project and an open day at the Canberra mosque. Under NAP, there was also the two-way media project which assisted members of the ACT Muslim community to handle media inquiries and issues effectively.

In 2007-08, a total of \$275,000 was provided to more than 160 multicultural community groups to help cover the costs of running language programs, radio programs and cultural initiatives. Celebrating and maintaining cultures and languages is a key component of ensuring our city's multicultural way of life, but helping those new to the territory to find work and settle into the community is also an important role.

The ACT government continued to assist migrants in a range of ways, including a work experience and support program, or WESP, administering citizenship ceremonies and assessing overseas qualifications. Being independent is one of the fundamental factors of successful settlement in a new place. WESP assists migrants to become more job ready in the Australian context and therefore more marketable. Securing a job is a huge step on the pathway to independence and it is programs like WESP and the suite of other initiatives assisting and enhancing the multicultural sector that make Canberra a leader in multicultural affairs in this country. An interesting linkage that goes from housing into multiculturalism is through the transitional housing program for refugees, where we want to give people a leg-up. Most of the time, when these people come to the country, they have the wherewithal to succeed. All they need is a start, and that is what we are all about.

I thank the committee for their patience. I have now covered all parts of my portfolios, so I am happy to field questions.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. Ms Burch.

**MS BURCH:** I am looking at the front-end of the report. You made mention of this in your opening statement and it is a question on matched funding from the commonwealth. I am referring to page 5 through to page 22. From 2007, funds from the commonwealth will match ACT funds. I am just interested to know how this has been used and allocated with that boost of funding, because it seems a bit of a windfall.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Just before I launch into that, I need to put a bit of context into it. I mentioned 2005 in my opening statement. That is when I became minister for disability for the first time. In those days the commonwealth had this really weird way of distributing its support funding. It was in the process of rewarding ineffectiveness and incompetence in the delivery of disability programs. The ACT was doing a whole range of activities and not having those activities recognised for matching. Officers from the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services engaged with the commonwealth and successfully turned that around.

Over the last couple of years, we have seen an increase in the recognition of the things that we are doing in the ACT. These are significant, they should be counted and they should be encouraged. As I mentioned, we got \$15 million-plus for that. What I would like to do, Mr Chairman, is ask Lois Ford, the executive director, to give you some

detail about that.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Ms Ford:** In answer to your question—what will that fund?—we have agreed that the additional funding that we have got will fund approximately an additional 60 accommodation support places, about 20 additional individual support places, 20 new respite places and two or more in-home respite arrangements. Bear in mind that that would be the minimum to which we could agree, based on what we know the level of need is and how we put our funding packages together. Often people's needs determine how many places go where and to what, but we anticipate that we will be able to meet those targets. In effect, we have had approximately 70 per cent of that funding to date and have delivered on 60 per cent of those outputs. So we are feeling reasonably confident that that will play out.

**MS BRESNAN:** I imagine that you have just outlined further packages which will be in place which go towards combating things that occur when people with disability in hospital cannot leave hospital, or they might be in a situation where they could actually lose their house or—

**Ms Ford:** Certainly. We have a reasonably good history in the ACT of intervention regarding people not needing to go into residential aged care and people not needing to go in or be in long stay in hospital and being able to support people to remain in their own homes. We have several services, including the Dorothy Sales Cottages, and there is Koomarri. There is also Centacare and, as well, we have four houses that deliver to people. You are talking about people who have much higher support needs because of the complications of their disability through neurological disorder or a traumatic brain injury. We have always put those as priority, alongside older carers, of course. We have always prioritised access to funding for that group of people.

We also have a program for young people in residential aged care. Consultation over the years and systemic advocacy have clearly identified that for young people and those categorised under 50 the institutional arrangements of residential aged care are not the preferred arrangements for young people with a disability and a rest home is not appropriate. We have a program in place, with matched funding from the commonwealth, which has been rolled into the disability agreement, to exit four people from residential aged care. I think there are seven or eight, but only four of them actually want to change their circumstances now. It is to provide some additional support to people who are in hospital or in residential aged care and to provide individual support packages for four to six, depending on their level of need. So we already have programs in place to do that.

At the moment, DHCS and ACT Health are working together on developing the systemic pathways for people who are long-stay in hospital and supporting them in gaining more appropriate living arrangements in the community. You would appreciate that that group of people, the ones that you identified, are generally people who have the highest, not necessarily the most complex but definitely the highest, need for clinical, therapeutic activity or daily living-type support. Therefore, a specialised type of housing arrangement is necessary. An example would be a person for whom we supported exit from hospital last year. The house had to be purpose built

because of the size of the wheelchair. Once we had purpose built the house, the wheelchair size changed. We had to then renovate the bathroom to accommodate the extra width of the wheelchair. Those are the sorts of complexities that are involved in planning for that group.

**MS BRESNAN:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Ms Ford. Minister, just getting back to page 5, 1.2, “Highlights of the Department’s Achievements”, it is a follow-on question in a way to Ms Burch’s question regarding the commonwealth government’s funding contribution. As I understand it, from reading this, while the commonwealth government has come in with matching funds over a four-year period, that will not start until the financial year 2012. Is that correct?

**Mr Hehir:** No, that is not correct. That agreement, the National Disability Agreement, came into place on 1 January 2009. Those funds are in place right now. It may just be the way we have described it. It is actually \$15.23 million over four years.

The point we are trying to make with that paragraph about commencing in 2012 is that the final year figure, the fourth year figure, is \$6.25 million. So it is not \$15 million spread evenly over four years; it actually starts at a relatively low base and escalates quite rapidly to a substantial figure. The \$6.25 million is very important for us as being the final year figure because that is the figure that is indexed. If they had spread it evenly at slightly less than \$4 million per year, that would have been the ongoing base figure, which they would have indexed at the agreed rate. The fact that it is \$6.25 million is very important in that that is the final figure that is indexed. It started off quite low, in the order of about \$1 million, I think, in the first year, and it grew quite rapidly over the last two years of the agreement. So 2011-12 is the final year of the four-year agreement.

**Mr Hargreaves:** This is one of those situations that I was trying to describe earlier on. All states and territories have been having the same difficulty with the commonwealth—that is, they would agree to give us funds and we would agree to do programs and jointly pay for them but, when it came to the end of the period, they would not index it. You would create a program with a recurrent demand to satisfy recurrent demand and the states would cop it to carry it forward. At best, we would get a similar sort of figure coming from the commonwealth, but we were constantly down by two to three to four to five per cent every year. So over a period of four years we could be as much as 12 per cent or 13 per cent down. The states and territories were having to pay for that.

This is the point I was making about the conversation that the ACT officers have had. They have put that case to the commonwealth saying, “If it is really a cost-sharing arrangement then you need to share with us the recurrent burden of it in current day prices.” They have agreed to do that. What Mr Hehir was saying, which I think is absolutely significant, is that they are basing their indexing on the final year figure. If we had front-ended the \$15.23 million we would be big losers over time. Because we have back-ended it and it takes time to ramp the programs up we are big winners out of that particular one.

**Mr Hehir:** Just for further information, the Australian government used to use the wage price index for the indexation, which was in the order of 1.2 to 1.7 per cent, depending on the year—indexation. That was nowhere near sufficient for any of the actual growth in the cost for that sort of service. In the most recent negotiation I think the final indexation figure was in the order of six per cent. While the minister is very generous to say that the ACT negotiated heavily, which we did, it was a national negotiation and all the states and territories put forward the evidence to support that the actual indexation required was in the order of six per cent.

**Mr Hargreaves:** He is being a bit modest, I think, Mr Chairman. Mr Hehir is noted for his modesty.

**Mr Hehir:** I am known for my modesty.

**Mr Hargreaves:** And he is noted for his modesty, I tell you.

**THE CHAIR:** I think each of the committee members have had a chance to ask a question, so Mr Coe.

**MR COE:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. I have a question on the database system.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Which page is that?

**MR COE:** Pages 15 and 16, the paragraph at the bottom right. It makes reference to—

**Mr Hargreaves:** I am sorry to interrupt you, but I think that is a housing matter.

**Ms Ford:** It is.

**Mr Hargreaves:** We were going to do housing at another date. I am happy to answer questions, but we will bring the officials together.

**THE CHAIR:** We are on disability at the moment. We are simply trying to ask the questions fairly across the panel.

**MR COE:** I have only got a housing question, so there is no need for the rotation.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Thanks for the advance notice of the question, by the way.

**MR COE:** No problem.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Are you guys getting well ready for it?

**MR COE:** Email the department.

**MS BURCH:** I refer to page 24 concerning disability and post school options and the transition from school to work options. Can you outline a little bit of the process for people with disabilities leaving school and going into work and how that works?

**Mr Hargreaves:** The commonwealth government's Disability Employment Network provides vocational employment support services for people with disability ready to enter the paid workforce with a level of support. The post school options was a three-year non-recurrent amount of funding of up to \$20,000 to assist a young person with disability to transition into supported employment and vocational arrangements. I need to underscore that bit: it was a non-recurrent amount.

For some young people the need was not transitional, nor would they readily be able to take up an employment opportunity. Disability ACT has changed the approach to ensure that young people who require a sustained response to their day-to-day needs can be accommodated within the resources available. Disability ACT both provides and has funded a range of community-based programs to support families on their future planning and to help them put their plans in place.

The ACT government's funded service options available to secondary school graduates with a disability who cannot immediately participate in full-time employment or may not be able to do so in the future include transitional pre-vocation support. This type of service is available for up to three years and assists young people to plan for the future, to build skills, experience and confidence as they move towards their adult life. Support is generally provided a few hours a week or a fortnight. The second one is the ongoing supported community access. These services may be community based or centre based, depending on the individual's need. Support is generally provided for several hours at a time and possibly each day of the week. Do you want to add to that, Ms Ford?

**Ms Ford:** I just think it is important that we recognise that the transition from school—as you have children, you would know—into adult life is really stressful. It is stressful for parents and it is stressful for the school. It is even more so for families who have a child with a disability.

Earlier the minister referred to the three-year transitional program where there was non-recurrent funding of up to \$20,000 to engage in a range of activities. We consulted with families around that. Also, our own knowledge told us clearly that that does not cut it, basically. There are some young people who will only need a transitional program to get into supported employment or full-time employment, but there will always be a number of young people who have very high, complex—sometimes very complex—behavioural needs who are not going to move into supported accommodation, as much as the social theories would say everybody has an opportunity and we would love that to happen. But we recognise that upfront. We also recognise that families lurch from situation to situation. They get through schooling years and then it is, “My gosh, what happens after school?” They have three years transitional funding; what happens after that?

We have completely, over the last two years, shifted that program around, as the minister said, so that we are very clear that for those people who need a transitional response there is a transitional response there. But for that group that we are going to be with for longer we are starting to put proper, sustainable supports around them. We have really changed our messages to families over the last little while. We are clearly saying to families with the high, complex needs, “We are in this with you for life or as long as you need us; we are on this journey with you.” We demonstrate that by putting

in some supports around them to start and encouraging them to do longer term future planning so that we know what supports and systemic changes need to happen into the future so they are able to be supported. Families then do not get to 30 or 40, have no plan in place and suddenly change their circumstances.

That is a fairly significant and important systemic change within Disability. This year I met with 14 of those families who had high and complex needs. It was very interesting for me to note, because it has been two years since I have been back into the post schools option, that over half of those families actually came with a futures plan already in formulation.

Over the last couple of years we have also funded a range of small arrangements and some big arrangements, through the local area coordination service, to assist families to plan a path. It is just a tool that is very visual. It is working with families to assist them to plan into the future. Family leadership anew is another program which, again, is families working with families to assist them to really think about what the future holds, what needs to be in place. An example would be: what sort of natural supports do you need around you? How do you build those natural supports? What are the things that you need to be starting to put in place now if this is what you are looking for in five years? And then lastly: what is it that government may be able to assist you with?

The other thing that we are doing that is quite different to previous years is that we are allocating a small amount of money to small groups of families. A lot of families come together naturally in twos and threes and fours because they know each other through school or, in one case, there is a family that has two or three people in the family whose children have quite high and complex needs. We are allocating them a small pool of funding so that they can engage their own coordinator. That coordinator assists them to work their way through the system but also to build up the social and recreational supports in the community that those young people would really benefit from, which starts to build a natural support network around them so that their dependency on funded support becomes less not more.

Over time we recognise that, as the young person develops, that dependency will grow, and that is what we prepare for in the outyears. It does not suit everybody. I will say that absolutely categorically. A small number of families genuinely are just tired and cannot do this anymore. They get to the end of the school years and they just want us to solve the problem. For those families, we work very differently because we recognise the stresses. Every family has a different complexity about them.

**MS BRESNAN:** I am going to jump back to something on page 5. Something was already mentioned about the young people residential aged care program?

**Ms Ford:** Yes, certainly.

**MS BRESNAN:** It notes in there that there were going to be purpose-built dwellings commencing.

**Ms Ford:** Yes.

**MS BRESNAN:** The four people you mentioned—are the four people you mentioned who want to exit part of that program?

**Ms Ford:** Yes.

**MS BRESNAN:** So they will be going to those dwellings?

**Ms Ford:** They will be going there. The DA process has just finished; construction is about to start. We are hoping to have that purpose-built place ready by the end of this year, with people being able to move in next year. With that, it is always working; people change their minds. At the moment, we have identified four people who are very keen to take up that option. We are working with them now and helping them to plan for what it will be like when they leave. We also recognise that those four people may not be the four people—that, for different reasons, people will change their minds if circumstances change—but that is the plan at the moment.

**MS BRESNAN:** I have a quick supplementary. In relation to that, is it correct that most clients in that sort of group, who would be moving to those types of accommodations, are under the age of 50? Is that generally the—

**Ms Ford:** Under the age of 65 actually, but at the moment the priority is under 50. Because we have already done substantial work around prioritising this group of people, we are now prioritising under 55. No, it is not that most of them will be moving. Of the seven or eight that were identified as being in residential aged care, I think only two or three wanted to change. For some of these people, it is actually the family advocates or their guardians who will determine where they live. Some of those guardians have said that they are happy with the current placement. For the others, yes, then they will move. So no, not everybody will move. That is a roundabout way of saying that people will decide whether they want to move or not.

**MS BRESNAN:** Yes, or the advocates will decide.

**Ms Ford:** Or their guardians or advocates, yes. Most of the people in residential aged care that we are working with do have very involved guardians, and over half of those are working with an advocate as well.

**MS BRESNAN:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** We seem to be stuck on page 5. I have got another question on that.

**Mr Hargreaves:** It is a big document, isn't it?

**THE CHAIR:** It is; it is a huge document.

**Mr Hargreaves:** What it is showing, though, is the way in which Disability, Housing and Community Services provides an excellent annual report. The committee does not need to go through all those pages, because it has got so much information in it.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Hargreaves; we have not noted that before but we will now.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Obviously we have noted the department's activity—

**Mr Hargreaves:** They have been leading the way in this for years and years.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you; your point is well made.

**Mr Hargreaves:** It is a pleasure.

**THE CHAIR:** Responding to known priority needs, minister—I have a couple of questions that may not be addressed by the annual report at the moment. If they are not, I would like to bring them to the attention of the department. I have received a number of representations from people who have an ongoing problem with getting assistance with motor vehicle registration. I have already had discussions with the department on this. Is this a known priority need at the moment? The problem is with vehicle registrations where people with disabled children, for instance, have to buy special vehicles which are classed as commercial; they pay commercial rates and yet the cars are technically just for home use and for the use of their children.

**Mr Hargreaves:** That particular issue is an issue for the policy of motor vehicle registration.

**THE CHAIR:** I was hoping you would not say that.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Having been involved at both ends of that, let me say that it has been a vexed question for TAMS Road User Services for many years. Part of the issue has been that once upon a time the distinction between a commercial vehicle, a van, and a passenger vehicle was quite stark, and people were popping wheelchairs in the back of a van because they could anchor them. Nowadays the gap between a commercial vehicle and a passenger vehicle has narrowed, so it represents those challenges.

I do not have an answer for you. It is something that I would suggest that the committee raise with the Chief Minister at some point, either through your report or through a letter. I agree with you: it is an issue. I have had similar representations to me over the years—I confess, though, not a lot. I have had a few, but not a lot. Do you want to add something, Mr Hehir?

**Mr Hehir:** Yes, minister. Mr Doszpot did raise that issue in our briefing with him. That is something about which I have undertaken to write to the Chief Executive of TAMS, to discuss the issue. We are very happy to do that. I must admit that that was the first time I had heard that that was an issue. Ms Ford may have heard it more often but certainly that was the first time I heard that that issue had cropped up.

**Mr Hargreaves:** I have heard it before when I have had constituent issues. I am, on a personal level, supportive of a regime which could be introduced to assist people in this sense. Whether or not we give people access to commercial vehicles at passenger vehicle rates is another issue; it may be that we need another classification of

registration altogether. Again, it depends on the type of motor vehicle that you are using.

We would like to encourage people to use hybrid vehicles at this stage of the game, but you cannot tow a vehicle with a hybrid motor car. If the access for a commercially sized vehicle includes a tow bar system with a trailer, because you can put your motorised wheelchair up onto the trailer, you cannot get an electric-petrol or electric-diesel motor vehicle that can do that. The technology just does not exist. Therein lies a problem for us. What we need to do is have that conversation between the two chief executives and see how far we can progress this thing.

**THE CHAIR:** In the interests of time, I do not want to labour this point too much, but I would like to make a very strong case for this point to be taken up, whether it is by disability, by TAMS or by a combination of both—or the Chief Minister. I do not care who it is, but the fact is that we have got people out there who have been asking about this for five years—people that I am talking to, who are reaching the end of their patience. I am just trying to get the—

**Mr Hargreaves:** I assure you, firstly, Mr Doszpot, and the committee, that Disability, Housing and Community Services will take the lead and approach TAMS.

**THE CHAIR:** Excellent.

**Mr Hargreaves:** We will not allow it to just be a table tennis ball between two departments. We will move forward on that.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. If I have got that undertaking, that will be great.

**MR COE:** Might I ask a question on this? Minister, given that you have had representations before, as minister for disabilities, have you taken it up with the minister for urban services or TAMS?

**Mr Hargreaves:** I had those representations when I was an opposition backbencher. I did take it up at that particular time with the minister for urban services, to receive absolutely no response. When I became the minister responsible for urban services and TAMS, I did not receive the representations on that subject any further. People did not approach me on it; I did not have any more of it. In a sense, it was a case that, if it is out of sight, it is out of mind.

Had I received those representations as Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, I would have moved at that particular time. I am delighted to hear that Mr Doszpot is raising it again and I am probably quite nicely placed to pursue the matter.

**THE CHAIR:** I will make one final comment on this to highlight the ridiculous nature of when red tape kicks in. The people with disability who have come to me on this issue have been told that, in order to have their car registered at normal rates rather than commercial, they will have to take the hoist out of the cars. The hoist is in there specifically to put the wheelchairs in.

**Mr Hargreaves:** We will take that up, Mr Doszpot, but I have to say also that when

we put the constituent inquiries together the matter is not quite as straightforward as some people would have us believe. There are other people out there. For example, I had a representation from people who wanted to have their vehicle regarded for passenger registration, not commercial. They had modified the vehicle. They bought a passenger vehicle, modified it and in effect turned it into a commercial vehicle in that modification. The argument was whether or not the modifications met the technical specifications for registration as applied by the engineer who gives the certification. So we had a technical issue.

Then we had some people who had modified vehicles interstate and who came to the ACT and tried to reregister the vehicles. Because they did not meet ACT technical standards, there were difficulties there also. What we are talking about here is a very complex issue. The numbers of people are not substantial, in terms of thousands, but for each and every one of them it is an issue. That I appreciate, and we will take the matter up.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. In the interests of time, I think we should move on from this point, unless—

**MS BURCH:** No. We will move on. I have another question. Page 32 mentions the Koori preschool program and Therapy ACT. It makes a comment about going in to support Aboriginal preschool children with speech therapy. Can you make mention about how that program is going and its—

**Mr Hargreaves:** I am sorry about this.

**MS BURCH:** It is not with you?

**Mr Hargreaves:** No, it is not. It is Minister Gallagher's portfolio.

**MS BURCH:** I will hold that one for her.

**Mr Hargreaves:** It is Therapy ACT; it is a speech pathology issue.

**MS BURCH:** It is very complex working out which outcomes belong to what.

**Mr Hargreaves:** The best thing you can possibly do is ask me and I will tell you which other minister belongs to that question, in every case.

**THE CHAIR:** I presume you two know each other, so I will let you discuss it in private—okay?

**Mr Hargreaves:** Absolutely.

**MS BRESNAN:** I am sorry but I am going to jump back again—to page 25, the intensive treatment and support program. It notes that this program has provided advice to the AMC and also the ACT Ombudsman's review of the Federal Police watch-house. I am just wondering if you can tell us a bit more about the nature of this advice and whether or not it has been implemented.

**Mr Hargreaves:** I will ask Andrew Whale to address the committee.

**Mr Whale:** ITAS, the intensive treatment and support program, has a targeted specialised client group around adults, 17 and up, that have a dual disability—they have a mental disorder/dysfunction plus intellectual disability—and are at risk of criminally offending. It is the area where we interact and engage with the justice system, most commonly with Disability ACT. We are very active with JACS around issues that involve some sort of forensic.

When the watch-house review went around for comment, we provided a range of comments, particularly on the issues of awareness of people with a disability and their particular needs. We have also done this in a very cooperative fashion with justice and community services around the Alexander Maconochie Centre. Our main focus on that is around people involved in those facilities who have an intellectual disability or have learning disabilities.

The issue, for example, with a learning disability, which in many cases is not as obvious as, say, a physical disability or an intellectual disability, may be that they are just being seen as recalcitrant, as in not following direction or unable to meet the requirements of that particular institution. So raising awareness of those issues and the needs of those individuals is critical for them to be effectively engaged within those institutions. A similar principle applies for intellectual disability.

With regard to the Alexander Maconochie Centre, we have already commenced training through our ITAS program. We have trained approximately 120 custodial officers directly through our ITAS program with a focus on that awareness and I can report to you that the feedback from the custodial officers that have been through that training has been extremely positive. We have been able to use some of their experience, talk through real case examples and suggest how approaches might be made in the future in those particular circumstances. So we have been actively involved for quite some time, since ITAS came on board, and I am very happy to report that there is now a very physical connection with things such as direct training of custodial officers and we will continue to provide support.

Once the Alexander Maconochie Centre is fully operational, we will be working with Corrections to ensure that people working within the ITAS program have access to prisoners being held in either remand or the prison itself to continue support programs. ITAS primarily works with individuals in their current environment, whether that be in the family home, in a group home or potentially in a forensic facility such as the Alexander Maconochie Centre, so that while they are there we continue to provide support and development in programs that we may be running; assisting with a sexual offenders type program around people with a disability is one example potentially. So that will continue on and will actually step up quite a few notches once that centre is fully operational.

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, page 89 gives the staffing profile. Can you give me some indication as to what percentage of the employees within the department are people with disability?

**Mr Hargreaves:** Yes. I will ask Meredith Whitten to join our merry band of people

and answer your question, because she is good at it.

**Ms Whitten:** On page 90, table 5, the staffing profile shows that the percentage of staff is 2.2 per cent, which is slightly down from the previous year, which was 2.35 per cent.

**Mr Hargreaves:** I go back to the previous thing I said: we do not always have to read the rest of the report to find the answer to that.

**THE CHAIR:** Sorry, what did you say the variance in percentage was?

**Ms Whitten:** It was 2.35 per cent and we are working across government and in our department in terms of identifying and recruiting, on a merit process, people with disabilities.

**THE CHAIR:** So you see it as a leadership position, no doubt, to employ more people with a disability?

**Ms Whitten:** In our department? Yes, absolutely.

**Mr Hehir:** It is also important to note that we have had a look at this issue previously. One of the things that we find is that people typically do not identify that they have got a disability. So, while the 2.2 per cent figure is there, the actual number of people with a disability is likely to be substantially higher. The majority of people do not identify that they have a disability when you ask those questions. I think we did an exercise in about 2006, if I remember correctly.

**Ms Whitten:** It was the previous reporting period, before that, and it was slightly higher again, because we actually surveyed staff to ask them whether they had a disability or not. As Martin has identified, a lot of this information is recorded at the time that the person is employed in government so actually going out and asking people provides a different result.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Part of the problem that we have—it is not really a problem in a funny kind of way—is that there are definitions about what constitutes a disability, what constitutes a significant disability and this sort of thing. But some of the time it is in the eye of the person with it, and some people with a disability do not see it as being the impediment that we, looking on, might do. They just think they are getting on with it, because they have existed with an impediment of some type—it might be a mobility one, it may be a slight intellectual one, it may be vision impairment; it could be anything—and have dealt with this all of their childhood, all through teenage life, through college and that sort of thing, or whatever.

When they come into the workforce, of course to them the situation is normal and so we do not always know necessarily either; somebody who has deteriorating eyesight, for example, starts off just having a slight sight impairment but ends up with a significant one later, and so we end up with another person with a disability on our books who has been with us for a while and came on when they did not have one. So determining the number is a difficult thing to judge a department's performance on. What I would invite the committee to do is to consider what people are doing about

the way in which they approach their workplaces and encourage people to come forward and offer themselves for employment. You mentioned that and asked whether we were taking a leadership role. Yes, we are.

The BLITS program, for example, is one of those very programs where we get into partnership with private industry as well as the public sector to talk about opportunities for people with a disability. What we would like to be able to do is to say at the end of the day that disability is absolutely no impairment to your employment at all. It is no more important if you happen to have a mobility issue than if you are red-headed or left-handed; it should not make any difference to us. We have a long way to go, but we have taken the lead in that.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. I guess the bottom line in all this is that we all appreciate the difficulties with looking at numbers and so forth, but the reality is that the number of people with disability employed in government is dropping, both in the ACT and federally. That is the anecdotal information that has come back to us. You were at the disability meeting where we were addressed by one of the national people, who put out a plea to the community to have a look at employing more people with disability within government circles.

**Mr Hargreaves:** I think part of the issue that was raised at that particular breakfast—and I think it is a valid point—was that the impetus for people to be proactive about this particular issue had waned a bit. If my memory serves me correctly about that breakfast, the speaker took a bucket of mud and threw it all over the federal government, saying that the states and territories were not blameless but the biggest bucket of all was for the commonwealth government. I put it down to the fact that our sort of commitment to pushing it—and I emphasise the word “pushing”—seems to have waned a bit across the country. I can assure the committee that that does not exist in this department.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. As we have no more questions on disability, we shall take a break for morning tea. Thank you very much to those who have attended.

**Meeting adjourned from 10.31 to 10.48 am.**

**THE CHAIR:** We will now reconvene. Is everyone present?

**Mr Hargreaves:** All are present that need to be present.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. Thank you for your contributions so far. We will now cover housing matters. Minister, the offer is there again, if you want to make an opening statement.

**Mr Hargreaves:** No, I think I covered all of the portfolio responsibilities in the opening statement. I think we will go straight to questions, with your leave.

**THE CHAIR:** That is fine. Questions?

**MS BURCH:** My first question relates to page 73, around the allocation of public housing. Can you comment on how long public housing applicants with the greatest

need have to wait? What is the waiting list for those with a high need? And how many properties are managed by Housing ACT to meet that demand?

**Mr Hargreaves:** Thank you very much for the question, Ms Burch. Can I answer the second part first, because I know that Mr Coe has got a pencil in his hand, probably because his biro has run out of ink, and we want to make sure that he gets these numbers down. I will, after saying it for Hansard, pass this piece of paper on which the information is written to the secretary, so that you do not have to write it all down.

The number for total Housing ACT properties as at 17 February 2009 is 11,565. Non-public housing properties, which is of interest but not part of the question, as at 17 February 2009, is 615. This will be of particular interest to Ms Bresnan. With respect to a breakdown of the 615, the figure for community housing properties—the range of community housing organisations—is 243. There are 55 Disability ACT group homes. Other Disability-related properties with non-government organisation management total 24. With respect to homelessness services, SAAP services, there are 254. Other government agencies, including the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support and mental health, manage 19 properties. The number for a range of NGOs, such as the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre and the Alcohol and Drug Foundation et cetera, is 20. That gives you a snapshot of the total number of properties. Within that figure of 11,565 we have standalone and, of course, multiunit properties.

The last advice I received in terms of the most urgent priority was 57 days. Our target is under three months. So we are quite pleased. That number fluctuates. It has been as high as 69 days and it has been as low as 52 days. There are a number of reasons for that, not least of which is that we fit the property to the person on the list. We are talking about people who have a significant disability—it may be physical, it may be intellectual, it could be a combination, it could be dual diagnosis, it could be a refugee, they could be imminently or actually homeless and in dire circumstances. In that sense, we are quite pleased with that accommodation rate.

With respect to priority housing, the last information I received was that it was at about 430-and-something days, so you are talking about, in round figures, 18 months. For the standard housing, it was 765 days, which is approximately a little bit over two years. That needs to be contrasted with what it was a few years ago, in all of those categories. A wait of four years plus for standard accommodation was quite normal two years ago. To have the wait for standard housing at just over two years is a remarkable thing. So that is the answer to your question. I am happy to expand upon it, if you would like more information.

**MS BRESNAN:** My question relates to pages 14 and 15. It is about the Social Housing and Homelessness Services. It notes that they are working with mainstream services outside the homelessness system to look at having a more holistic approach to people's issues. Could I have a little bit of information about the type of services—looking at things like drugs and alcohol, employment and those sorts of questions.

**Mr Hargreaves:** One of the things that we did when we embarked upon the housing reforms was to address ourselves and our mind-set to the problems of the people who were presenting for accommodation, particularly those who were imminently or actually homeless. Before we started to do this, people were given accommodation

and a series of phone numbers and left to it. We were not as a community, through the government, looking at the applicant and the family as a holistic issue, and saying to ourselves, “What are the reasons; why they are homeless?” It is not going to be effective for us to just give them bricks and mortar. It is not going to work. What happens is that their lives turn to custard again a little while later; they end up leaving the system and then they are back again, through crisis accommodation.

One of the reasons why we will never get down to zero, where you have a person knock on your door, they are homeless and you say, “Okay, come along and we’ll give you this house,” is that we actually interview and talk to these people and say to them, “What are the underlying reasons for your situation?” It may very well be that if, for example, they are fleeing domestic violence—that is another priority area that we have—we will interview these people and look at their case while they are still in the refuge. We will then look at the reasons behind it. There might be gambling issues, drug and alcohol issues; there might be dual diagnosis issues. We have to bring to bear a suite of supports so that the accommodation is the rock upon which the supports are founded. It is not the solution. It is just the foundation of a group of packages that will go to this particular individual or the family.

We look at their preferred location, and usually it is around family supports, it is around medical opportunities or rehabilitation opportunities. If it is, for example, people exiting the judicial system, we have to make sure they are not going back into exactly the same situation they were in before. We have regard to the educational needs of children. Sometimes the medical needs of children are involved as well.

When we look at those particular packages or solutions, some of them are available within the public system. We have arrangements in place with mental health and the police—MOUs which we can kick in. We have partnerships with the drug and alcohol foundation and a whole suite of things. We give people financial counselling, gambling counselling, and anger management if they need it. You will know that quite a lot of those services that I have just articulated are in the non-government sector. That is what we are talking about there, Ms Bresnan. It is about accessing a particular support for a particular family in a particular situation, as part of the process. Once they get allocated the property, those supports are ongoing. It becomes then an essential part of that package. Do you want to add to that, Ms Sheehan?

**Ms Sheehan:** Thank you, minister. The page that you refer to in the annual report is referring to the commonwealth government’s green paper on homelessness, which has since become a white paper called *Finding their way home*. A big theme in that paper is something that we have been picking up on a lot in the ACT, as the minister said, which is that homelessness has many causes, and the cure for homelessness is not simply to apply an existing homelessness service funded under the previous supported accommodation assistance program.

We need to make sure that we link into all of the mainstream services which homeless people have got just as much of an entitlement to access as any other person in the community. It would be very important for us, in addressing homelessness generally, to make sure that homeless people, even though they are in a service funded by the homelessness non-government funding area, also access services that everyone else in the community can access. So if you are in a homelessness service, you should be able

to have a mental health case coordinator who comes to the service and provides you with counselling, or that you go out from the service into the mental health system and receive that support. As the minister said, we do have those MOUs with the mental health system.

Ms Bresnan mentioned access to education and training. Again, that is incredibly important. The ACT government has made a commitment under the national affordable housing agreement to work more closely with mainstream education and training providers to make sure that people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness do have access to education and training opportunities. The annual report also refers to some of the innovative services we have put together here in the ACT, particularly around young people. We have the youth stairwell model for young people, where we have employed youth housing managers inside the public housing system whose job it is to assist young people to maintain their tenancy, so that they do not bounce back into homelessness, and also to see that they re-engage with the training system and the education system. We have also just entered into a contract with the non-government sector to further support young people in re-engaging with the education and training system.

Again, if there is one thing that we all know, it is that people in poverty will find it very hard to sustain their tenancies in the longer term. The best way of getting out of poverty is, of course, to have education and training and ultimately employment. So we are engaging with all of those bits of the general service system to make sure that disadvantaged people have just as much entitlement and just as much access to mainstream services as any other person in the community.

**Mr Hehir:** One of the initiatives that we talked about in the annual report is the couch surfing initiative. Certainly, the intent of that is to keep that young person as stable as possible, to keep them at school, to see that they have appropriate home-like supports so that they do not take that next step and break into the homelessness system and break from the education system. One of the key factors that we are trying to achieve with that couch surfing initiative is that they do maintain contact with a school and that they are supported to continue to attend that school. So that is the sort of specific initiative that looks at that education side of it.

**Ms Sheehan:** The way that we designed that couch surfing project was by talking to young people and to the counsellors in schools to find out what their perception was of the need that they saw in schools. In that way, we developed the service based on what people in the education system were saying young people actually needed.

**Mr Hehir:** One more thing to add about this—

**Ms Sheehan:** We love this service, you can tell!

**Mr Hehir:** It is an interesting area for us. The other thing that we are looking at is HASI, the housing and accommodation support initiative, which was initially trialled in New South Wales as a partnership between New South Wales Health and New South Wales Housing. We have taken some of our mental health colleagues on a trip to the seaside, to Batemans Bay, where there is a HASI model up and running, so that they could see how it works.

So we have been quite extensively engaged with the Department of Health around that particular model and seeing whether we can implement it here in the ACT. We have still got some work to do around that, but we certainly like the initiative. Certainly, the initial pilot outcomes from New South Wales, which I think were referenced in the white paper, were very positive, particularly in terms of the length of sustained tenancy for individuals who have had very erratic stability within their housing tenure before.

**MR COE:** I have a question which relates to the finances, and it can be found on page 173 of volume 2.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Before you go on, Mr Coe, can I ask Mr Hubbard to join us at the table. Mr Hubbard is the man in charge of the money bucket within the department, and he is the most competent person I know to answer your questions.

**MR COE:** It also relates to page 72 of volume 1.

**Mr Hargreaves:** I might get you to repeat the page numbers for Mr Hubbard's benefit.

**MR COE:** Sure: page 72 of volume 1 and page 173 of volume 2.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Okay.

**Mr Hubbard:** I am the Chief Financial Officer for the department and also for Housing ACT.

**MR COE:** This is both a broad question and, hopefully, a specific one as well, if you can give me a specific answer. Note 22 in volume 2, on page 173, refers to allowance for impairment losses. That, in effect, is doubtful debts, isn't it?

**Mr Hubbard:** "Impairment losses" is a range of things. It is more related to the value that we have ascribed to an asset and that during the year it is considered, relative to its book value, to be not as valuable as it is in the book, so we actually impair it in some way. That is usually due to it being a house that has been damaged or things like that.

**MR COE:** What about in relation to rent, according to note 22 there at the top of page 173?

**Mr Hubbard:** I presume that is related to the revenue stream that is coming through—the expected revenue stream coming through for that property. Because it is unable to be let, there is an impairment loss related to that loss of revenue.

**MR COE:** Given that this is a report rather than a budget, that should be a finite figure, which it is. Does that mean that approximately \$1.2 million of rent has been written off, in effect?

**Mr Hubbard:** Has been raised, as you said before, as doubtful debts. At the moment

we are considering that to be doubtful debts.

**MR COE:** Right. If I might leap back to page 72, there were 27 evictions for breach of tenancy, including arrears of rent. Given that it seems we have got—

**Mr Hargreaves:** That is not the only reason for the evictions.

**MR COE:** I understand that. But we have got millions of dollars of rent that is marked down as receivable—1.4 I think I saw elsewhere—and then you have got \$1.2 million which is, in effect, doubtful debt. How much of that do you think could be attributed to those 27 tenancies? If not, are there considerable amounts of debt being carried by existing tenants of Housing ACT?

**Mr Hargreaves:** The short answer to your last question is yes, it is carried over the years. But it is not the same picture that it was a number of years ago. A number of years ago, we did not have quite the same checking regimes on people's arrears or the way they go into arrears. Now we have flags which pop up when people are getting behind in a certain figure—a week's rent or something like that.

The figure of rental arrears that we have at the moment is going to be a decreasing one in terms of when we get satisfaction of those people who have had these arrears. We have plans in place with each individual—individual case management plans—for these people to satisfy their outstanding arrears. We do not, as a rule of thumb, proceed to eviction straightaway. What we do is introduce financial management training and mentoring for these people to try and get them to work their way through it. It is only when it gets to a stage where people are recalcitrant and they have got a significant amount that we proceed.

You need to look at this against a certain background. That background is that, in terms of revenue received from our properties, we get a squeak under 100 per cent as a norm. In some years, we get 103 or 105 per cent of our rent that we have out there returned to the department. That is because of the success of our recovery program. At one point it was about 99.1 per cent or something of that order—or was it 99.9?

**Mr Hubbard:** Last year it was 99.9.

**Mr Hargreaves:** So 99.9 per cent of people—

**MR COE:** Does that mean it is going backwards?

**Mr Hargreaves:** No, not at all. The 99.9 per cent, I remind you, with over 11,500 properties, is better than any private marketplace could boast. Secondly, in the previous year we had certain recovery actions actually bear fruit, and we were able to go over 100 per cent. No, it is not going backwards. If I was presenting the committee with a figure of 92 per cent, yes, that would be it. But remember that 99.9 per cent is as close to 100 per cent as you can possibly get. That means that the rents that we are charging are actually it.

Five or six years ago we were not anywhere near this because we did not have in place those flag regimes which identified people as having the potential to be

significantly in arrears. The opportunity for our current tenants to add to that amount is reducing as we go forward because of the new regime. In terms of the amount owed to us, the rental arrears figure has to be taken into account with the other bits of it. The other bits of it are tenant-responsible maintenance. There is a lot of money in there, and that is very difficult to recover—very difficult to recover. Mr Hehir can give you some more detail on this.

**Mr Hehir:** That is a pretty comprehensive answer, minister. There was 99.9 per cent collected in the 2007-08 financial year. In terms of the debt, the \$1.4 million figure you referred to is identified as current rental debt, so that sits with the existing tenancies rather than with abandoned tenancies. This other figure will be incorporated in the number of abandoned tenancies as well. So the current rental debt figure is the \$1.4 million referred to earlier.

Our experience is that we are often dealing with very poor people who have very little disposable income. There are significant events that can impact in a very detrimental fashion on their finances. While our preference is that they pay us the rent, we are prepared to work with them while ever they show genuineness in working with us. We engage with them through a number of processes, including getting conditional orders from the rental tenancy tribunal as the final step in terms of engagement. Given the vulnerability of these people, and often their families—and often they are single mothers—we believe that as, in a sense, the housing provider of last resort, we should work to keep them in the system. What we do know is that if they go into the homelessness system they cost a lot more.

Having said that, the proviso we have is: “If you don’t engage with us genuinely, we will seek an eviction.” That is a process that has to go through the rental tenancy tribunal and meet all the requirements of the rental tenancies act in order to be effective. Certainly, our approach is: work with people and stay engaged, and you will generally do okay.

You will see in the output measures that there is a requirement that we have as our performance measure that we engage with tenants with over \$500 worth of debt and have them on formal repayment agreements. That was designed to make sure that tenants were very clear that we were serious about it and that it was a sign of good faith by them that they would actually sign those formal agreements and demonstrate that they were going to meet those repayments. Sometimes people fall off that, but as long as they make an attempt to get back on we will continue working with them.

It is a very interesting area. In the past, prior to my time, we have taken quite a strict approach and we have had over 100 evictions in a year. What we found in that process was that they were nearly all in our homelessness services and we were paying a fortune for them. In a sense, we do not tolerate people not paying rent, but our processes are about engaging with people and saying, “We will work with you as long as you are genuine.”

**MR COE:** Thank you.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Just to add to that—

**MR COE:** I want to ask a follow-up question.

**Mr Hargreaves:** I just want to add this; it might even address part of what you are talking about. A great number of our people are on Centrelink benefits. As I say, we need to think about these things in a certain context. Some 86 per cent of our people at the moment are on rebate; 86 per cent of our people are earning so much or so little that they would be expected to pay more than 25 per cent of their disposable income on rent. The opportunities for these people to get nothing in the way of an income are significant.

One of the issues that we have had facing us in the past was that our rent was based on people receiving the Centrelink benefit. We would give them a rebate but for some reason, which we had nothing to do with, people would be breached at Centrelink and they would receive nothing. Then they would find themselves being six weeks in arrears in their rent—and that was if they got it sorted; often it would go longer than that: three or four months. They would be \$90 or \$100 a week in arrears for every week that they were in breach, because Centrelink would pay them nothing.

In a way, that was an artificial figure. What we did to remedy that—with the approval of the Assembly, I might say—was to introduce the regime that if people were breached at Centrelink the amount of rent that we charged them would reduce to \$5 a week. The reason for \$5 is that you need to have something to keep a tenancy agreement ticking over; you cannot have nothing. So it is five bucks. So we did not have these people whose financial lives had turned to custard racking up rental arrears when they had absolutely no chance of an income at all—and no chance for us. They were working with Centrelink; our people would kick in and we would charge them only five bucks. Before that regime kicked in, we had this sort of story going that Mr Hehir has just indicated.

The issue for us is to have sustainable tenancies. When we changed the system from a time-based thing—where you can just wait your three years, as I did, and get yourself a guvvie house—to a needs-based one, we knew that over time our rebated tenants would go to 100 per cent. It will take a little while until those people who are earning enough money to be charged market rent leave the system by either purchase of the home or just *anno domini*, but it will rise eventually to 100 per cent.

None of these people can afford to rent in the private marketplace. As Mr Hehir says, public housing or community housing is housing of last resort. To have them not have a sustainable tenancy is just not an option for us. We recognise that there will be some debt, and we have to manage that to be as low as we possibly can. That is the downside, if you like, of us accepting our social responsibility.

**MR COE:** Thank you, minister.

**THE CHAIR:** You have a supplementary?

**MR COE:** Yes, a supplementary question. You said at the start that the amount of debt is actually decreasing, but other—

**Mr Hargreaves:** For current tenants, yes.

**MR COE:** And in previous years sometimes you had 101, 102 or 103 per cent.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Yes.

**MR COE:** If this year was 99.9 per cent, does that not mean that it is not decreasing at all: it is actually increasing by 0.1 per cent?

**Mr Hargreaves:** No. What it means is that for those figures of current tenancies it is 0.1 per cent which is owed to us, but for those tenants who are no longer in the system and who still owe us money our recovery rate is down on what it was last year.

**MR COE:** Thank you.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Does that make sense?

**MR COE:** Yes, it does.

**THE CHAIR:** What is the status of the 27 evictees, people that have been evicted, as far as future involvement with the department is concerned?

**Mr Hargreaves:** One of the problems that we have, as Mr Hehir was alluding to just a minute ago, is that it becomes a revolving door. This is one of the issues with people encouraging us to take eviction action. When eviction action takes place, a number of things kick in for the person that is being evicted. They wander around town living in cars and things like that and popping up in the homelessness service, getting SAAP; sometimes they go to refuges for a little while; and sometimes they live with people. Some of them even leave town. If they leave town, they are gone as far as we are concerned. But some of the others pop up in a homelessness setting. At that time we have an opportunity to capture them again and try again to rescue them as a human soul with a family. But it does not always work. There is a very small percentage of our tenants—a very, very small percentage of our tenants—that we get to that last resort with. But the answer is that they disappear out of the ACT or we see them again.

**Mr Hehir:** In terms of their status for eligibility for public housing, as long as they meet our other criteria they are eligible to re-apply for public housing.

**THE CHAIR:** So even if they owe money to the department they are still eligible to re-apply for another—

**Mr Hargreaves:** They can re-apply.

**Mr Hehir:** They can re-apply. We go through a process, at the point of housing, of identifying whether we will house them given the debt that is owed. There is a process there at the time when they are likely to be housed where we will look at the debt, look at the cause of the debt and look at the work that has occurred with that individual. For example, if they spent nine months in a medium-term SAAP service having their alcohol and drug issues addressed, they received some financial counselling and they entered into an agreement to repay us and have been making some repayments towards that, we would probably look favourably at it. But if there

is no attempt, no counselling and it was still a relatively recent debt, we would be fairly cynical about it. It is a case-by-case process where we look at the facts and make a decision on that.

**Mr Hargreaves:** There is another aspect to this which I would like the committee to be aware of and to take note of. It is quite easy for us, when we look at the stats in annual reports and in a budget sense, to consider these folks as stats, as numbers, and just say: “There are 27 people and there was \$X million owed. What are you doing about that? Go to eviction,” and all that sort of thing. As Mr Hehir said, these people are eligible; they are, at the end of the day, a community responsibility. Their lives have turned to custard, for one reason or another. But somebody has to look after them, and the whole community has to come together to look after them.

When we consider these applications, as Mr Hehir said, we look at their attempts to help themselves, with our assistance. If that is evident then we will look favourably upon the application. But sometimes it has got an unintended victim in there. It could be the children or the wife in a situation where the main breadwinner—often it is a male, not always—is the one that has racked up all of the debt through a gambling problem, an alcohol and drug problem, whatever, and the family itself finds themselves in trouble. When we consider their application we have to consider the needs of the children in that application.

Not to do so would be an abrogation of our responsibilities and not something I would go down. I have to tell you, I would rather house a family with five little kids in it, knowing that I am going to get another debt, than to pursue them for \$500 worth of debt. That is the approach we take.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. I think we might move on.

**MS BURCH:** We spoke about the number of housing stock across Housing ACT and across the non-government and community sectors. Given the number and complexity of the client base in the housing arrangements, how does the department work through ensuring transparency and accountability in that community housing sector?

**Mr Hargreaves:** Maureen, knock yourself out.

**Ms Sheehan:** Thank you, minister. There are a number of ways that we do ensure accountability and transparency with respect to community housing. The first way is that community housing is funded by the ACT government in two ways. One is with the provision of stock for head leasing, which means that we enter into a lease arrangement with the provider and that lease has conditions. Those conditions have to be abided by. That is a strict legal obligation that the provider has to abide by the terms of the lease. That enables us, as the landlord, to ensure compliance.

The second way is through the funding agreement which we give to community housing providers to manage each tenancy. We provide a benchmark payment of a little over \$1,000 per tenancy to a community housing provider for the costs incurred in managing the tenancy and we have a funding agreement with the community housing provider. They are required to abide by the funding agreement and to provide us with regular reports. Depending upon the provider, it might be

six-monthly reports, quarterly reports or annual reports. Again, we have an accountability measure there. That is the second way in which we do it.

The third way is that we have a requirement that providers either be accredited under the national community housing standards or that they are working towards accreditation. The largest community housing tenancy manager is Havelock Housing Association and it is accredited under the national community housing standards and, for a second period, it has been accredited. Our other community housing providers are all working towards accreditation.

The final way—and this will be the most significant way—is the Legislative Assembly has passed legislation to introduce a regulatory framework for community housing providers and for the not-for-profit housing providers. At the moment, the department is engaged in a consultation phase with community housing providers in order to establish the standards which will sit under the legislation. The legislation for regulation was an amendment to the Housing Assistance Act. We will very soon be entering the process of actually registering those providers under the legislation.

As you can see, by way of agreements on the provisions of the houses themselves, funding agreements for support for the tenancies, standards for administration of the tenancies and the properties and finally through a regulatory framework, we do have quite a robust system for the community housing sector.

**MS BURCH:** Through those systems, would some of those points include what we have spoken about, that revolving door?

**Ms Sheehan:** Absolutely, yes.

**MS BURCH:** You could have evictions. But it is about not jettisoning them; it is about supporting them through. That would be included?

**Ms Sheehan:** Yes, it absolutely is included. In fact, a number of community housing providers actually participate in what we call the SAAP forums, which are really the forums for the homelessness services providers, because they do see themselves as part of that continuum of support for people, from homelessness support in crisis through to the provision of safe, secure, affordable housing, whether it be community housing or public housing.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Ms Sheehan just used a word which I think needs some explanation. This actually shows the difference between the way the ACT does it and the way some of the other states and the Northern Territory do it. We have embraced what we call the housing continuum. The continuum goes from imminent homelessness to homeownership. There is, if you like, a pendulum that can swing between those two points. People will fall off from time to time.

Generally speaking, it is a model or, let us say, a travel through. That continuum could be this: a person becomes imminently homeless and then they become actually homeless. We get hold of them when they are actually or if it comes to our attention that they are imminently, and then we will find a support for them—crisis accommodation of some description.

When we talk about them holistically we say to ourselves, “Can we support these people so that they can go into the private marketplace?” The answer to that is yes. They go off and, hopefully, we never see them again. It may be that they cannot, but it may be that they need to have a special circumstance by which they are most appropriately placed in the community housing sector.

We would see the community housing sector as a transitional thing. It may be for three years but it is still a transitional thing where people will get on their feet with a range of supports given to them. Havelock House itself is an example of that. Again, those people might bounce out into the private sector, into private rental or homeownership, whatever. Hopefully they can.

Then the next step is public housing where we know that this is the housing opportunity or system of last resort. We know that these people cannot and will never be able to exist in the private marketplace unless other really dramatic things come into play.

What we have introduced into the public housing system is a recognition on our part, as a community, that there are people there who will only ever earn \$25,000 a year and that is that and they will have a government house or a government property forever. There are also singles who will have—

**THE CHAIR:** Minister, can I interrupt you for a moment. We are running short of time.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Yes. I am aware of that and I am very nearly at the end of the pendulum.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Mr Hargreaves:** We have singles who get a bed-sit. We do not have too many of those. But we want to try to bounce those people into the private sector as well. That is why we have gone down the aspect of shared equity and all this sort of stuff. The end result for us, the most successful thing for a person that started imminently homeless, is when they buy their own home. That is the continuum that we apply, which now the federal government has picked up on and some of the other states are following.

**MS BRESNAN:** I have got a question in relation to Breaking the Cycle, the homelessness strategy. I understand it was first created in 2003. Is that right? Then it was evaluated in 2007-08.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Yes.

**MS BRESNAN:** That evaluation recommended that there be annual action plans for homelessness. I am wondering whether that is going to be the way the strategy will proceed, or will what is happening federally with the homelessness white paper influence what happens here? I will say too it is good to hear that the housing model is being looked into strongly because it is a very good model.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Thank you for that. A big tick, you beauty!

**Ms Sheehan:** There is an intention to have a homelessness action plan. At the time that the strategy was evaluated and the evaluation came out, the federal government had already announced that they were going to do a green paper and a white paper. So the ACT decided not to pre-empt the outcome of the white paper. Of course, what has come out is a recommendation that there be regional or local and state and territory action plans. It will be the ACT's intention to develop a local action plan. That of course sits very well not only with the recommendations of that strategy but with the agreements that we have signed under the national affordable housing agreement and the national partnership on homelessness.

**MS BRESNAN:** The action plan would be something which is for a number of years, not just an annual thing which is developed?

**Ms Sheehan:** Yes.

**Mr Hargreaves:** You, generally speaking, have a four or 10-year action plan and then it is a rolling program; so we would evaluate how we were after 12 months and you might modify it a bit and you move forward. If you like, you get one, say, of 10 years and then each time it is a different one as you go along the track.

**Ms Sheehan:** And the action plan in the ACT will obviously be different from the plans elsewhere because you need to take action where you find the service gap or circumstances require it so that the service issues that come up in the ACT might not be the ones that come up in other states and territories. For example, we have virtually deinstitutionalised homelessness provision.

I think earlier the minister gave you information that there are over 260 standalone properties that are provided to homelessness service providers. That is so that families and individuals, instead of living on top of each other in a refuge, which obviously is very difficult for people in a crisis situation, can live in standalone properties so that they have got a much better chance of re-establishing their lives and addressing the issues. In terms of our service system, we will not need to take that step of deinstitutionalising homelessness service provision, whereas other states and territories will have to do that.

**MR COE:** Minister, is the department still committed to the sale to tenant scheme?

**Mr Hargreaves:** Yes.

**MR COE:** That term, sale to tenant scheme, is not actually mentioned in the annual report at all.

**Mr Hargreaves:** It is.

**MR COE:** Whereabouts is it?

**Mr Hargreaves:** What? Didn't you read it? I will get a page for you.

**Mr Hehir:** Certainly the sale to tenant scheme exists. Our program actually identifies the parameters for sale to tenants. You will forgive me for not being across the exact detail. It has been some years since it has been in the operational—

**Ms Sheehan:** It is on page 78 and the reference is that the sales of public housing properties included 22 properties sold at auction and 47 properties sold to tenants.

**MR COE:** But there is no specific section about the actual scheme itself?

**Mr Hargreaves:** What do you call that, a bucket of prawns? That talks about the sale of properties to tenants.

**MR COE:** You are a real professional, minister.

**Mr Hargreaves:** I would suggest that you read your report.

**MR COE:** Given the government's commitment to encouraging people to get into the private sector and I note—

**Mr Hargreaves:** No, do not put words in my mouth. I said we want to encourage people into homeownership.

**MR COE:** Okay. I will accept that.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Good. I am pleased.

**MR COE:** You also have the affordable housing action plan and you have got a fairly lengthy document about the policy of sale to tenant scheme. Do you think it warrants quite a good mention in the annual report?

**Mr Hargreaves:** I believe that the entry in the annual report should suffice. I think it is comprehensive enough. If you want additional information, I am happy to give it to you. You have got to understand too, when we talk about sale to tenants opportunities, we have had this scheme in place for some time where people's opportunities to buy the premises that they rent from the government increase. We are happy to see them acquire that property, provided that it fits neatly within our asset management strategy. It is not always the case that someone sitting in a government house will have that house being made available to them for sale but it is quite possible in quite a few instances.

Also, we are embarking on two encouragement models, shall we say. One of them is the examination. We have now the right to ask people to tell us how much they earn. We wish to have a conversation with our tenants who earn over \$80,000 a year and suggest to them that they might like to consider their social responsibility with respect to government housing and either rent privately or buy the house from us.

We believe, in fact, that a figure of \$80,000 a year and above is actually an amount of money to sustain a mortgage on the properties, remembering that a lot of these properties are quite old and a lot of our properties have had, particularly for those

people who are reasonably well off, middle-level public servants, modifications done to them where Housing ACT has given approval to do that. We will give discounts on the market value of that house for some of those modifications people have done. At face value, you might say a house is worth \$330,000. It is quite possible that by the time we are finished we are talking about \$290,000. So a figure of \$80,000 a year can sustain a mortgage of that type.

We have undertaken that we will not force the issue for anybody but we do believe that we have a responsibility to have a conversation with people about that and say to them, “We would like you to give some thought to it, please,” particularly if two people are sitting in a four-bedroom home and therefore they are one bedroom over entitlement.

**MR COE:** Do you have any idea how many people would be earning more than \$80,000 in public housing?

**Mr Hargreaves:** We have not got the full figures in yet. We were allowed to start collecting it from 1 July last year.

**Mr Hehir:** We have been able to actually collect that information. What we are trying to do is do it in one hit. Given that if you have a tax agent you are actually able to put your tax return in up until the end of March, we will write out to tenants at that point and ask them all to provide their information so that we do it in one hit. We did not see the point in having a series of mail-outs to people saying, “We do not have your information.”

**MS BRESNAN:** Can I ask a question?

**MR COE:** Do you think it is likely that we could see an increase in the 47 properties?

**Mr Hargreaves:** Before you go on, I draw your attention—this was part of your original question—to page 82, where we talk about the shared equity scheme. This is another scheme that we are hoping to introduce fairly shortly. The negotiations with the finance institutions are almost finished, I think—or is it done?

**Mr Hehir:** No, it is not.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Not quite done. The idea is, of course, that people earning, we would hope, over \$50,000 a year would be able to get into home ownership. Remember that they only have to own more than 51 per cent of a house and it is absolutely secure forever for them, but we are looking at a figure that is considerably higher than that. The idea is that, for those people who are earning a decent amount of money, we will be encouraging them to buy the house or move on. But we cannot and will not force people out.

**MR COE:** Will we see an increase regarding those 47 properties?

**Mr Hargreaves:** Will we see what?

**MR COE:** Of the 47 properties that were sold to tenants in 2007-08, if there is going

to be this survey done and there are going to be mail-outs, do you think we will be able to see an increase—

**Mr Hargreaves:** We are not going to force anybody to take it up, though.

**MR COE:** Do you think it is likely that we will see an increase?

**Mr Hargreaves:** I hope so.

**Mr Hehir:** Certainly, it is a possibility. We do not have the information about exactly how many tenants are in that income bracket. We have financial information on those people receiving a rebate. They have to provide that information for us to provide the rebate. So for approximately 13 to 14 per cent of our tenancies, we do not have the financial information at this point in time.

**Mr Hargreaves:** It is about 1,500, to give a round figure for it.

**MR COE:** Above \$80,000?

**Mr Hehir:** No, that are market rent.

**Mr Hargreaves:** No, that are not receiving a rebate.

**MR COE:** Sure.

**Mr Hehir:** The actual policy talks about a sustained income as well. One of the things that we will find, particularly with some of the low-skilled workforce, is that they can be in and out of employment. While for one year they may have had a good year and been on a building site, for example, and had a good income, the next year they may have no work. We are actually talking about having a sustained income, so we would be looking, over a two to three-year period, to see that they are able to demonstrate that they have ongoing earning capacity and that it is stable.

It is a similar system that the banks would apply in terms of wanting them to demonstrate that they are able to purchase the property. While we would anticipate that there would be that, there are other factors that will come into play. If there is an increase in unemployment, there may be some tenants who lose less stable employment and therefore are not in a position any longer to purchase when they may have been considering it.

One of the more significant issues has been the cost of housing. Given that we sell at market value, that certainly has an impact on people. We will get a lot more people inquiring about purchasing than those who actually proceed. So what we would anticipate, I suppose, is that there should be an increase. Whether that will actually translate or not will depend on a number of other factors.

**Mr Hargreaves:** There are two things that you need to understand about this. Many of our tenants are public servants—many of them. A lot of them got their houses in the fifties, sixties and seventies. Those people are almost reaching retirement age—the baby boomers. A lot of these people are EL1, EL2 and at SES levels. We do not know,

until we get this information. But a lot of them are on ASO6 stuff or ASO5 stuff. The problem is not what they are on at the moment, but if they take a redundancy or retire, their income goes down significantly. They might drop to as low as \$45,000. So you might have someone who is sitting up on \$90,000 today who, in 12 months time, drops down to \$45,000 or \$50,000 a year. So that is what Mr Hehir is talking about in regard to sustaining the tenancies.

The most dramatic one of them all was that we had a public housing tenant who was earning over \$100,000 a year, who did not contest the last election and who now is not earning \$100,000 a year and was hounded out of her publicly owned property. That was not a sustained income of over \$100,000 a year. We all risk in this game a termination of our employment at an election, and then some of us go down to nothing, because for a period of time after you get out of politics, often you are unemployable, until you get back on. So we need to understand that is what happens. We cannot just say, as people have been encouraging us to do, that if a person earns \$80,000 a year plus, they have to move on, because it cannot happen that way.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Hargreaves. I think Ms Burch wants to ask a question related to that question.

**MS BURCH:** It is just a general question around housing stock. How do you go about identifying areas for increasing your housing stock? How do you buy, build and increase your housing stock?

**Mr Hargreaves:** In the past it sort of emerged—we would get stuff in greenfield and that sort of thing. We do not now. We buy more strategically. It has to do with the needs of the people on the application list. We keep coming back to this: it is needs based. For example, we had a period some years ago—I think it was in 2006; I could be wrong—when we had, I think, six people with a mild intellectual disability. So Housing ACT built purpose-built apartments for these people in Braddon, at a cost of \$385,000 a hit, at a time when you were buying or building a house for just under \$300,000. That was because it had to be tailored to their needs.

So we look at the needs of the people on the list. It might involve education imperatives for their kids, it might be access to medical support—it could be any number of things. We have an asset acquisition program which targets greenfield and it also targets infill, and the infill can involve either the purchase of existing properties to suit a need or the demolition of a property or a couple of properties and then the building of some older persons' units. For example, in Farrer, off Lambrigg Street, opposite the shops, a little bit further up from the shops towards Hawkesbury Crescent, there is a series of about 10—I could be wrong; it might be 12 or it might be eight—townhouses for older people. They are public housing. They were able to be constructed because we bought two older properties, demolished them and built those. So it depends on the asset acquisition program.

**MS BURCH:** When there is an owner-purchased property, you look to replace that within that area?

**Mr Hargreaves:** The committee might be interested to know that under the former commonwealth-state housing agreement—and it will be in the new NAHA—we are

obliged to spend every penny we make from the sale of a property on the acquisition of another one. If, for example, we sell a house in Belconnen, when you take into account modifications and things, we might only get \$290,000 for it, at the end of the day. There is no way that you can build or buy another one for that kind of money, so we are a couple of grand short. On the other hand, if somebody moves out of or passes away in, say, Ainslie or Braddon, we take the decision as to whether we want to re-let that property or sell that property. If we sell that property, we might realise 1.2 of the value of a house that we would purchase somewhere else or build.

So it depends where it is and also on the mix. For example, 8.6 per cent of all dwellings in Canberra are public housing properties. In some suburbs, the figure is as low as four, five or six per cent. In other suburbs it is as high as 30 per cent. So the average across town is about 8.6 per cent. Again, we look at the suburbs that have got 30 per cent and you think, "Is that such a good idea?" but then you look at the needs of the person on the application list who is next on the list, or at the next few, and we try to get those properties into the mix.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. I have a question relating to page 77 and complaints management. It is stated there that members of the community are dealt with promptly and impartially, thus avoiding escalation of issues. Is it feasible to conduct an impartial complaints inquiry from within the department, or is it something that should be looked at by an independent complaints commissioner?

**Mr Hargreaves:** It is possible to do it impartially within the department. We pride ourselves on our complaints mechanism. You have to remember that Housing, along with Territory and Municipal Services and the police, attract quite a number of them. A lot of the complaints we receive are of a minor nature. A lot of them are about maintenance complaints—dripping taps and things like that. They are minor. Some of them are major. Some of them are about staff response, and we are talking about a human service here. It is important that we understand that the resolution of complaints cannot just be punitive. It does not resolve anything.

We take the view that every complaint which is sustained is a training opportunity for us. That is what we do. We effect change in that sense. So I have every confidence that our administrative processes around handling complaints is robust. Mr Hehir can give you a rundown on the actual process, which is a very robust one.

**Mr Hehir:** It is also important to note that there are a number of other mechanisms in terms of complaints. We have a central reception for all correspondence, so that if the complaint is about a housing manager they do not have the opportunity to put it away and have it not be seen. It actually is managed centrally. We have time frames identified within our processes in terms of how we need to acknowledge and then respond to that complaint. Within the department we also have an area that reports directly to the chief executive that actually makes sure that the person making the complaint gets their voice heard by the chief executive. So there is less of an opportunity for filtering. Where people are not satisfied with the response provided by the line area, there is an opportunity within the department for them to say, "No, actually I wasn't happy with that," and the correspondence that we provide to complainants identifies those processes.

There are also a number of statutory bodies that have the ability to take complaints and look at how Housing ACT is responding to those complaints. For example, the Ombudsman and the discrimination commissioner will have a look at complaints relating to Housing ACT to make sure that we are responding appropriately to that. So, in a sense, there are external mechanisms already in place. But by far the most efficient and effective way of dealing with the majority of complaints is to actually have the organisation itself deal with it.

As the minister said, it is an excellent opportunity to identify where things are not going well, where you need to focus training, where you need to see that you are improving service delivery. Certainly, that is the approach that we have taken in setting up that centralised complaints management unit. That is about three or four years old now, in terms of processes. The intent when we set it up was to make sure that we became a learning organisation, and looked at what was not going well and at what we could do in terms of trying to improve our services to make sure that we do that.

So, yes, there are external opportunities for formal complaints where people are not satisfied, but it is very important in terms of complaints management that the organisation itself hears those complaints and attempts to address them.

**Mr Hargreaves:** This, in fact, and quite reasonably, is the difference between Housing ACT and the private rental system. The private rental system really has a responsibility to the owner to realise a return for the owner, and so it should be. We do not have a quarrel with that. Our vision, though, is more about the human services and about support services for people. We look upon it as an organisational issue and an organisational failure if we have too many of these complaints.

But we need to consider that against the background of the nature of complaints that we receive. As I said before—and I will not go over more examples—we have got mechanical ones like maintenance, and then we have ones about response. When we look at the number of complaints, we need to remember that we have in our public housing stock about 30 per cent of all rental accommodation in Canberra. One in every three, nearly, of rental properties in the ACT is administered by Housing ACT. So when we start comparing, in our mind's eye, these sorts of processes, I would ask people to consider that they can add the rest of it together to see whether or not we are performing as well or not. It is a significant amount that we are dealing with.

I think that the numbers of complaints which are delivered to me which are non maintenance related are so few that it leads me to congratulate the department regularly on that sort of stuff. With the maintenance ones, I get quite a lot of those, and you would expect that when you consider that we have the oldest stock in the country. With our 11½ thousand properties, if you have a look at the older stuff, we have the oldest stock, generally speaking, of anywhere in the country, by a long shot. So, naturally, those premises are going to require an enormous amount of maintenance. We spend about \$20 million on planned maintenance and about \$10 million on urgent and responsive maintenance. That is \$30 million a year that we spend on it. People are going to get a bit toey if they do not get their drains fixed or their painting done, but we do the best we can with the old stock.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. Ms Bresnan?

**MS BRESNAN:** I have a question related to Narrabundah caravan park. There is a brief reference made to it on page 230 of volume 2. I could not find a reference to this in the report, and I apologise if it is in there. There was \$600,000 put aside for upgrade of the park. I am wondering what has happened in terms of that money being expended and used.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Mr Chairman, I introduce David Collett to you.

**Mr Collett:** Those funds were identified to address work that was necessary in order to upgrade the road and the water supply, including for fire services, and to carry out some maintenance work of an urgent nature at the caravan park. The expenditure of the moneys waited until the asset was transferred back to the territory in a land swap with the developer that purchased the property. The works have now commenced and should be concluded in the next few months.

**MS BRESNAN:** So that full 600 will be—

**Mr Collett:** Yes.

**MR COE:** I have a question about the Spotless contract, the total facility management contract. I see that an extension has been agreed to. Did that extension go to tender or was there a provision in the contract for that? If it did not go to tender, were other contractors sought to provide the service?

**Mr Hargreaves:** Before Mr Collett answers your question, I need to give you some background on the why. We have just got the one contract. Prior to this current contract, we had two—one north side, one south side sort of thing. We found that the delivery of the service to our tenants was less than satisfactory, having those two contracts.

When we went to the tender process in the beginning, we asked people to tell us how they would do it, in one contract or a split one. We chose then to go to the one contract, which gave us a single point of entry for ourselves and, most importantly, a single point of entry for our tenants wanting to get something done. It also had robust reporting services to us, and we could manage penalties and all the rest of it with one contractor. It was a much better arrangement. So far, we are quite pleased with that arrangement; I would be very loath to go back to the old system. Mr Collett might address the specifics.

**Mr Collett:** The provision to extend the contract was part of the original tender documents and the contract itself with Spotless. The contract was for three years initially, with the option for the territory to exercise, at its discretion, an additional two years and, following that, the potential for another two years. That is not uncommon in large maintenance or service contracts. It was an assessment against the performance over the first three years that resulted in a recommendation to the commissioner for public housing that the terms of the contract be invoked that would allow for the first of those extensions.

**MR COE:** Were other contractors or potential contractors contacted or consulted to see whether they could provide a similar service?

**Mr Hargreaves:** They would not be. This is not a re-tendering process.

**MR COE:** I understand that, but if you are going to—

**Mr Hargreaves:** That is the only time—

**MR COE:** If you are going to renew a contract, a considerable contract—

**Mr Hargreaves:** No, you do not. This is not a renewal contract—

**MR COE:** If you are going to extend—

**Mr Hargreaves:** Mr Coe, I remind you—

**MR COE:** If you are going to implement the extension clause as part of that contract, given that it was a \$33 million contract for three years—

**Mr Hargreaves:** Yes. There is—

**MR COE:** I simply want to know—excuse me.

**Mr Hargreaves:** I am telling you; I am giving you the answer.

**MR COE:** Excuse me, minister.

**Mr Hargreaves:** You have asked a question.

**MR COE:** I have not even asked the question, so I do not know how you can answer.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Do you want an answer or don't you?

**THE CHAIR:** Order!

**MR COE:** The question is—

**Mr Hargreaves:** I will answer the question.

**MR COE:** The question is: given that it is such a substantial contract, was it or would it be appropriate to speak to other potential providers about whether they could provide the same service or a better service?

**Mr Hargreaves:** The answer that you have been given is that there was an assessment done after the first three years as to whether or not an option in the existing contract which was available in the tender documents in the very first place—whether that option would be taken up. The answer to that was: yes, it was; the option would be taken up with the existing contractor. In other words, the three-year arrangement with Spotless would turn into a five-year contract under the terms and conditions of the

original tender documents.

All of the people in Canberra who were pre-qualified were given the opportunity to quote in the first place, knowing that if the person that was awarded the contract had satisfactory performance at the end of three years they could stand a good chance of it just being rolled over for another two years—standard contract process. That is what occurred.

In answer to the question of whether we go and talk to the rest of the people, no. Part of the reason for that is that there is no requirement under the procurement act to do so, there is no requirement in the Financial Management Act to do so and there is no requirement under the existing contract to do so. Further, the arrangements with Spotless were satisfactory according to our assessment.

You might not know this, Mr Coe, but if we ask a contractor to submit a tender it costs them money to do it—a lot of money. Mr Doszpot would know that from his own experience. There is no need to do it. At the conclusion of the second set of options, if it is determined at the end of two years that we will pick up the option of the second one, thus turning the three-year contract into a seven-year one, at the conclusion of that we are obliged to go to the open marketplace. We are not obliged to go to the open marketplace at this moment.

**MR COE:** Has the contract been signed?

**Mr Hargreaves:** It is a rollover.

**MR COE:** Has the—

**Mr Hargreaves:** It is a continuation of the existing contract.

**MR COE:** Has the option to extend the contract—

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Coe, I think the question has been answered.

**MR COE:** Well, no. Has the contract been signed or has—sorry—

**Mr Hargreaves:** Mr Coe, the contract is in force invoking the first of the options available to us.

**MR COE:** And when did that take place? When did you actually say, “We would like to”—

**THE CHAIR:** It is now 12 o’clock and the question has been answered, Mr Coe. The option was—

**MR COE:** To be honest, I do not think it has been, Chair. I would simply like to know when did you—

**MS BURCH:** Mr Coe, excuse me. Mr Coe—

**MR COE:** I have spoken to the chair. When did the extension—

**Mr Hargreaves:** Mr Coe, I have answered your question—

**MR COE:** When was the extension agreed upon?

**Mr Hargreaves:** I have answered your question.

**THE CHAIR:** Order, please!

**MR COE:** When was the extension agreed upon?

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Coe, order! It is now 12 o'clock. This session is concluded. Our next session is with the multicultural affairs people. Thank you all.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Mr Collett, is the contract on budget?

**Mr Collett:** The original contract was on budget.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Mr Coe, you might like to know that all contracts that we have, particularly of this size, are posted on the vacancy thing. You might like to have a look at it.

**THE CHAIR:** I welcome our new attendees. Minister, you have already made a statement.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Absolutement.

**THE CHAIR:** That was quite a few hours ago; I do not know whether you want to refresh any memories on that?

**Mr Hargreaves:** I said that in French, Mr Chairman, to show my multicultural nature.

**THE CHAIR:** As per usual, I extend the courtesy to ask the first question to my colleague Ms Burch.

**MS BURCH:** My question goes to pages 56 and 57 or thereabouts. It is around the ACT Muslim Advisory Council.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Yes.

**MS BURCH:** Through here there is no mention of another broader multicultural council.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Can I at this point indicate something. I indicated earlier on that I will get other information about the formation date. I said in my opening address that the council was created in 2008. That was the reappointment of the existing council in 2008. The actual council was created in December 2005. The 2008 time was to appoint the next couple of years worth.

I will say this again: you need the background for the new committee. I have indicated this to previous committees in the past, so please forgive me if you have read it. When I first became Minister for Multicultural Affairs, there was in existence a Chief Minister's advisory council on multicultural affairs. This was an advisory council to the Chief Minister, not to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs.

When I became the minister, I decided not to continue with that council, for two reasons. The first reason was that they were dysfunctional, had not done a report to government in two years, and were fighting amongst themselves. I felt that they were not representing to government anything at all from the multicultural community so I decided not to reappoint it. I did not abolish it; I just did not reappoint it. I decided not to continue with it.

A second reason was that I felt that there was a need for some action in the multicultural community whereby the government needed to be closer to it and go down and talk to it more. That is when I did the forums, and it resulted in the multicultural summit of 2005.

In that year, though, you may recall all of the vicious discrimination that was given towards the Muslim community, the Islamic community, in other parts of the country. It has persisted since—I have forgotten—about 2006, 2007 or somewhere around there. It started with the Cronulla riots; then we had the issue about north Africans going to New South Wales country towns. It was appalling.

This community was singled out because of its religion. In our Human Rights Act we absolutely outlaw that kind of discrimination. I needed to have, I believed, a connection with the Muslim community. I am a Catholic. What do I know about Islam? Not much. That is what I said to myself. I, the government and the community needed to walk with the Muslim community and stand side by side with them to defeat this discrimination—at least not allow it into the ACT.

So we created it. It was the conduit that I had into the community. They have given me much advice over this period of time on how we can address these things. When there was a little bit of a stoush going on recently around some imam and some mosque activity, the Muslim Advisory Council was very effective in hosing that down, getting on with it and moving forward in a peaceful way.

The reason why I have not bothered to go wider than this—which goes to the heart of the question—is that no other parts of our community have been targeted in this way. For example, we have people discriminating against women who walk down the street dressed head to toe in black with gloves on and shoes so you cannot see their ankles; only parts of their face are showing. We discriminate against them. We do not do it in the ACT, but they do in the rest of the country. If a Catholic nun wearing the same gear walks down the street, we revere her. There is hypocrisy rampant around this.

I needed a vehicle to help me give the Islamic community strength on behalf of the Canberra community, and I did. There is no other community suffering this at the moment. There is no need, therefore, to have another body.

When I looked into the Islamic issue, I found that regionally we have gone through

discrimination according to ethnicity quite regularly over the years, going back to the 1800s with the Chinese massacre at Lambing Flat. We had discrimination against the Greeks and the Italians when they finished building the Snowy hydro. We have had discrimination against the Poms quite frequently over the times. We had discrimination against the boat people—the Vietnamese, the Afghanis and all the rest. But they have come and they have gone and they have not had a residual effect. At the moment, we are still in it.

The one thing that really upset me was the fact that it was religion based. None of the other communities here suffer the discrimination or the difficulties which go so much to their hearts. This is the vehicle that I can use on behalf of the people of Canberra to stand up in front of Australia and say, “It does not happen here. We walk, and we walk tall, with our Muslim community.” I do not think it will be a forever thing. There will come a time when the discrimination stops and there will not be a need for the council, at which time we will disband it.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Hargreaves. My question to the minister is about the multicultural affairs funding and the amount of sponsorship that has been gained since the last annual report. That was the direction in the last annual report: new funding, new sponsorships, would be sought.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Can we get an indication of how much new sponsorship has been gained in that period?

**Mr Hargreaves:** Yes. It is a bit hard. We are still doing the tallying up at the moment on it. You are talking about the festival, I presume. Firstly, the government has indicated an increase in its contribution by \$100,000, which is a 30 per cent increase or thereabouts, which ensured the viability of the festival.

When we were doing this, of course we could not, and nobody could, forecast the economic downturn that would hit business and would hit the club industry, but we felt the effects of it on this festival, where we had the Tradies walk away from a significant level of the sponsorship. We had relied a bit on the Hellenic Club coming good with some. They actually, to their credit, significantly sponsored the Greek Glendi, but they had other additional sponsorship they did not come good with. So we had to cut our cloth, and we did.

There was an article in the paper regarding Opera by the Lake and its connection with the festival. We have said that a lot of the big events are intrinsically linked with the sponsorship of that event. If that sponsorship disappears and no sponsorship replaces it, then it does not go ahead.

What is not understood by the community entirely is that the festival certainly is administered and managed by the Office of Multicultural Affairs, the manager this year being Kabu Okai-Davies. But that is not all of it. A lot of the events that go on at the festival are actually managed by the events themselves. They go and get their sponsorship, they go and put it on and they put it on under the auspices of the festival.

Opera by the Lake was such an event. They did not get the money; it did not go ahead. We tried to get the money from other sources and were unsuccessful. It is a fact of life in that game. It is regrettable. We do everything we can. But it would appear as though some of those events did not go ahead but the actual overall success of the festival was there.

We should also remember that the reason for having the festival in the first place is not so that we can give vent to artistic expression in Canberra. In fact, it is to further the cause of multiculturalism. If there are people out there in the wider artistic community who think that they have a *raison d'être* linked to the festival and they have no way of demonstrating that it has a multicultural outcome, then I say to them, "Your continuation is dependent upon you showing how it is going to work," because I want to see more relevance to multiculturalism and less relevance to people having a party mid-week for their friends.

**THE CHAIR:** As a supplementary—and to answer my question, I guess I am asking for clarification—has the ACT government become the main sponsor of the festival through that \$100,000?

**Mr Hargreaves:** It always was. It had in round numbers, cash money, \$300,000. We are now throwing in an extra \$100,000. Yes, it is the major backer of the festival. It is probably a better way of putting it than "sponsor"; it is a backer of it. What I would like to do over time, though, is get away from it being a government-delivered event to a government partnership event with the community at large. So I would like to see the community take the major run, rather than have the government as the major sponsor—not the person or organisation on which the whole thing depends and revolves around. That way we will know that the community embracement of multiculturalism is as successful as we hope it will be.

**MS BRESNAN:** My question is in relation to the multicultural strategy for 2006 to 2009. I know that over the last few years there has been a review of the way funding is distributed and that it has been through government. Can you let us know how the reforms are progressing and whether you expect the funding will continue to be delivered, I guess, through government rather than through the community?

**Mr Hargreaves:** Okay. I will go back a bit, for your committee's information. Once upon a time, the government used to give out \$70,000, give or take a bit, to the Multicultural Council to deliver services out there to the multicultural community. Essentially, they did absolutely nothing for a couple of years, gave us nothing for the money, and did not engage with the smaller communities such as the Mon community. There are only 200 of them. They did not engage with them. They did not do anything. I had enough of this and thought, "There has to be some relevance; there has to be product for the money that we are putting out there." I said, "No more funding to a peak body. We will have some project funding."

Out of the multicultural summit in 2005, and as a result of the ministerial forums—there were seven of them in 2005 and there were six of them in 2006; that is, 13 all up—came the way in which people wanted us to go. They wanted us to talk about young people, they wanted to talk about social isolation in the aged, they wanted to talk about capacity building and they came up with a series of things that they wanted

done. What we did was: we funded projects. They are outlined in the strategy and in the evaluation of the strategy that I tabled in the Assembly.

What we have got in the way of the 2009-12 strategy is an update on that. What is out there in draft form at the moment is the direction that the community want us to go now, and I am happy to see that. The other thing, of course, on the money was that the community had an opportunity to tell government what they wanted done, through the summit and through the forums.

In the meantime, the sort of peak body started to disintegrate a bit. Then, out of the demise of one, emerged another. The Multicultural Council went away, as far as we were concerned, and the Canberra Multicultural Communities Forum emerged. The CMCF is actually doing a lot of the things that we would expect a peak body to do. An examination of their website over the last two years will show that.

There was—and I need to make this underscored—no intention to de-fund one organisation to fund another. But I knew that if we took those responsibilities to provide services away, out of the ashes of one would come something. It is my intention, over time, to return to the days when the community determined its own priorities and its own way of doing things.

Where we are at at the moment is a combination of core funding and project funding, on our way to total core funding, except that the core funding is given out to an organisation or a group of them. It could, for example, have the CMCF and the MRC come together—or MARS, as it is now—to form one alliance to do that sort of stuff. I do not mind. But that will always be with a series of outcomes that we, on behalf of the community, want. And those outcomes will come out of the multicultural strategy.

We did not tell the communities what we wanted for the money before and then, of course, they did not bother to deliver it, because we did not tell them what we wanted. Over time, over the last couple of years, we have told them and they have delivered. Now we can go back. But it will take us a couple of years to make sure that the organisations we are dealing with are, in a management sense, an administrative sense, viable enough to do it. I will not go back to that regime if the organisations are not viable to pick it up and run with it. The minute I have that confidence, we are off and running.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. The time allocated to this has been eclipsed. We now move on. Mr Manikis, thank you for joining us. We move on to the final part of our agenda. It is the Minister for Ageing. Again, minister, I welcome you.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** You may want to give us a bit more preamble because there are members here who were not here when you spoke originally.

**Mr Hargreaves:** No, that is fine.

**THE CHAIR:** It is up to you.

**Mr Hargreaves:** I recognise the Leader of the Opposition, representing the aged.

**MS BURCH:** Following on a bit on planning, on page 60 there is talk of the strategic plan for positive ageing. The existing plan finishes in 2009. Are you going forward with the strategic plan for positive ageing?

**Mr Hargreaves:** Yes.

**MS BURCH:** How are you going about building that plan up and consulting with the community?

**Mr Hargreaves:** Thanks very much for that. When I took over multicultural affairs and housing, I knew then that I did not know much about it, except from my own little exposure. So we had those summits we talked about earlier today, the housing summits and the multicultural summits. They came out of my having a chat with people in forums and things like that.

While I am not going to commit to having a summit as such on the ageing, I am going back to the original format where we are having the aged forums. There are three of them; they have been advertised. I hope members know about them and would like to come along.

The idea of this is that, in partnership between the Office of Ageing and the Ministerial Council on the Ageing, MACA, there will be developed an action plan, if you like, a strategy going forward, which talks about positive ageing. And it will address a number of issues. Those issues have been articulated to us from the action plans given to us from the Ministerial Council on Ageing. We will put those to the community.

At the end of the day, what I want is a conversation between the government and the council and the community out there, the older community and anyone else that is interested, to tell us where they want us to be in a couple of years time and how we are going to get there. What I do not want to have is an action plan that goes down on the table and actually means nothing. It has got to be crunchy; it is got to address things; and it has got to have timelines and milestones and measurements.

The areas that we are going to put on the table to start with, to see whether or not this is valid, are the health and wellbeing of older Canberrans, including the impacts of disability; housing and accommodation; support services for older people; transport; work and retirement, including ongoing employment opportunities and planning to retire. Interestingly, I worked as a director of rehabilitation and aged care a couple of years before coming here and there is a connection between rehabilitation and aged care. It is called disability. It is the disability that links the two. That is the one thing that gets in the way of people having a positive old age, disability of some type.

I want to have a strategic plan put down which is not a product of the government of the day, it is not a product of an Assembly committee, it is a product of the community and they are telling us what we should be delivering for them.

**MS BRESNAN:** My question is in relation to the social isolation research project. It

notes, on page 7, that the project was completed in September 2008. I wanted to find out a little bit about it in terms of what some of the key aspects of this project looked at. That includes issues like elder abuse, which is a key issue, and isolation.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Can we not use that phrase, please?

**MS BRESNAN:** Sorry.

**Mr Hargreaves:** The reason why I said that, quite seriously—sorry to interrupt you—is that I am aware, as a result of the information given to us from that project, that Indigenous people have a difficulty with the term “elder abuse”. We are actually looking for another one. It may be “older persons”. I am not committed, but I only just found that out in the last couple of days. I thought, “Struth, we should have known about that and we did not.”

**MS BRESNAN:** That is interesting. What are some of the key outcomes or recommendations that came out of the project?

**Mr Hargreaves:** I ask Meredith Whitten to give you the details.

**Ms Whitten:** Thank you for the question. The annual report does say that it anticipates that research will be completed in September. I have to report that in fact we received the final report in January of this year and we are currently briefing the minister on the outcomes of that research. What we will do is build that research into the development of the strategic plan that the minister has just talked about.

**Mr Hargreaves:** I have just proved to you then, Ms Bresnan, that I have actually read it.

**MS BRESNAN:** You did.

**Mr Hargreaves:** That is amazing, isn't it?

**MS BRESNAN:** Can you talk about—you obviously may not be able to—what some of the key issues were that you might have looked at in the project?

**Mr Hargreaves:** These are the same themes that I have just indicated to you—

**MS BRESNAN:** So that is in that plan. Yes.

**Mr Hargreaves:** the health and well-being of older Canberrans, particularly the impacts of disability; housing and accommodation for older people—appropriate accommodation really. One of the things that we are looking at is positive ageing. That is a good idea. I want to see people looking at the relationship between young people and older people. We know that, for example, the southern European people, Pacific Islanders and those in the Asian countries all revere their older people, but the Anglo-Celtic people do not. We have got to find out why that is so and fix it. We need to be able to say to people, “We want you to think of the older citizens as treasures, and not as a liability; stop this granny dumping and start revering people.” I think it goes a lot to that and this report helps us a little bit along that path.

**MS BRESNAN:** Thank you.

**MR SESELJA:** Minister, in relation to aged care, what is the forward outlook in terms of places? How are we looking for the next few years in terms of our ability to service the needs of the ageing population with aged care places?

**Mr Hargreaves:** There are a couple of issues with that. You might recall a couple of years ago—I do not know if you were here; I am not quite sure about the timing, because I think it was around the change of government time—that we had a revolving-door issue. The federal government were responsible for approving aged care places and all of that but the territory was responsible for allocating the land that these are built on. You could not get one without the approval of the other, so nothing happened. We then started doing some land banking to enable people to go to the federal government and say, “I have got an in-principle agreement to do this.” So we have actually got some surplus stuff going on at the moment, but Mr Hehir can attack that for you.

**Mr Hehir:** I am going to pass it. Aged care is the responsibility of the Minister for Health and the land release program is under the special projects for the Chief Minister’s Department.

**MR SESELJA:** When we see talk about a whole of government approach to the framework for ageing, this minister does not have any role in that?

**Mr Hargreaves:** I suppose I should explain, for the understanding of the committee, what the role of the Minister for Ageing is. Unlike the other ministries that have a line responsibility for the delivery of recurrent outcomes, the ministry is responsible for bringing together a range of supports and services which will be available and which can be planned to go forward. What the Chief Minister was anxious to do, and this is a body of work that I have only just commenced so I cannot give you an outcome of it because I have just commenced it, is to bring together a lot of the services and try to talk about it holistically.

The issue you raise about residential places for older people, whether we are talking about hostels, freestanding townhouses, nursing homes or whatever, is linked to economic circumstances, pensions and concessions. Some of the social aspects are linked to education; we want to see people connected with U3A. I want to start bringing these things together in an overarching statement, which is what you will get when we bring forward that statement on the strategy on ageing.

So, if you ask me for the detail of another minister’s portfolio, I cannot answer it for two reasons. The first reason is that it is not my portfolio and I could not be expected to have that level of detail that they have. The second thing is that I am still new to the portfolio and have not got to that bit yet.

**MR SESELJA:** So the overarching statement, the whole of government approach that you will be coordinating—

**Mr Hargreaves:** Producing, yes.

**MR SESELJA:** will cover off on the issue of aged care, aged care places?

**Mr Hargreaves:** To be quite frank with you, I had not given that thought. I had assumed it, the same way you will, and now you can guarantee it.

**MS BURCH:** Membership of the ministerial council on ageing has recently been changed. There is some comment here, and you mentioned in your opening statements, grandparental leave. Do you want to give us a snapshot about the outcomes of these ministerial advisory councils into direct program changes and outcomes?

**Mr Hargreaves:** As I mentioned before, the reason I did not proceed with the Chief Minister's advisory council on multicultural affairs was that it was not doing anything. I do not see it as appropriate that we have advisory councils to ministers that sit around a room and have a good chat and a nice cup of tea. I want to see crunchy action come out of these things—direction, and ongoing recurrent involvement with the subject matter—and I am pleased to advise this committee that Alan Hodges has been appointed the chair of MACA and Marion Reilly the deputy chair. I had a meeting with them yesterday. I will be meeting with the whole council this afternoon to articulate to them what sort of work plan I want to see them take on and what responsibilities they will carry going forward.

When it comes to the delivery of the strategy that we were talking about, that will be informed by these ageing forums that we are taking on, and I want the department's Office for Ageing to work significantly in partnership with the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing to conduct those forums, to deliver the outcome from those forums and to monitor the milestones along the way so that the report that they give to me on the activities in a year I can table in the Assembly. I do not want what often has happened with commonwealth advisory councils: they give somebody a couple of bucks, give them a cup of tea and that is the end of it; you never see them again. That does not happen with any of the councils that I have had advising me.

**MR SESELJA:** So just going back to your initial statement on that, minister, you were suggesting that some of the way that some of these advisory councils have operated in the past has not provided much benefit?

**Mr Hargreaves:** In other jurisdictions, not here—not the ones under Labor anyway, Mr Seselja.

**MR SESELJA:** So what is being done differently with this one? Could you just fill it out for us? I think you mentioned who was the chair.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Alan Hodges.

**MR SESELJA:** Who are the other members?

**Mr Hargreaves:** There are about 11 of them, so I cannot run through all the names.

**MR SESELJA:** Could you take that on notice.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Not a problem; we will get the list of names for the committee, but Marion Reilly is the deputy chair. I can respond to you with respect to the councils that I have had dealings with and the ones that I have. The difference between the way I do things and the way other people in other jurisdictions have dealt with them is that I have a direct relationship with those councils and a regular one, and I have an open door policy for the chair to come and talk to me. They do not have to go through anybody; they just ring me up if they feel like it.

I have also given them the riding instructions; in other words, they have not been given a job and then told to go away and try and work out what they are supposed to do. That was a hallmark of advisory councils before we came to government, and I am not being critical of anybody in this particular sense; it has always been the case. Some councils have been particularly efficacious and some councils have not. But under my watch none of them are redundant. I will table the names.

**MR SESELJA:** That is fine.

**THE CHAIR:** We will take one more question if there are any more questions.

**MR SESELJA:** Sorry, because I was not here earlier I do not know whether the reciprocal transport concessions around the country for our older Canberrans comes under simply the transport portfolio, but as it is an ageing issue as well I just wanted an update on it, because it is mentioned in the annual report.

**Mr Hargreaves:** It is up and running.

**MR SESELJA:** So it is across the country, every jurisdiction?

**Mr Hargreaves:** I think there are two that are not—Queensland and—

**Ms Whitten:** Queensland and Western Australia.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Yes, those two are still not on board.

**MR SESELJA:** They are dragging the chain, are they, Queensland and Western Australia? So where are we up to with them? Are we going to push them along?

**Mr Hargreaves:** We will be doing that in the ministerial council to do with ageing. That is where the states that are dragging the chain usually get a bit of a tickle along by colleagues. I can tell you that it is much more important for me that we have reciprocation with New South Wales than anybody, and I am delighted that that is there. I know that a lot of our people enjoy the sunny floods of Queensland from time to time and would like to have their maritime concessions honoured when they go to Queensland, and we will be pushing that forward, but sometimes with some of these larger states it takes a bit of time and a little bit of horse trading.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, minister. The time has expired. I understand there will be some questions on notice from Ms Bresnan; is that correct?

**MS BRESNAN:** Possibly.

**Mr Hargreaves:** Okay. Before you close the business and before Hansard finishes, Mr Chairman, can I express my appreciation to the officers of my department, to all segments of my department. They, as usual, have done a fantastic job. Their support over the 12 months to me has been sensational and I do believe that they lead the way in the production of annual reports.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, minister, and thank you to your staff.

**Mr Hargreaves:** I also congratulate you, Mr Chairman, on the conduct of the committee hearing. This is my fifth year in doing this sort of thing and I found it a very productive session. Thank you very much for it.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. The meeting is now adjourned.

**The committee adjourned at 12.32 pm.**