



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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

(Reference: Annual and financial reports 2008-09)

Members:

**MR S DOSZPOT (The Chair)
MS A BRESNAN (The Deputy Chair)
MS M PORTER**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

WEDNESDAY, 16 DECEMBER 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

Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services56, 88, 103

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Amended 21 January 2009

The committee met at 8.50 am.

Appearances:

Burch, Ms Joy, Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Minister for Children and Young People, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Women

Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

Hehir, Mr Martin, Chief Executive

Ford, Ms Lois, Executive Director, Disability ACT

Whale, Mr Andrew, Director, Disability ACT

Power, Ms Leanne, Director, Policy Planning and Business Support, Disability ACT

Hayes, Ms Roslyn, Senior Manager, Therapy ACT

Collett, Mr David, Director, Asset Management

Whitten, Mrs Meredith, Senior Director, Governance, Advocacy and Community Policy

THE CHAIR: Good morning, minister, and everyone; welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Health, Community and Social Services inquiry into the 2008-09 annual and financial reports of the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services. Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement?

Ms Burch: Yes, please. I want to thank the committee for the opportunity this morning to discuss the department's work in three areas of human services—disability, therapy and community services. By way of introduction, I will provide a brief overview of each.

On disability services, the year 2008-09 saw the continued growth in services and supports to people with a disability and their families, with a clear focus on flexible and adaptive assistance and collaboration. The shift continues away from a one-size-fits-all approach to a range of more planned, individually focused and holistic outcomes for individuals and their families.

Since 2002-03, there have been considerable increases across all of our output indicators. Funding for services to people with a disability has increased by 61 per cent; accommodation places increased by 31 per cent; community support places by 55 per cent; community access hours by 70 per cent; centre-based respite nights by 11 per cent and flexible respite by 96 per cent. During this period, 2002-03 to 2009-10, there was an increase from \$14 million to over \$26 million.

In addition, the number of individual support packages funded through Disability ACT has almost doubled. Members may be aware that the ACT, in national terms, has the highest percentage of people with core profound disability. We also have a high percentage of people with core profound activity limitations in the government accommodation services compared to the national average. We recently launched the second future directions policy framework. This is a very important document and builds on four strategic directions set down in the first future directions document in 2004.

In regard to community inclusions, we have seen the Business Leaders Innovative Thoughts and Solutions Advisory Board—I prefer the shorter name of BLITS—formalised to promote initiatives that value people with a disability. BLITS hosted three successful events in 2008-09, one being the launch of the champions program, another the industry mini-roundtable and the other being the Chief Minister's inclusion awards. In partnership with BLITS, Disability ACT developed and launched the ACT companion card. This card enables people with a disability who require a carer to access activities and events to pay only the cost of their own ticket and not that of their carer.

Earlier this month, it was my pleasure to attend a number of events to celebrate the 2009 International Day of People with a Disability. Members will also be aware that in January 2009 the national disability agreement came into effect, replacing the commonwealth-state-territory disability agreement. Under this new arrangement, the ACT has negotiated commonwealth funding of \$15.23 million over five years.

The financial year saw a particular focus on achieving sustainable long-term housing and support options for people with a disability. It is heartening that housing options for people with a disability continue to expand, including the commencement of the living in networked communities program in the south of Canberra.

Accommodation options for young Canberrans who live in residential aged care have also been expanded. In partnership with Housing ACT, Disability ACT is constructing a purpose-built property that will house four people aged under 50 who are in or at risk of entering residential aged care.

In 2009, Disability ACT, Housing ACT and ACT Health worked under a joint partnership to assist people with a disability who are medically fit for discharge from hospital to transition back into the community. Working on an individual basis means that it may take a little longer to find the right option, but by Christmas five of the eight people will have transitioned back into long-term community accommodation. This is an excellent outcome for these people, and I can assure you that Disability ACT is absolutely committed to working with the remaining three to find suitable, but more importantly sustainable, accommodation options.

I would like to talk briefly now about therapy services. Therapy ACT is highly valued in the community. Last year, the service saw more than 4½ thousand people, including 4,000 children. It was also very pleasing that Therapy ACT was able to attract and retain professional staff. In the 2008 new year, it was fully staffed. Strategies to assist to reduce waiting lists have been implemented. These include clinic sessions and increased group programs for common problem areas, as well as further development of early intervention strategies such as “Is your toddler talking?” Increased funding has been allocated to Therapy ACT to employ eight additional speech therapists over the next two years, as well as three additional occupational therapists.

Members will know that the right equipment can make an enormous difference to children and young people with a disability. It can help them to develop physically and prevent the development of later problems. This leads me to the children and

young people's equipment long loan service, which was officially launched in August this year, with the first loans commencing three months earlier. Families who have children with a physical disability are finding this service invaluable.

Finally, I would like to refer to my portfolio's responsibilities for community services. The ACT government funds a range of programs that provide direct benefits to disadvantaged Canberrans, including 822,000 in the annual year for financial and material assistance. In December 2008, this government responded to the economic downturn by injecting \$3.5 million into services already provided by community organisations. The additional funds were distributed through a broad range of agencies, including ACT-funded emergency relief providers, the six regional community services and other providers of personal support programs.

The ACT concessions program is another mechanism that provides direct benefit financially to disadvantaged Canberrans. Concessions cover gas, electricity, water and sewerage, general rates, transport, motor vehicle registration, drivers licence and spectacles. In 2008-09, the government responded to an identified inequity in the cost of bus travel for residents of Oaks Estate by negotiating a subsidised fare with the Queanbeyan-based Deane's Buslines. Residents of Oaks Estate now pay the same as any other resident in the ACT to travel on public buses.

During the reporting period, the department worked with the non-government sector to develop the landmark Long Service Leave (Community Sector) Amendment Bill 2009, which was passed in the Legislative Assembly on 12 November. This bill provides amendments and a schedule specific to the community sector to establish a mandatory portable long service leave scheme for workers and employer organisations. The primary objective of the scheme is to enhance employment conditions for the sector's workforce. In doing so, the government is helping to ensure the sector's vital role in providing assistance to our most vulnerable community members. The scheme is managed by the Long Service Leave Authority and will commence on 1 July 2010.

I would like to thank the committee for giving me these few minutes to make those comments and for the rest of the morning to explore some of the activities carried out by the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services. I would like to briefly thank my predecessors, Minister Gallagher and former minister John Hargreaves, for their work across these portfolios. I thank members of my office who are here. At the end of the day sometimes some of them are not here, so thank you for your work in my transition and for the work over this year. I am happy, as I am sure my officers are, to answer questions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. May I, on behalf of the committee, thank you for your brevity and for the concise nature of your introduction.

Ms Burch: There is so much good news to cover, Steve; it is an effort to keep it short.

THE CHAIR: That was an honest compliment. You have sat on this side of the table and you have sat through other preambles, so thank you.

Can I take you to page 11 of volume 1 of the annual report, and the paragraph

detailing implementation of the recommendations in the Auditor-General's performance audit on the management of respite care services. Which of the recommendations of the Auditor-General's report into respite services are you looking at and is there a time line to have these changes implemented? There are 14 recommendations; we are trying to get some understanding of which ones you are looking at.

Ms Burch: While I am happy to talk, some of the detail is before my time, so I will go to officials. Mr Hehir, do you have some comments?

Mr Hehir: Yes. At a previous committee hearing we had a brief discussion around the Auditor-General's report. The substance of those 14 recommendations, from memory, was largely accepted and the implementation of a number of the recommendations had commenced prior to the finalisation of the report. From my recollection, there was nothing in the report that we completely disagreed with and, in large part, we are working to implement; my understanding is that we are a significant way down that process. I might ask Ms Power to respond to the detail of that; she is managing that process.

Ms Power: There were 14 recommendations from the Auditor-General's report. As Mr Hehir stated, we had a number of those recommendations already underway, and the auditor noted that in her report. In particular, recommendations around the development and implementation of the client feedback system have been completed, and that is well operational. The other recommendations are all substantially underway, with a number pretty close to being completed. Indeed, our time frames that we have identified for the Auditor-General are by the end of this calendar year.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

Ms Burch: Can I reiterate the significant increase in flexible respite hours and overnight respite hours over the last couple of annual report reporting periods.

MS BRESNAN: I have got a follow-up question on that. A recommendation that I am particularly interested in is recommendation 6, which is about standardised records management. I also note there have been some concerns about the use of RiskMan—that being used properly. I appreciate that the client feedback system is being implemented but it would be good to get an update on those two specific recommendations. The other one was recommendation 11, around the independent reviews being conducted of non-government respite providers. There was an incident in Queanbeyan where that happened. I know that is being investigated at the moment by New South Wales. It would be good to get updates on those three specific ones because they were highlighted in the report.

Ms Power: I will take the client feedback system question first and then the risk management and the last one. As I mentioned, with the client feedback system, the Auditor-General noted that we were in the process of developing that when the audit was being undertaken. Because we were doing a lot of the activities that the Auditor-General wrote about in her report, we are substantially in front in terms of being able to implement a lot of those by the end of the year.

In terms of the client feedback system, we were in a process of being ready to trial that while the Auditor-General had her audit underway. That did go through a period of trial. Because it is a system that is linked to RiskMan as a system process, we went through a trial period with that and made improvements to the way records were managed through that system.

We then launched that, if you like, and wrote to about 300 or so of our stakeholders, letting families, individuals and service providers know that that system was up and running, how to use it and how to provide feedback, both positive feedback and suggestions for improvements to services. We have a senior manager in charge of that system. They do regular reports back on how the system is working and whether the time lines are being met for responses.

In terms of how we are going with the feedback through that process, we have had quite a number of positive pieces of feedback through the client feedback system and our complaints processes are met within the time period specified by the process. So there is an immediate response to the person who raises the comment or the feedback and then there is a process for whether that needs to be escalated or dealt with through that system.

MS BRESNAN: Is the client feedback linked to the standardised record management? Is RiskMan linked to all of those processes?

Ms Power: It is a module of RiskMan. It is held within a module of RiskMan, so it is linked to the risk management process. For example, there might be a number of complaints that come through the process on a similar issue. There is then a process of picking that up in the risk management framework.

MS BRESNAN: So the standardised records management is going along as well—that recommendation?

Ms Power: That is right. That is also to do with client records.

MS BRESNAN: Yes, I understand that. So the client feedback is linked to all of those processes?

Ms Power: That is right.

MS BRESNAN: The other one is about the reviews of non-government respite providers. There was a suggestion by the Auditor-General that they be independently reviewed.

Ms Power: We do undertake a number of independent reviews of respite providers, as part of the quality framework that we have in place with NGOs. The non-government organisations also undertake an annual baseline self-assessment themselves, as part of the compliance process. They do both qualitative and quantitative reports. So that is a financial acquittal and acquittals against the outputs that they are required to provide under the contract. As part of that process, we have a number of independent reports that we do each year. We try to look at five NGOs each year as part of that process.

MS BRESNAN: With respect to non-government providers, I am thinking particularly of those that might go out to other providers themselves, and there is that sort of chain process going on. Will all of those providers be independently accredited?

Mr Hehir: Part of that conversation is a broader conversation than just this audit. You will be aware that the national disability framework includes the requirement for an accreditation process to be undertaken. So the intent is that, yes, they would be. The details of that still have not been finalised—

Ms Power: No, that is right.

Mr Hehir: and sorted out, because there are different quality accreditation systems in operation in other jurisdictions across Australia. So there is some of that detail there. Certainly, my understanding of that process is that there is the intent that all disability services providers would be accredited.

MS BRESNAN: When do you expect that process will occur?

Mr Hehir: I might ask Leanne to talk about the detail of that, but I would be surprised if the full system was rolled out within 18 months.

Ms Power: One of the reforms under the national disability agreement is around establishing a national quality framework. One of the key elements of that is a third party accreditation system. So the work is being done across jurisdictions around the type of accreditation system that would come into place. The work plan for that has work on that framework going on over the next 12 to 18 months.

MS BRESNAN: I understand that you said you aim to do five organisations annually. In the meantime are we making sure that we do not have similar situations to incidents that have happened before?

Ms Ford: The other part of this, and we have done the mapping, is that many of our respite providers—bearing in mind that Disability ACT provides centre-based respite—and the majority, outside of Carers ACT, who provide a small discrete centred-based respite for all people with disability, including mental health, are also in receipt of the home and community care funding through the commonwealth. There is a requirement through that process of meeting standards and meeting what is not a prequalification but an accreditation framework. So we have a number of ways of monitoring across the service.

We are also, through another process, working with the peak bodies—significant regional community service providers, Procurement Solutions and the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services. We are starting to develop the framework for a prequalification for community providers. The initial discussions around that are not so much what the framework would look like but what would need to be the elements of a prequalification framework that largely took care of the compliance issues. As you would be aware, any accreditation framework only looks at the absolute minimum; it does not look at maximum performance. This is to ensure that providers meet the minimum compliance so we can really focus on the quality

improvement frameworks. There seems to be a lot of support for that approach.

Mr Hehir: As part of the national discussions in a number of areas there is a very strong move towards a responsive regulation approach where you try and encourage through your regulation—and that would include these accreditation processes—high performance within organisations. You have less risk management to do around organisations because you are comfortable about where they are to start with and that they have got their processes up to high levels. Certainly, that is the philosophy that is being pushed both in our own service when looking at this issue and also nationally in terms of trying to reduce the amount of time that governments spend monitoring service providers.

MS PORTER: I had a couple of things that I wanted to pick up, minister, from your introductory remarks—and you have just mentioned it again—about flexible respite. Can you give us a bit more information about what that actually means in terms of service delivery? Once that is answered, can you give me a little more information about the BLITS champion program? Is there anything else about BLITS that you would like to inform the committee about?

Ms Burch: Flexible respite is driven purely around meeting the needs of the person, the individual client. It is about making sure that the options are there to suit their own care, the care of their families and their different needs. I think Lois is probably best placed to speak on the flexibility and the arrangements that we have in place across all agencies.

Ms Ford: Flexible respite needs to be seen under the broadest possible heading of wanting to ensure that families and individuals have the biggest range of support options available to them. You will hear the term “respite effect”, which also comes under that broad heading of flexible respite. Respite and respite effect can be anything from community access activities—which may be social, recreational, vocational activities where a person is able to engage in a broad range of different activities and environments—through to agreed planned time when that individual will be able to be away from home or the family may go on holiday, as an example, and support will go into the home.

Within our own services, in 2006 we completely changed the structure. Between 2005 and 2006 we started a program of changing the structure of our services. I will use that context to describe the range of flexible supports. We now provide centre-based respite, which can be anything from a day to five days. People book in, they plan, they know that that time is coming up and they use it. We provide after-school support. It may be just for a couple of hours. From time to time a person may need some weekend support during the day. Instead of saying, “This is what you get; this is what you agreed and you’ll get it every six weeks,” people now get to choose from a menu of different ways that the support can be delivered.

Additionally, it may well be a case of going into a person’s home and providing some support within their home for a limited number of hours, for 24 hours, or it may be, from time to time, a person being able to go away on holiday and their support worker going with them and those hours being provided. There is a very broad range. Then there are the funding models that go with that, which can be through block funding

arrangements where the hours are paid within a contract and the agency itself determines how many hours for how much.

There is also individual support packaging where people are able to determine for themselves how they might like to use those hours or those dollars. That would be auspiced through an agency. We are now moving into the area of direct grants where people can get a direct grant straight into their own bank account and they determine for themselves how they need to best use those dollars. These all come under the heading of flexible respite.

MS PORTER: The ISPs doubled in this—

Ms Ford: ISPs since 2003 have doubled—the number of people who now are in receipt of an individual support package.

MS PORTER: The other question I asked, minister, was around the BLITS program, in particular the champions.

Ms Burch: The BLITS program is a great way to have leaders in the community come forward and work with those with a disability. It involves business, the community and government, so it is a great innovation. Again, Lois, can you talk about the champions?

Ms Ford: Certainly; I am really happy to talk around the champions. In 2008 when we were working with business people through BLITS we said, “Wouldn’t it be great if we could get business leaders from across the ACT community to engage more positively with us and in a more high profile way?” They went away and, using a lot of their contacts and also some of the people that the BLITS board had identified as being desirable to have associated with disability, came back with a very positive yes—from everybody they asked, I might add. All-up we have nine champions, three of whom are national champions and seven of whom are local champions.

Those champions came on board because they were asked. We said it would be good to have a number of champions who knew nothing about disability, because BLITS focuses on raising awareness and engaging with people who know nothing about disability and then getting them involved in activities that promote participation and respect for people’s disability across the community. Those champions came on board very willingly.

The next part of the program was to approach each of them and ask them if over the next two years—possibly it will be three because of the number of champions we have—they would host what we call industry mini-roundtables. That has been extremely successful. We have had two. We have had one tourism industry roundtable and one sports industry roundtable. The invited participants to that are generally people who have very little to do with disability but are at the chief executive level and have an enormous amount of influence.

At those roundtables we have a series of questions that we work through with the champions. As the chair of BLITS and the executive officer, I sit right back on this and leave it to the champions to host and do their work. The outcome has been that

they have suggested a number of initiatives to us which we will work on over the next year. They have also taken away a number of initiatives that they will do in their own industry.

An example would be the hospitality industry, in particular hotels. That was one of the areas that sparked interest when we talked about people with disability and their spending habits on holiday, which came as a big surprise. We provide a lot of information around the benefits, more as a customer but certainly as an employee and a supplier. They were very keen then to start looking at how they might better market to people with disability and also look at what opportunities may come up in future when there is a disability event in the ACT—when we can connect back with them to ensure that we highlight the accessibility of our tourism.

Those are the sorts of initiatives that are within the champion programs. Alongside that, there have been a lot of personal connections, which happens. Once people become interested in disability they usually do not lose interest in disability. Many connections and discrete employment opportunities have come out of that. Some traineeships have also come out of that, as well as a range of other disability-friendly initiatives within their own workplace. It has been a very successful program. It will continue to build and have a high degree of success.

As well as our business champions, in the new year we will be looking at having sports champions. Hamish MacDonald, the Australian Olympic gold paralympian, is on the board. He has been a dynamo since he arrived. He is really keen to establish a BLITS sports champion. In another couple of years we will look at arts champions as well.

Ms Burch: Just following on from BLITS, I just read the—

THE CHAIR: Sorry, can I just ask a supplementary on that while we are on it? How many business champions do you have? Can you give us any details on that? Is it possible to profile some of these people?

Ms Ford: Sure. Would you like me to do that? We have got it on our website, but I am very happy to run through the list of people.

THE CHAIR: It would be good to give these people recognition, I would say.

Ms Ford: Colin Adrian, the Chief Executive of CIT, as you know, is resigning. There is Dougie Edwards from Prime and Eoghan O’Byrne.

Ms Burch: I wanted to share with Ms Porter that there was a wonderful breakfast that Ms Bresnan and Mr Doszpot had at the Botanical Gardens. In the inclusion awards there is that wonderful story about Chris—organisations and companies employing people with a disability. It is a wonderful story. It is good to have these awards. I agree, Mr Doszpot, that we should recognise these champions.

THE CHAIR: I fully applaud all the people who have taken the time to contribute their services. Many of these people are obviously cropping up in a lot of other areas as well. I think we are asking the same people to get involved in a lot of things. Quite

a few people who are involved in business have disabilities and I think they would make very good candidates for this. A number of Olympic sportsmen come to mind. I hope you will look at including some of those as well.

Ms Ford: We have tried to engage as much as possible with people in business, sports and the arts who have a disability. I know many of them. We have invited some of them to join the board and they have gracefully declined. Many people with a disability in business in particular—not quite so much in sports and the arts—are already doing a lot of work around raising the profile and we appreciate that. We continue to have a relationship with them; we continue to engage and look at opportunities, but many of them are already profiling disability in their own way. I would say to the committee that if anybody does know people in business, sports and arts with a disability who would like to engage with BLITS we would welcome the opportunity to meet with them.

THE CHAIR: That was going to be my next question. Do you take recommendations or nominations, as such?

Ms Ford: We do, when there is a membership position on the board. There are two vacancies at the moment. We have had several recommendations, but we could still take more. More importantly, we like to know who is out there, particularly in business, with a disability—or in sport or arts—who would be interested in engaging with us. The board is not the only way that BLITS engages. In fact, the board is quite secondary to the other ways we do that. We would be really keen to hear.

Ms Burch: I look forward to a letter from you, Mr Doszpot, with suggestions of some names from the community.

THE CHAIR: I have two particular names, but I would like to check with the people concerned before we make them public. I interrupted you; was that what you wanted to talk about?

Ms Burch: I was just going to talk around that. Whilst there is BLITS and the champions, we recognise the other champions across the community and the organisations and groups that are recognised through the Chief Minister's awards. The breakfast was a great example. The mpowerdome is not far from where I live. It is around the champions throughout the community as well.

THE CHAIR: Just on the breakfast, I asked a question in question time about accessibility problems. I had complimented the department on the morning of the breakfast for what took place and I stand by that compliment. I received a number of complaints afterwards about people with wheelchairs who did not feel comfortable about attending because of the nature of the incline of the parking areas. I simply wanted to make sure that I brought their concerns to the department's attention for future consideration.

Ms Ford: Thank you, Mr Doszpot. We were aware that there would be some people who would be disinclined to do the walk for that reason. We had people available to assist them for anybody that wanted to. Over 100 people attended the walk. I think there were over 10 different events on the day of the international day of disability.

We fund a large number of those events. We like to fund a full range because we bear in mind what might suit one group does not suit another group and we do not want to limit the range of activities that are available to all people with a disability. We also encourage the general community to participate as well, so we do take on board the feedback. However, we need to ensure that we do not marginalise people's disabilities simply because some people may not be able to attend some events. We try to get as broad a range as we can to appeal to as many people as we possibly can, both the community and people with disabilities.

THE CHAIR: Without trying to put too fine a point on it, some people were marginalised by the location. That is all I am trying to say.

Ms Ford: Absolutely. That happens with all events and we accept that.

THE CHAIR: If I can take you back to page 11 on the launch and implementation of the ACT companion card. What has been the take-up of the companion card so far?

Ms Burch: The companion card was launched. It is part of a national approach. It is good to see that the country is getting behind full-time carers of people with disabilities. Andrew Whale can provide some detailed response about the uptake and where we are now.

Mr Whale: Thank you, minister. For the companion card as far as individuals are concerned, we have had 300 people seek expressions of interest and we have sent them expression of interest packs. We have now processed almost 100 of those. The other 200 have not eventuated yet but we are working with those. So at the moment we have got about 100 people who are registered with a companion card.

In respect of affiliates, we are approaching the 50 mark of businesses in the ACT that have signed on as affiliates to the program. Again, that is linked to the national scheme, so once you have a companion card from the ACT you can use that card, which is identical in appearance apart from a territory logo on the back, in any other state of territory. The Northern Territory came on board about a month ago so it is now a fully national scheme and there was a further launch by the federal parliamentary secretary, Bill Shorten, of that national scheme about a week ago, on the International Day of People with Disability, down in Melbourne.

THE CHAIR: With the businesses coming on board, and you say it is becoming a national scheme, is there an opportunity for Canberra companies that are not involved at the moment to be become involved?

Mr Whale: Absolutely. We are approaching businesses almost on a weekly basis to become affiliates of the scheme. I do not know if it was actually triggered from the ACT but there is now more work being done by the federal government for national organisations such as Greater Union. But, for example, the Dendy, which is a national organisation, really came out of the ACT push to become a national affiliate; they were one of the first ones that signed up here.

We had a deliberate focus initially on major businesses and institutions in the ACT—places like Brumbies, Questacon and the art gallery—so that there were flagships that

we could talk about and demonstrate to other businesses around the ACT that it is very accessible and it is good for business to become members of the companion card. We are stretching that out further and further—as I said, we have now got about 50—and we are very confident, now that the scheme is up and running and people are seeing how it works and are understanding a little bit better that it is a different concept from a concession scheme, that the take-up of affiliates will be even greater over the next 12 months.

MS BRESNAN: My question is in relation to the taxi subsidy scheme which is briefly mentioned on page 28. I am hoping to get a bit of information about the amount that is spent on the taxi subsidy scheme and how that has changed over the last couple of years. I was looking at what is spent on it now as opposed to what was spent on it a couple of years ago. Also in relation to this there is the review which is happening into taxis overall which will include WATs. I was just wondering if there is any involvement from DHCS in the review?

Mr Hehir: I might take on notice the difference in the expenditure—and I assume you would like it over a couple of years—if that is all right.

MS BRESNAN: Yes.

Mr Hehir: The actual expenditure I will need to check because it has moved—and this is important in terms of the processes—from a departmental appropriation, which meant we had a flat-line budget for it, to being part of our territorial funding stream, which means that it is an entitlement, so there is no cap on the total level of funding. If you are entitled to it, you are entitled to a particular amount of subsidy. The people who are eligible for that can ask for it. Previously, we had a budget and if more people asked for it we would be having problems in terms of managing our budget. It is now being moved to the point where if people are entitled to it they get it. We do not have any problem with the budget, because it is funded through the territorial line. That is quite a change in philosophy in terms of how it is delivered but I would need to take on notice any increase in the actual numbers paid out. I do not have those figures off the top of my head.

Lois has just told me there are about 3,500 users. I am not sure whether that is the total number of people who would be entitled to it. I suspect there are more than that; that is the number who are registered at the moment. In terms of the actual dollars out, I would need to take that on notice.

Ms Burch: Just some other information that I have in front of me around the taxi subsidy scheme: 85 per cent of those numbers are over the age of 60. I think you asked around levels of subsidy. There are two levels of subsidy: 50 per cent for eligible individuals who use a standard taxi, \$17 per trip, and then 75 per cent for eligible individuals who require a wheelchair-accessible taxi and that is a subsidy of \$26 per trip.

MS PORTER: So not a percentage?

Mr Hehir: It is a percentage of the total trip, with a cap so there is a maximum figure. So, if there is a short trip, say from Turner to the city, and you do not hit, for a WAT,

something in the order of \$40, 75 per cent of that fee would be subsidised by the government. If it is a long trip—say it is costing you \$50—the maximum fee payable is \$26, so it has got a cap on it.

MS BRESNAN: The other question was about what involvement DHCS is having with the taxi review, because the WAT is a significant part of that.

Ms Ford: Absolutely. We are aware that the review is going on. The Disability Advisory Council have a representative on that review and they feed back to us through that. There is not anyone else from Disability ACT directly involved in that, but we do keep a watching brief on it and get feedback about it.

MS BRESNAN: So the representative from the advisory group is the representative in the review. But do DHCS themselves have any involvement in the review?

Mr Hehir: Yes, we are, but through a different area. It will not necessarily be disability specific.

Ms Burch: It is a complex department; there is stuff going on everywhere.

MS BRESNAN: I know; I have been there.

Mr Hehir: I suspect this change is because we moved the wheelchair subsidies, taxi subsidies scheme, from Disability ACT into our community services which deals with all of our concessions areas—

Ms Ford: We keep an interest in and we get the feedback from it but we are not directly involved in it. Sorry; I do not think I made that quite clear.

Mrs Whitten: The annual report does indicate that the responsibility for the taxi subsidy scheme moved into our area of responsibility during the reporting period. In terms of the actual funding that was available in 2008-09 for the taxi subsidy scheme, it is \$160,000. The figures for previous years I would have to take on notice.

In relation to the involvement of our department in the review, the department also is one of the chairs of the Joint Community Governance Reference Group, co-chaired with ACTCOSS. At a recent meeting, the taxi review people briefed that group, so we have had some involvement in terms of the taxi review through that briefing of the Joint Community Governance Reference Group. In terms of participation of the department on the review itself, our manager of Community Development Services is a member of the interdepartmental committee.

THE CHAIR: I have a couple of supplementary questions on this issue. The taxi subsidy scheme is available to people with a severe disability. What is considered to be a severe disability?

Ms Ford: When you talk about a severe disability, you say a core profound severe limitation either in mobility, communication, cognitive abilities or sensory. Within that, they also look at psychological, so where a person is severely impaired by their psychological status. For the purposes of the taxi subsidy scheme, that is for people

with a severe limitation who are unable to use any other form of transport for mobility. They may well be able to use a wheelchair-accessible bus, but they would still be eligible under the taxi subsidy scheme to ensure that they had maximum flexibility and maximum mobility into the community.

If a person was, for example, sight impaired and could not drive a car, they would be eligible for the taxi subsidy scheme if their sight impairment was such that they could not catch a bus or if they were not on a bus route. Because it does have that 50 per cent cost component to the individual, people's uptake of it can sometimes be a balancing act. A lot of people do have it as an emergency or as a residual transport need as opposed to a primary need.

THE CHAIR: Is there an annual medical examination or certification required to maintain their presence on this?

Ms Ford: Yes, there is. They have to have certification to say that they have that impairment. The responsible agency for the taxi subsidy scheme does not do that; that goes through a health management arrangement. That is outsourced. People go through that arrangement, and it seems to have worked very well.

Ms Burch: And it is every three years.

THE CHAIR: One of the number of complaints I have received on this is that the circumstances of people with severe disability are highly unlikely to change, yet they still have to go back to get this certification over something that is not going to change. Is there any way of alleviating that inconvenience and cost involved there?

Ms Burch: Can I just jump in? From August of this year, permanent membership was introduced for those people with an enduring condition, in recognition of: why have a hurdle every three years when it is clear that you do not need any more hurdles?

THE CHAIR: Thank you. One other question: apart from the recognition of what is a severe disability, you have mentioned that a lot of the users are over 60. Does this extend to people who are elderly, not necessarily disabled but who through age have issues?

Ms Ford: Absolutely. If they have a disability, if it is an age-related disability that means they are unable to have any other form of transport, they are eligible. When we talk about disability, even though from our perspective we are looking at the nought to death, so to speak, and there are different programs that come through Health and Disability and other areas to complement the package that might sit around a person with a disability, we always take into account that people who are ageing and have a disability are within those broad eligibility criteria.

MS PORTER: Minister, you mentioned in your introductory remarks, and I think you mentioned it just a while ago too, the community inclusion fund. Page 54—and I think I found it somewhere else too—mentions the fund. This fund is ceasing. I am not quite sure where organisations that previously received the funding under this source are going to be able to seek funding in the future.

Ms Burch: The community inclusion fund ran for a couple of years and I understand it finished in 2008, thereabouts. It has been merged into another set of funds, but certainly while the community fund was in existence 25-odd projects were delivered across a range of initiatives and a range of community sector organisations. In this reporting period, which if I do my maths right is August 2008, there were 20 outstanding projects and these have been extended through to cover to June of this year. The extension was granted for the projects to seek new funding and resources.

I think the department have had the discussion around community inclusion boards across these rooms before. A number of organisations have worked with the department over the time to secure the needed funds if that project is deemed to be ongoing, and also we have community support and infrastructure grants, CSIGs, which have picked up the elements of the inclusion board and others; it is another grant round supporting communities in innovative projects.

MS PORTER: Can I have a little bit more information about that last one that you mentioned—

Ms Burch: The community support and infrastructure grants?

MS PORTER: Yes, please.

Ms Burch: Mrs Whitten?

Mrs Whitten: There is some information on the community support and infrastructure grants on page 53 of the annual report. The program started in 2007-08 by combining a number of grant programs, as the minister has indicated, and that total was around \$1.5 million in 2007-08 and funded 103 projects. With the funding being reduced over time, in 2008-09 there was about \$536,000 available and that funded 34 projects. The minister will be making an announcement about the current grant program shortly.

Ms Burch: That is right. Going back to those community inclusion grants: at the end of that extended period, or at June of this year, 13 of the 20 remaining projects secured alternative funding. So 13 have secured alternative funding, ongoing, plus either this department or other departments, and seven projects have wound down with the conclusion of funding. But a number of those projects were always time-limited, one-off type projects anyway.

MS PORTER: Could I have some examples of the kinds of organisations or projects that come in under this other one that you mentioned, Mrs Whitten?

Mrs Whitten: Yes, we have got a list of the 2008-09 grants, which we can provide to the committee. Also the grants are listed in volume 2 of the annual report.

MS PORTER: I just wondered what the infrastructure part was, as opposed to—

Ms Burch: It can be computers to support small organisations; it can be some minor refurbishments; it can be practical stuff; it can be program support—new software, new computers.

Mrs Whitten: Yes. There are three aspects: one is community support, one is equipment and one is capital works. In terms of the 2008-09 grants for equipment, there were 16 grants in that part of the program. The value of that particular part of the program was about \$194,000 and they included things like audiovisual equipment that was purchased by the Prisoners Aid (ACT). The Canberra Blind Society received some funding for upgrading their computers. The Create Foundation received some funding for furniture and office equipment. Companion House, for example, received some funding for relocation and IT equipment and furniture as well. That is the kind of thing in relation to equipment for 16 groups in terms of capital works, and I think the limit for those grants is around \$50,000.

We had a program in 2008-09 of \$153,000 and that included Woden Seniors receiving some funding for floor coverings and other needed equipment or capital works at their premises. Also one of the playschools received some funding to install playgroup equipment. So these are important projects for these groups.

MS BRESNAN: I have a follow-up question on the community inclusion fund. Just to be clear, minister, you said there were 20 outstanding programs extending to June this year?

Ms Burch: There were 20 at the conclusion of June. Sorry, in August 2008, I made the comment there were 20 remaining projects, including those that had an extension and were granted additional funds. But because the program was coming to an end, we had to have an end date, and the end date was June this year. So of those 20 remaining projects, 13 have sourced additional ongoing funds from elsewhere and seven have been wound down.

MS BRESNAN: With the ones that wound down, were they wound down because they had essentially come to the end of their life or because they were not able to secure additional funding?

Mrs Whitten: My understanding is that primarily it was because the grant had been completed by the organisation.

MS BRESNAN: I understand that, but was it that the need for the program had essentially ended? The other programs were able to source additional funding, and I know there were quite a lot of questions about this during estimates. But with those other seven programs, did they wind down because of need or because whoever was running them decided they did not want them to continue, or was it because they were not able to source additional funding?

Mr Hehir: We will have to take the detail of that on notice and get back to you about which ones had a natural end—a planned end. From our perspective there was always a time limit to funding.

MS BRESNAN: I understand that, yes.

Mr Hehir: I think the point of your question, though, is whether some organisations may still have wanted to pursue that work but could not source funds.

MS BRESNAN: Yes, that is right. I think it became clear that once these programs got established, quite a number of them were very popular and heavily subscribed by people, and the need was still there for people to access that program.

Mrs Whitten: And they were primarily the 13 programs that did get some additional funding through this financial year.

MS BRESNAN: Yes. It would be good to get some information about whether those seven programs—

Ms Burch: Of those seven?

MS BRESNAN: Yes, and whether they were not able to source additional funding.

Ms Burch: It is recognised that short-term funding creates opportunities but it also creates challenges for small organisations.

MS BRESNAN: Absolutely, yes. I am thinking particularly of ones like Gugan Gulwan and also MYS; they were very much used by people.

Mrs Whitten: Gugan Gulwan did get some funding through the Department of Education and Training for this year.

MS BRESNAN: When they appeared before the education committee's achievement gap inquiry, there still seemed to be uncertainty around whether or not their funding was going to keep going beyond the end of the year.

Ms Burch: We will bring some information back.

MS BRESNAN: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I note that Ms Hunter has joined us. Ms Hunter, you are next in line for a question. Do you have any questions at this point?

MS HUNTER: Yes. I want to go to the caring for carers part, on page 54. In 2008-09 the department finalised its commitments under the action plan, a 2004-07 action plan. What is planned there? You obviously have a caring for carers policy, and you do speak about that there. Is there going to be another action plan developed? Are there going to be any funds available for particular programs, projects, research and so forth that has happened in the last few years? What is happening and where do we go from here?

Ms Burch: I will defer to Mrs Whitten.

Mrs Whitten: The caring for carers policy is still in place. That was the commitment that was undertaken a few years ago. In terms of the government's election commitment, that was in relation to developing a charter of rights for carers, so that will be something that will be prioritised for the next calendar year. That is our main commitment. There was funding of about \$200,000 that was available for a grants

program, a carers recognition grants program. That funding has transferred to Disability ACT as part of their broader grants program, which would be available for carers to access as well.

MS HUNTER: So there will not be another action plan, for instance, put in place? It is a decision to stick with the policy but not have an action plan; is that right?

Mrs Whitten: We had three action plans, and the actions under each of those action plans have been completed. Really, it is about looking at where we are now, and the way to drive that is through developing the charter of rights for carers.

MS HUNTER: Have people in the organisations that work with carers been calling for another action plan or has their focus been on this charter of rights?

Mrs Whitten: The main focus has been on calling for a charter of rights. The department, over the last couple of years, has been developing a charter of rights for particular groups within the community. The development of the charter of rights will involve the caring community.

MS HUNTER: We have just had the charter of rights for children and young people in out-of-home care, which has been a good result there. Obviously, it is an important step to have a charter but then it is around implementing it, making sure people understand it, the education and so forth. Along with this development of the charter of rights for carers, are you looking at building in funding for the education, for the ongoing implementation and so forth? Is that part of your thinking at this stage?

Mr Hehir: At this stage we will be working within our existing budget. So it will all have to be done within our current resources, in terms of the work that has to happen. That is not dissimilar to the work that we have done in other areas, including the charter of rights for children in out-of-home care. It is part of the process that we will have to have a look at as we go forward. Certainly, we will be talking with carers and their representatives as we go forward, in terms of what they think that communication and the promulgation actually needs to look like, to make sure that it is effective. There is no point having something that is not going to be effective and have broad understanding throughout the community.

MS HUNTER: On the grants, it is a very large department with a lot of areas. You have just spoken about the caring for carers grants and that \$200,000 being put across to some disability grants programs.

Ms Ford: It is broader than that. It was the caring for carers grants, our quality of life grants and an additional \$200,000 through the budget process, which makes it a grant pool of \$500,000. That grant pool has \$300,000 which goes to the quality of life grants, which is direct payments to individuals for a range of supports, and that includes carers. So that broadens out.

The feedback that we have had from the community is that the quality of life grants are extremely useful because they are direct grants and because carers and individuals can use them and there is maximum flexibility within that. With respect to the other \$200,000, you are right: there is a lot of innovation out there in the community that

needs a bit of a kick-start. We saw that through the inclusion grants. We are going out with the innovation grants that are currently out. That is really targeting more programs or small projects that will increase resilience amongst vulnerable Canberrans and improve the health and wellbeing amongst the vulnerable groups. Also, it will assist with economic, social and cultural participation in the ACT community

We have taken as broad a view as possible to get the widest range of innovation into that. The feedback we are getting to date is that it is a good blend and a good way of going—individually and also by way of small projects or initiatives. Some of them will be seed funding; some of them will be to jump-start something; and some of them, unfortunately, will be time-limited projects, and people will need to be very clear that at the end of that there is no commitment for ongoing support.

MS HUNTER: Thank you very much for that information. I want to understand whether the quantum, the total amount of grants that we have had in the 2007-08 and 2008-09 years, is now going to be continuing. Do we have the same amount of money available, regardless of whether it has slightly changed its focus?

Ms Ford: Yes, absolutely. It is an increase of \$200,000 across those broad ranges. The other area that we want to look at—because feedback from the community has suggested that a time limit of one year may not be the most useful way—next year is to have some more longer term projects or initiatives, so that people can get a little bit more traction on it and use that funding in many different ways. You may get a grant but it may be over a three-year period or we might review it at the end of the year to see whether you have done what you said you would do and whether that is getting the outcomes you have stated, with some commitment that if you are, we will move on. So we are trying to maximise flexibility around it, particularly for the innovation grants.

Ms Burch: Ms Hunter, to go back to the carers, it is covering the range of carers that we have in our community. We have young carers as well as adult carers. So the conversation, in developing that charter, will include anyone in a caring role. That will be linked with how we get that information out as well.

THE CHAIR: Does the department have any figures on the number of people that fall under the broad category of carers?

Ms Ford: Yes, I do. Fourteen per cent of the ACT population is in a caring role.

THE CHAIR: So based on those figures and the allocation that is made, what does that work out at per head?

Ms Ford: That would be really hard to determine. In fact, I think it would be nigh on impossible. Through the funding streams, home and community care, mental health, disability support and also community health, where we would fund an individual for their support needs, it has a rebound effect on alleviating the role of the carer. We could give you the total budget figure, which is \$57 million in direct support, and for people with a disability I think it is about \$9 million in home and community care. That is the figure that is in my head. Obviously, there is a large amount within health

and the mental health budget. All of those dollars would be distributed amongst individuals, which, as I say, would have a rebound effect on carers.

MS BRESNAN: Is the 14 per cent based on census data or on the number of people accessing carer payments?

Ms Ford: I think that was based on census data.

MS BRESNAN: A lot of people do not identify as carers as well.

Ms Ford: I think that figure has changed a bit. New data is starting to come through and I know that figure has changed a little bit.

MS BRESNAN: Having worked in mental health, I know that a lot of people do not identify themselves as carers. So it would probably be much larger.

Ms Ford: Interestingly, of that 14 per cent, about 24 per cent—again, the numbers are updated—are over the age of 54. So we are looking at a large number of people in the mature carers area, which is why there has been such a high focus on it, particularly through the commonwealth and ACT partnerships around that.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I have moved on from page 11. Could you go to page 12 of volume 1, speech pathology. What is the waiting list currently?

Ms Burch: Our program has been enhanced with the additional speech pathologists, speech therapists, that have come online.

Ms Hayes: The current waiting list for speech pathology services as at early December is 299 people.

Mr Hehir: When you talk about the waiting list, it is important to recognise that it is not just a wait-your-turn list; it is actually a prioritised list. So there is priority 1, 2, 3 and 4. Breaking that down is probably equally important. With any service that has a finite budget, of course, you work to your highest needs first and then you work out strategies in dealing with others. Indeed, the minister in her opening speech referred to some of the strategies that we work with around some of the lower priority groups.

Ms Hayes: I would like to put that in context. At the beginning of July, that waiting list was 650. So there has been a considerable improvement in that over this five-month period since we have had additional staffing.

THE CHAIR: How many speech therapists do you currently have?

Ms Hayes: Right now, we have 25, and we have another two people starting in mid-January, so we will then have 27. We brought on the first five speech pathologists and an additional HP4 senior speech pathologist in July with the new funding. We took a group of our most experienced senior pathologists and formed them into an assessment team to go through our waiting list and assess 300 people who were on the waiting list, which they did over a 10-week period. They were doing nothing but continual assessment. They were able to take all of those people and put

them into programs that were either starting in the fourth term this year or in the first term next year. So we actually take people off the waiting list when they have been assessed, not necessarily when they start their programs. For some of those people who were assessed, their program will not actually commence until February.

We have moved a substantial number of people. Of course, once people have had an assessment, they understand what is going on and they understand what kind of treatment will be offered to them, they are a lot more relieved about the situation. Very often, in the assessment process, a therapist can give them some interim activities to be doing and some home-based programs that they can be working on until their actual therapy program starts. So, yes, it is in that context.

I will say a couple of things around the priority groups. We have four priority groups. In speech pathology, that changes on a daily basis. People do not wait more than 48 hours for a service if they are in our highest need group. That is usually either babies with feeding problems, swallowing problems, or adults with a disability who have feeding or swallowing problems, and speech pathologists are the experts in that area. So there is virtually no waiting period for those people.

In the high need group, there are still 150 in that group. We put them in a high need group because we are aware that the sooner we can provide them with a program, the more effective that program will be.

THE CHAIR: You say you have 25 staff, and you have two more starting in January?

Ms Hayes: Yes.

THE CHAIR: With the number of people particularly in the high need group are you currently understaffed? Could you put more staff on? Are people available with the correct background qualifications to come on staff?

Ms Hayes: We expect that when the full eight new positions come on—two in January and a further one in July 2010—we will be able to reduce our waiting lists further. The demand for our therapy services is almost infinite, so in some ways you can never have enough staff. If you were the parent of a young child with some kind of disability or language or communication issue, more therapy would always seem a desirable thing. It is a matter of balancing that. Of course, we could always use more speech pathologists, or more of any professional group for that matter. In terms of their availability, we have just done the recruitment for the two that will start in mid-January. We had two positions available. We had 12 applicants, all of whom were qualified.

Ms Burch: A \$3.6 million investment in a pathologist is a significant investment in Therapy ACT. That was a government budget line this year. In addition to direct therapy services, which are critical, there are also different groups—playgroup, play therapy—and “Is your toddler talking?” type programs that are broader than just a one-to-one interview. Perhaps you would like to talk about that program and the impacts?

Ms Hayes: Certainly. The “Is your toddler talking?” program is an early intervention universal program. It is available to any parent who has concerns around their two-year-old and whether they are gaining language skills. It is a program that we have marketed through GPs, childcare centres and child and family centres—anywhere that toddlers go. It is a very simple assessment: “Does your two-year-old have 50 words? If they have fewer than 50 words then you might want to come along to one of these programs.” It is a two-session workshop program for parents. We run about 10 to 12 programs across the year—some in the evening, some in the day—in child and family centres and in our centres. They are across the city and they are very accessible. They give parents the strategies that they can use to encourage language development in their children.

We have been running this program for nearly 18 months. We are starting to see a real impact in that we are getting fewer referrals to the next stage of concern of parents because parents have been able to encourage the language development of the children who were just delayed and who were always going to make that catch-up. Even when those who do have language impairment come to us now they are coming in at a slightly higher level and therefore we can move them to the next phase of therapy. Whereas previously they may have needed to go through a group program before they got to that, they are now able to move into a higher level of therapy program. We think this early intervention universal program is a terrific initiative.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I think Ms Porter has a supplementary question.

MS PORTER: I did, and it was about that program. Can you tell us how many parents would be attending? Is it a sort of fluid arrangement where from time to time you have this many and then next week you have that many? Do you have a core group?

Ms Burch: I do not know the details—Ros can give you that—but it is certainly a well-received and increasing program because it brings the family in at those early stages and gives them the support they need.

Ms Hayes: There were 110 families who attended the program this year. As I say, across the reporting period we ran 12 programs. In 2009, we have run 10 programs. It is a mixture of programs. Increasingly, the evening programs are popular. We are happy to run them in the evenings because we get more dads to come, and that is important in language development for children.

MS PORTER: Going back to the waiting list issue that you were talking about before, I was a bit unclear because you seemed to be saying that the waiting list has been substantially reduced. I thought you said it had almost disappeared, but no. How long is it?

Ms Hayes: As Mr Hehir pointed out, how long people wait is dependent on their priority. If you are the highest priority then there is no waiting. If you are in the next highest group then at this stage you will be waiting three to four months for a program. Our aim is for people to be assessed within a two-month period and then have their program. We are talking often about children and children in preschool and kindergarten years. We work on a term basis because that works best. We are looking

at doing the assessment within the term that they are referred and their program commencing in the next term. That is what we are aiming to get to.

Mr Hehir: And that is a substantial improvement from where they were last year. I think waiting times last year were up to nine months.

Ms Hayes: That is correct, and for the lowest priority it was up to 12 months.

Ms Burch: Can I just make a comment on the facilities of Therapy ACT after my visit there? There are wonderful facilities and play areas. It is a very encouraging environment for families to come in. There are very productive therapy sessions, for want of a better language. It is a good place to visit.

MS HUNTER: I was wondering about the interaction between Therapy ACT—say speech pathology services—and schools and how that service may be delivered. Obviously, a lot of these children are at school and it can be quite disruptive for children to be taken out of school to attend therapy sessions and so forth. Has there been any further work done in that area to try and streamline the delivery of these services?

Ms Hayes: Yes. In terms of background, Therapy ACT works with individual children and their families. We are not a school-based service. Individual families refer to us and then we provide the service to them. That may include a school-based element where we work with the teacher to look at strategies to use in the classroom—we look at the child's particular needs and how to include them in the curriculum. We do a lot of that work at the individual child level.

In terms of being able to provide therapy in schools for individual children, that really is not likely, given that there are, I think, 88 primary schools in the ACT. In our school-age therapy teams I know we have got 30 therapists, but how many of them are speech pathologists I cannot really recall. There will never be sufficient therapists to go a particular school to provide a therapy service when there may only be one or two children. We will do a visit to the school, we will work with the teacher and we will give the teacher the strategies that they can implement. We have a bunch of things that we call resource packs which we provide to teachers. They give them a lot of information about a particular language or communication issue and a lot of strategies that they can incorporate into their classroom and into their teaching to assist with that.

We run professional development programs for teachers at the Centre for Teaching and Learning and we are a regular part of the department of education's professional development program for teachers. We run four different types of professional development programs around language and communication skills. We try to work in a consultative way in terms of giving teachers the skills and then at the individual level in giving teachers particular information around a child. That is how we work.

As an outcome of the special education review, we will be working more with the education department around developing a protocol between therapy and education to see how we can support schools better—using those kinds of strategies I just talked about but making them more universally available to schools, because at the moment

whether or not teachers actually take up our offers is dependent on the individual teachers. There is a kind of ad hoc approach, I guess. Whether you get that very strong connection between therapy and school depends very much on the principal and the teachers rather than a more systematic approach.

MS HUNTER: It was just that connection with the Shaddock review and what might become of that.

Ms Hayes: I was on the steering group for that review, as I say, working with colleagues in the department of education around improving our protocols.

MS BRESNAN: My question is in relation to disability accommodation support services, which is mentioned on page 33 of volume 1. It is stated on page 33 that there is accommodation support for up to 168 people. Does the department have any idea about what the level of unmet demand is in relation to that or is that 168 meeting the demand of the community?

Mr Hehir: We have people who were identified to us who would like a government accommodation service, so there would be a level of expressed demand there. There would be some people who would like an accommodation service but it does not necessarily need to be a government one. There would be people who are looking for funding, such as ISP or block funding, in terms of accessing accommodation support. An ISP will do that as well. We would have an idea of expressed demand. I would probably need Lois to talk through the detail of that.

There is also likely to be an unexpressed demand for accommodation services. Where families are coping at the moment with their son or daughter or their brother or sister and they are coping well, they would not necessarily express a need for accommodation services. That might change in the future. They might just think that it is their responsibility to undertake that role and they are not really aware that there are other options available. We would have data on what a broad population measure might be, but we would also have the expressed demand for those services.

Ms Ford: I can talk about registration of interest. Currently we have 89 people who have registered interest in some form of service. It may not be specifically accommodation support. It may be anything from respite to accessing in-home support arrangements. We are working actively with 36 people at the moment. A number of those people that we are engaged with actively are looking at developing accommodation arrangements into the future.

One of the things that we know through experience is that people will express an interest in accommodation support but that expression of interest is into the future. They want to start thinking about what they might have available to them into the future. Some of the subsets of people that are expressing an interest in accommodation support are expressing an interest more in terms of: if anything happens to me, will my son or daughter be taken care of?

To get really accurate figures of who needs accommodation support at the moment, those 36 people that we are working with are generally looking towards an accommodation support model. But to look accurately at people who express interest,

I would say most of the 89 people on our registration of interest would want at least to explore what the accommodation options into the future would be.

MS BRESNAN: As you say, there might be people who are just coping but they probably would like to have some assistance there—even though they are just coping in the situation.

Ms Ford: Certainly. With those 36 people that we are actively working with we are doing some future planning and building a model. We are thinking about how they might want their accommodation support to look in the future, We are actively working with some of those people, probably two-thirds, to assist them to engage with Housing and look at some of the opportunities that are available now or to help them design some fairly unique models that they would feel satisfied with.

Linking families together is a big part of the work that we do around accommodation support so that they can start thinking about whether co-location will be an option for them. We also fund, for example, up to three families who have come together to look into co-locating in future. We provide around \$14,000 for them to engage their own coordinator to assist them to do that planning.

There are a whole lot of processes in place to move into accommodation, right from life skills development to catching buses and learning to prepare a meal. It is very simple stuff—just getting up in the mornings sometimes and all of those things. How can that support arrangement be put in place, how much support needs to be put in place, what skills development needs to occur through the superior to enable them to have the desired model that they want? It is one of those areas where you ask: how long is a piece of string? It has many tangents that go off it.

MS BRESNAN: In terms of the assistance that you provide, do you provide links to legal assistance and so on, which are obviously going to be part of it? You said: how long is a piece of string? Do you provide legal assistance on the legal ramifications of what they might do if they choose joint housing arrangements?

Ms Ford: We give them information if there are some legal ramifications. Interestingly enough, the direct work with families is much more around thinking about compatibility, thinking about how a house may be managed, thinking about how to maximise the independence of each young person, and talking them through the optimal number of people to share. It is also about assisting families to recognise that an arrangement that they put in place today may not necessarily be a suitable arrangement in two years time and getting them to think about what they might want to transition to then.

The early stages involve a lot of discussion around the what-ifs and the maybes. The later discussions are much more around how the house might be managed, who will be the tenant, how will they arrange those tenants, how will they arrange the tenancy, how will they organise the utility and the functional payments and what will be the support model, because generally we are looking at people who need a reasonable intensity of support?

Then as we progress it may well be about helping them to do a small tender to engage

a provider or suggesting a provider to them or engaging them with a provider who will work with them. There are other agencies in the community, like Koomarri and Catholic Care, who do similar work with families. We also fund individuals to work with groups and families. Stepping Stones is an example of where we provide the funding for a coordinator to work with a larger group of families to assist them to think about what types of arrangements they want to put into place.

THE CHAIR: I have a supplementary on that. How many long-term patients in hospitals who have ISPs already approved are waiting for suitable accommodation?

Ms Ford: We have four people who have transitioned out. We actually had five but one person recently had a health event and needed to go back into hospital, and we are now relooking at those arrangements. We have had two people who have been trialling some different options to see whether they are going to be satisfactory. We have one person for whom, as I say, we are going to relook at what the options are. So for that group of eight people that we started out with, that is the status of them.

THE CHAIR: In terms of long-term patients, and I think we discussed this topic nearly 12 months ago—

Ms Ford: Sure.

Ms Burch: Many times.

THE CHAIR: once an ISP package is given, how long does it take to find suitable housing for these people?

Ms Ford: It entirely depends on the—sorry, minister.

Ms Burch: I will go to both Ms Ford and Mr Hehir, but I think the primary concern here is the individual's care and security. These are significant decisions and they are not to be entered into lightly. Unless you are absolutely sure that the conditions are right, the housing is right and the support structures are right, this is a decision that cannot be taken lightly or in haste. Yes, there has been an extent of time, but it is something that has to be done right.

THE CHAIR: Minister, I take all of that on board, but I think the patience of a lot of people is at straining point when you are talking about an individual who is close to three years in confinement without being able to get the sort of support—

Ms Burch: I am sure we have had many discussions with you—

THE CHAIR: We have.

Ms Burch: out of these sessions on this, but I am happy to go to Mr Hehir.

Mr Hehir: The time frame for the actual provision of the house will vary and it will depend on a number of different circumstances. If the individual is relatively mobile and has minimal requirements, the provision of the housing once an ISP is in place is a relatively straightforward event, as long as there are not substantial modifications

required to the property. It is a case of finding a property in the area that they are looking for. If their requirements are not too specific, so that it can be a district discussion rather than individual suburb identification, it is a relatively quick process.

The level of complexity changes. For example, if that person was to be in a standard wheelchair and they could go into a class C adaptable property, Housing ACT would have a reasonable number—not a large number—of adaptable accessible properties in various parts of Canberra. But finding them available or doing the work on an existing property or purchasing a property to meet those specifications will take some time, and the level of time will depend on market forces—that is, whether properties are likely to become available, because once people are in a disability modified property, they tend to stay—and whether there is a house in the area that is available for sale that is easily adaptable or whether we have a property that is easily adaptable. Again, it is relatively straightforward and a matter of months rather than an extended period.

If the person goes beyond that class C level of adaptability, you are talking about a much more extended period. It is normally a case of the person having quite specific requirements; their level of mobility is clearly very restricted at that point and they generally would require quite high aids for them to move around. So you are looking at a much tighter ask in terms of the property location. You are looking at properties that we just do not generally have available. What we have has been purpose built or purpose purchased for individuals who are not intending to leave any time soon. We just do not have a stock of them available.

THE CHAIR: How long does purpose built take to purpose build?

Mr Hehir: I might ask David to come up and talk through the time frame for that, but that would include a substantial amount of design consultation with individual clients, it would include the routine planning requirements, it would be working with OTs in terms of whether our design is right. Some of the technical side of it will be quite difficult—that is, does the person need electrics for the doors to make them work, because of the size of their wheelchair et cetera, and is a person able to exit safely in the event of a fire?

There are a number of other factors, so there is quite a consultative process that we will go through. We will then either purchase a purpose-built property, which will take probably nine months, or there will be a substantial refurb of an existing property. Probably “refurb” is the wrong word. It would be a gutting and rebuild exercise; that would be my understanding. I might get David to talk through that process.

Mr Collett: As Martin has anticipated, some of the more complex requirements that we have for accommodation for people with a disability can become quite difficult. Martin referred to the sorts of issues that we need to deal with from a construction point of view. As well there is the matter of automatic opening doors; there is often strengthening of roofs needed in order to put in hoists and moving equipment. Once you get outside class C adaptable, you are into quite heavy specialist-built wheelchairs, which have even larger requirements in terms of openings, corridor widths, turning circles and wet area access.

The complication that I would add that we find in the most extreme cases, on top of

what Martin has talked about, is constraints on location. We might have someone with high and complex needs who is accessing a particular service and needs to be within a couple of kilometres of the service provider, whether it is the Canberra Hospital or another specialist provider. Finding accommodation, either in terms of an existing house we can modify or in terms of a vacant block in some of those areas is extremely difficult. You would understand that if we needed to be within a couple of kilometres of the Canberra Hospital, for instance, with the limited amount of stock there, the stock is all three bedroom, and often the blocks in that area of Garran are sloping, which will be a further complication. Unfortunately, it can be quite time consuming in some cases.

The other issue that further complicates that is the changing needs of the client. In a number of the complex cases that I can recall in the recent past, we have gone some way down the track of acquiring a property or finding a site, only to find that the requirements of the person with a disability have changed. Obviously, people with that level of disability are subject to ongoing health issues and it can change quite quickly. Also, we need to try and make sure that the housing that we build is going to be acceptable to the client. We do not want to do all of this work and then find out there are other issues that we have not considered, such as access to kids or grandkids.

THE CHAIR: I understand all of the concerns and all of the provisos that you have outlined. But is there a point where all of this planning and discussion between various agencies can, and perhaps should, take place earlier so that when the ISP is finally found, you are further down the track than currently is the case on long-term patients? There must be a point where somebody is a very high priority. I guess that is what we are trying to get to. We understand everyone's concern, but how can we solve a situation that is ongoing for as long as in a couple of particular cases we have at the moment? What is the solution?

Mr Collett: We can always do better. I can undertake to look at those cases again. Without knowing the cases that you have referred to and had a discussion with the minister, I could not comment on individual cases. The ones that I am aware of—

THE CHAIR: There are only a couple.

Mr Collett: have been subject to those sorts of changing requirements that I described in my answer.

Mr Hehir: Certainly, one of the most important things about this process is working with the individuals around their preferences and their requirements and working with their advisers. In a sense, having a higher level of class C adaptable properties, which is one of the things we are working on, is the first part. But having a higher program and, in our spot purchase program, looking at properties that are easily modified, again is part of the process and something that we are quite conscious of when we do that process.

For the most complex cases, it really becomes such a purpose-built solution in many circumstances that you are talking about a need to work quite intensively with that individual and their support people, their technical supports as well as their personal supports. Some of it is about trying to find the right property in the right place.

Sometimes we have properties that are more suitable than others and in the right location, and we can move quickly. At other times we spend longer looking, and that is a really frustrating thing for everybody. To a certain extent, that is when we start to look at the purpose purchase or build, just because that is the only thing that is going to resolve the issue in the end. There have certainly been a number of cases in my time dealing with housing issues where we have had to do that.

So, yes, we can certainly have a portfolio that is more responsive, and that is part of what we are working on at the moment. Yes, that would include our purchase program in terms of having a look at the standards of the properties that we spot purchase. But for the most complex clients and their needs, it tends to be quite a specific solution—and it should be. This is going to be a long-term home for these people. They are not going to move in and out within eight years, which is pretty much standard for housing ownership in the territory. They are there for the rest of their lives, the majority of them, and we need to make sure it is going to last for that period, in the sense that we need to think about what their requirements are going to be in the future as well.

THE CHAIR: Three years is reaching the point of being quite incredible, so can I just leave that on the table and say please look at that.

Mr Hehir: We are looking, and we are working with that client. I understand we are working very cooperatively with that client and she has been giving feedback on designs et cetera. So that is what I understand is happening, as has her health support et cetera.

THE CHAIR: Okay, thank you.

MS HUNTER: We have had a discussion around ISPs. Just recently, you might be aware of a couple of young people with disabilities. I note that page 11 of your annual report talks about the policy framework for children and young people with disability and their families. It talks about the importance of integrated support services, pathways and so forth under that framework. That is looking at services and programs that are provided across government or by the community. What has been the latest development around the couple of young people who have ISPs whose families have been informed that they will no longer be able to access the social recreational program at one of our community services? Have you had anything to do with that particular issue, as far as being able to advocate on behalf of these young people is concerned?

Ms Ford: We most definitely have. Disability ACT and DHCS have not reduced funding to any families, individuals or services in relation to—

MS HUNTER: I understand that, but it is more about the commonwealth funding.

Ms Ford: their access. We have in fact given an assurance through that organisation that, should families be compromised in any way through the change in that organisation's circumstances and the decision the organisation has made in relation to funding, we will relook at that situation. Of course, we would support the families to the level at which they are currently getting that support. So we have been very clear

about our message to that organisation and very clear that they must give that information to families. For those families that have approached us directly, we have given them that message.

MRS DUNNE: Ms Ford, could you be more precise about what it is you have told people, because that is not a very clear message to me?

Ms Ford: For the organisation, we have told them very clearly that DHCS is not reducing any funding to that organisation now or into the future. We have told them that if there are families that are going to be compromised by the decisions that that organisation has made around funding, we will re-engage with them and look at what their needs are and provide them with that level of support. For any families that have approached us directly, we have given them that same message. Indeed, we have asked the organisation to expedite a letter to families explaining the situation and have also advised them that if that is not done in a timely way, we will send the letter out to families ourselves, so that families are not compromised and do not feel threatened by their supports.

MS HUNTER: My understanding, as of about 10 days ago when I spoke to one of the families, was that they had not received a letter.

Ms Ford: Yes, we have talked to the organisation. They assured us that a letter was going out yesterday. We have a letter ready to go out if that has not happened. We have also advised them that we are ready for families to speak to us directly if they are concerned, and a couple of families have contacted us and we have spoken to them directly.

MRS DUNNE: In relation to that, there are other people in the community—for instance, members of the parents and citizens association associated with Cranleigh school have approached me because they may not be direct users of the service but they anticipated becoming users of the service. What comfort can be given to the wider community about the continuation of those services?

Ms Ford: We have been absolutely clear. We could not be clearer with the organisation that there is no intention by DHCS to reduce funding or indeed to stop funding for those services. There has been no—

MRS DUNNE: The thing is that the agency anticipates that they will have a shortfall of funding, which means they will have to cut back or change that service. What guarantees or comfort has been given to the families directly currently involved or those who anticipate using the services to give them comfort that the service, which is highly regarded, will be able to continue?

Ms Ford: We have said to that service that they are to inform families that there will be no reduction to services and we have also said to them that should there be any family that currently uses that service that is going to be compromised, we need to have that discussion with them, because we would not leave those families unsupported. We have been very clear with the agency—a consistent message from the very beginning.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Ford. Ms Porter?

MS PORTER: I want to go to page 55, where it mentions the financial and material aid. It talks about the development of a policy and service framework under future directions. Is that work now being done or has it been done in the interim and what requests do you get for that kind of aid?

Ms Burch: Our financial and material aid framework is around establishing a coordinated service, a community developed service response. We are looking at an internal evaluation of delivery of those financial and material aids, with a particular view to assisting people in a way that promotes their resilience and supports individuals. Mrs Whitten can give some more details.

Mrs Whitten: The financial and material aid program is an annual program. It comprises about \$880,000 per year. We are currently evaluating that program for a three-year funding agreement. The current service providers are Salvation Army, UnitingCare Kippax and St Vincent de Paul. There is also a small amount of money that is funded for Rotary, for its frozen food bank. We are just looking at that annual program, and we are looking at it in the context of some of the additional funding that was provided by the government in December last year, when \$1 million was provided for financial and material aid or emergency relief to the community sector.

In that initiative, the funding was distributed to those three organisations, plus the six regional community services. \$850,000 went to those organisations and \$150,000 was retained by the department for clients of our department to access as well. From that initiative, we have been looking at the reports that have been coming in from each of those organisations to see what demand there was in the community for those services. There was a particular priority around grocery vouchers, petrol vouchers and medical expenses. So there was quite a diverse range of priorities for people in the community in terms of that program. It is with that analysis that we are now informing the evaluation of the annual program and we will be briefing the minister shortly around the way forward.

Mr Hehir: Certainly, one of the key things that we are looking at in that area is what supports are provided, rather than just a straight handing out of the aid. It is important to look at what changes you can make to the circumstances, what other supports you can put in place, that will in the long term ameliorate the need for that aid consistently to be provided. One of the things we are quite interested in is whether the additional services providers, through their existing programs et cetera, were able to identify and continue to engage and work with those families and individuals about what their needs are. So it is a slightly different approach, but certainly it was important for us to look at it.

Ms Burch: In addition to the food vouchers and the petrol support, it is also around providing financial assistance for perhaps an energy-efficient hot-water system that then has the ongoing benefit of decreased utility costs, which puts more money into the household.

MS PORTER: Minister, on page 54, when it talks about the carer support grants and volunteer grants, which it also says is additional funding for financial and material aid,

is that additional money?

Ms Burch: Additional to the routine or was that part of the—

MS PORTER: Yes, that is what I am trying to find out.

Ms Burch: new budget initiative?

MS PORTER: Yes.

Mrs Whitten: The \$3.5 million initiative that the government funded just before Christmas included \$1.25 million for carers and \$1.25 million for volunteers as well. So we have nearly finished both of those programs. The funding was provided to a number of organisations in the community. In relation to carers, Carers ACT received funding, as did the six regional community services. Tandem and CYCLOPS were some of the other organisations that received funding for carers. In relation to volunteers, Volunteering ACT received funding and then provided that funding to organisations who had volunteers working with them.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mrs Whitten. Thank you very much, minister, and thank you, ladies and gentlemen of the department. No doubt there will be some questions coming in writing to you. Thank you for your contributions this morning. We will now take a break and reconvene at 11 o'clock to continue our hearing with the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs.

Meeting adjourned from 10.48 to 11.04 am.

Appearances:

Stanhope, Mr Jon, Chief Minister, Minister for Transport, Minister for Territory and Municipal Services, Minister for Business and Economic Development, Minister for Land and Property Services, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and Minister for the Arts and Heritage

Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

Hehir, Mr Martin, Chief Executive

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

Hubbard, Mr Ian, Director, Finance and Budget

Harwood, Mr Neil, Director, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services

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

THE CHAIR: Good morning, Chief Minister and departmental representatives. I believe the Chief Minister has got an announcement to make about—

Mr Stanhope: No. I could not survive without my colleagues.

THE CHAIR: I welcome you all to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Health, Community and Social Services inquiring into the 2008-09 annual and financial report on matters pertaining to your department as Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. Chief Minister, would you like to give us a preamble prior to our questions?

Mr Stanhope: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I have no opening statement that I wish to make but I do thank the committee for its interest, and of course my colleagues and officials from the department are willing and ready to answer any questions or to provide whatever assistance they can.

THE CHAIR: My first question relates to volume 1, page 32: what was the total staffing level for the office throughout the reporting period?

Mr Stanhope: Mr Manikis would be happy to respond to that.

Mr Manikis: In the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs we had for the reporting period a manager, two SOGCs and an ASO4, so that is four staff throughout the year.

THE CHAIR: That is strange; I thought there were 14 FTE reported in the—

Mr Manikis: No, that is the business unit for the multicultural—

THE CHAIR: Okay, my apologies.

Mr Manikis: For the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, which is one component of the business unit, there are four staff.

THE CHAIR: And what was the total budget for your office throughout this reporting period?

Mr Manikis: The total budget is about \$850,000 for Indigenous affairs.

MS BRESNAN: My question is in relation to page 212 and the United Ngunnawal Elders Council. It says they have been consulted on water security in the ACT region and also it mentions the Cotter Dam. I do know they have had some involvement in terms of identifying items of cultural heritage which might be a part of the Cotter Dam expansion. I am wondering what level of involvement they had, the communication they had with Actew in the whole process and how that went.

Mr Manikis: I understand it went very well. What happened was that Actew ran that process and took the elders out on site. From what I can recollect, they spent some time out on the site and provided advice direct to Actew. I understand that Actew found that to be quite useful advice and have taken that into account in their considerations.

MS BRESNAN: Was it an active role? You said that they went out to the site and provided advice, but was it an active role in terms of actually identifying where the sites were and working with their expertise in doing that?

Mr Manikis: Yes. That is right. It was requested by Actew, so it was not something that was proactively done by the council. There was a request by Actew. From my recollection, they made the first move and sought UNEC's expertise in that regard.

MS BRESNAN: I am guessing that has all been documented in the correct way—that advice that was sought?

Mr Stanhope: Ms Bresnan, I think Mr Manikis is responding directly in relation to the involvement of the United Ngunnawal Elders Council who were consulted separately by Actew in relation to issues that Actew felt might have been of particular interest to the United Ngunnawal Elders Council. But the issues around our heritage and Indigenous assessment of the impact of the dam would be a different process.

MS BRESNAN: I understand that, but I was just wondering what input they had into that process.

Mr Stanhope: Right—into the process around heritage assessment?

MS BRESNAN: Yes, being the elders for the region.

Mr Stanhope: I do not know. That would have been a different process that would have been facilitated as part of the planning approval process by Actew through ACTPLA. I am not sure that this office would—

MS BRESNAN: No, I understand that.

Mr Manikis: We do not have a role and we would not have any input in that.

Mr Stanhope: I understand the question. It is an answer, I think, that requires some cross-agency consultation to determine exactly what factors were taken into account and the outcomes specifically of the heritage Indigenous assessment and then the relationship between that assessment and the involvement of UNEC. I think we would have to do some cross-agency consultation to be able to fully answer the question.

MS BRESNAN: Okay, thank you.

MS PORTER: Page 210 talks about the elected body and says that the body has met seven times as a full body and twice as a working group. Minister, could you update us on what is happening with the committee and how it is going? I know that it was only formed some little while ago.

Mr Stanhope: Quite obviously the record of meetings reported here relates to the reporting year to June 2009. I think it is acknowledged and accepted that the elected body has taken some time to work up its own processes but there is certainly quite a strong level of engagement now and certainly a work program that, over this last six months, has advanced quite significantly. I think two weeks ago, I met with the chair and the deputy chair of the elected body. I meet with them quite regularly. I informally undertake to meet quarterly and I do that.

In the context of the way forward and the development of processes and a role, and I do not believe it is included within this recording period, the most significant was an estimates type process that was conducted by the elected body and that was in August, so post this reporting period. It was probably the most significant advance in the development of a role or an ongoing function—an inaugural first. I think it is probably best to describe it as an estimates process conducted by the elected body, following this same format, fully reported and recorded, where the heads and senior executives of every ACT government agency with a role or responsibility in Indigenous issues, whether it be around health, education or community safety, appeared before the elected body to answer questions from each of the seven members of the elected body on their role, their function, their responses, their record and their achievements.

The elected body have a transcript—Hansard were utilised and recorded the hearings—and are now preparing a detailed report, as is done by and under the same format as Assembly committees, of all the evidence they collected across all portfolios. As I said, I met with the chair and the deputy chair two weeks ago and they were at the point of formally finalising the draft report along with a summary report and a raft of recommendations. The chair is in touch with my office now with a view to finding a mutually convenient time for him and me to meet for the combined report to be presented to the government for response.

The government have undertaken, as we do with Assembly reports, to respond to that report and all of its recommendations within three months. That is the most significant advance in terms of process. In my discussions with the chair and the deputy chair, it was indicated to me by the chair that he is not aware of any other arrangement anywhere in Australia where an Indigenous body has the capacity to formally question the heads of every government agency and to then prepare and deliver a report with an undertaking from the government that it will formally respond to the report and all recommendations within a stated time frame. I think it was a significant

milestone in the development of a work program and a role for the elected body. I have not seen or read the report yet, but I am looking forward to it and I have absolutely no doubt that it will represent some significant challenges for government.

In relation to all of the indicators of wellbeing that are relevant to each of us, but most particularly to aspects of our community, Indigenous people within this jurisdiction suffer similar levels of continuing disadvantage on a whole range of indicators—health, wellbeing, economic security—to those of Indigenous communities throughout Australia. Here, as everywhere else in Australia, the Indigenous community as an identifiable sector in this community is and continues to be the most disadvantaged across all indicators.

MR HANSON: As a follow-up, if I may: has the facilitator been appointed?

Mr Stanhope: I will ask Mr Manikis to respond to that.

Mr Manikis: The facilitator has now been identified, with the assistance of the elected body. The elected body were very careful to ensure that they got the right organisation for that role and the person for that role. It has taken a little bit of time, but they have now identified the person and contracts are being prepared. We hope to have an early January/February type start for the facilitator to assist the elected body going forward.

MR HANSON: In terms of how representative the elected body is—I think there were 240 votes that were counted last time and I do not recall when the next election is for the elected body—

Mr Manikis: 2011.

MR HANSON: What are we going to do to make sure that there are more votes, so that we can assure ourselves that it is a truly representative body?

Mr Manikis: I understand that the number of people that turned out to vote was on par with the former ATSIC elections for the zone here.

MR HANSON: That is not necessarily a success, though, is it?

Mr Manikis: No. I put that on the record. And we want to do better, of course. I think the way that members themselves conduct themselves, the way that they have been going out into the community, is assisting in raising the profile of the importance of the body. I think that is going to work. We have learnt some lessons from the previous experience and we will certainly be looking to increase the access to voting points around the ACT.

Secondly, we will certainly be using the members themselves, as I mentioned before, to talk about the body broadly and the importance of the body around their circles. I hope that through their work in the first three years, and the improvements in service and all the rest of it for the community, they will see that this body is worth while having and that it is worth ensuring that the best possible representatives for themselves are put in those roles when the time comes. So I think it is a little bit we

have to do and a little bit that the members themselves have to do when the time comes.

MR HANSON: They have got to market themselves—

Mr Stanhope: I do not disagree with you, Mr Hanson. I am not sure that I would say that I was disappointed with the voter turnout, but I was somewhat surprised that it was as low as it was. I do not know whether we can be judgemental about it or critical of it, but it is something that I have pondered. We believe and the advice to us is that there are somewhere between, I think, 3,500 and 4,000 people in the ACT who identify as Indigenous, the vast majority of whom do not identify as traditional custodians or owners of Ngunnawal or Ngambri.

I think there is some complexity in the attitude which people who do identify as Indigenous bring to issues around representation. I have discussed this quite broadly, the feelings of people who are not from this country about putting themselves forward as representatives of Indigenous people in this country. I think there is a complexity. I have spoken fairly broadly about this issue of appropriate representation of the 4,000, or thereabouts, Indigenous people that have made Canberra home.

One of the complexities is that of that 4,000, say, only 500 or less would identify as Ngunnawal, Ngambri or as traditional custodians or owners, so 3,500 of the 4,000 do not and there is a quite genuine, as a matter of respect, reluctance to present themselves as people who might be legitimately representative—even though they form the majority of Indigenous people; they come from a group that constitute the majority of the Indigenous population, namely the 3,500 who are not Ngunnawal. A real issue for us is that our traditional structures around consultation have concentrated on recognising the pre-eminent role of traditional custodians or owners. But they are a significant minority in the Indigenous population.

The point you raised is a point that bothers me, but I think that is one of the explanations and we have to be respectful of that. As Mr Manikis has said, we can do much more. But the group itself, just by being successful and having a good work program, working well with the government and with the government being responsive, genuinely engaging, not patronising, and taking seriously the work that the elected body does—at one level the future of the elective body is very much in the hands of the current members and of the Indigenous community.

As Mr Manikis has said, there are things government can do better, but at the end of the day the Indigenous community here really have to work with us to make this work. But we have to respond.

MR HANSON: There is a follow-up on this one. The relationship between the Ngunnawal Elders Council and the elected body: do they meet frequently? Is it harmonious—that is probably a difficult word to use, but I know there are often frictions within some of the groups.

Mr Manikis: There are frictions between families, but I do not believe there are frictions between the elected body and the Ngunnawal Elders Council. We have had the chair and other members of the elected body come to council meetings and we

have had quite a bit of interaction between the two groups. That goes along quite well, bearing in mind, of course, that three of the elected body members are elders from different families—two from one group and one from another group—so four of the members on the elected body are not from the traditional group, but three are, but they do work quite well.

Mr Hehir: One of the very clear things the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body have been about is that they are not going to provide advice on traditional matters. They are very clear in terms of their responsibility being about services to the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

MR HANSON: So that heritage and genealogy is with the elders.

Mr Hehir: It is with UNEC. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body have been very clear with everybody that that is not their remit—those are not the conversations they are going to have; those are not things they will provide advice on. I think there is a genuine respect around what the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body have been able to do.

As the Chief Minister said, a lot of this is in the hands of the elected body, but they have a very professional approach. Their focus on trying to find ways to improve services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has been quite good. I think that is recognised by both the council members, who are also elected body members, and the broader membership of the council. They understand that there are quite different roles. It is a very difficult issue to communicate to the broader community, which is something we are going to have to work on.

Mr Manikis: That role is explicit in the elected body legislation which actually prescribes the role of the Ngunnawal elders council vis-a-vis the elected body.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Manikis. Minister, still on the IEB, what is the total funding provided to the IEB?

Mr Stanhope: I will ask Mr Manikis to explain.

Mr Manikis: \$300,000 per annum.

THE CHAIR: What services are provided to the body?

Mr Manikis: Purely secretariat; it is a secretariat service. One would imagine that would be taking minutes, setting up meetings and doing a bit of research for the members.

Mr Stanhope: Assisting in the writing of reports.

Mr Manikis: Yes, assisting with the writing of reports, and also coordinating support from across our department for the body as well.

THE CHAIR: Talking about the department overall, what major projects and activities were completed by the office throughout the reporting period?

Mr Manikis: In relation to the elected body?

THE CHAIR: The Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs.

Mr Manikis: The Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs had quite a significant role in the COAG context, providing and preparing papers around the COAG national agreements framework. These papers included the Indigenous economic participation national agreement and negotiating with the commonwealth on an implementation plan for that—a bilateral agreement between the commonwealth and the ACT. The office was heavily involved in drafting that and negotiating it across our government—taking a whole-of-government approach to that—and also in putting together an ACT framework for Indigenous service delivery. That is just about to be finalised. That started in the reporting period.

It is supporting the minister at commonwealth-state forums through briefings on the agendas—and there are several of those forums—throughout the reporting period. As well as that, it is assisting the community with NAIDOC Week activities and other celebratory-type activities throughout the reporting period. It is about secretariat support to the ACT task force on Indigenous affairs when the chief executives come together from the human services departments, as well as Justice and Community Services these days. They come together to provide strategic direction. The office provides secretariat support and research for that. The list goes on. There are some programs as well. The Indigenous traineeship program is driven from the office, including managing the cultural centre over at Yarramundi Reach.

MS BRESNAN: My question is a follow-up in a way to that. You mentioned the COAG economic participation agreement, which had been driving the framework for service delivery, and the chief executives meeting. I am just wondering about our overall input into these processes. Would the chief executives meeting be the main forum by which the department, or the office, provides a coordinated response to a number of issues? In terms of the other annual reports hearings, health, education and housing are all pretty significant issues and often Indigenous people are the highest needs groups. I am just wondering how that works and it all comes together.

Mr Hehir: The task force is how we talk about the interrelationships between those issues. It is very rare for there just to be one issue within the community. Housing has an impact on education and health and people's health and their ability to sustain has an impact on education. There are a lot of interrelationships. We use the task force to discuss those interrelationships, to look at how we can support each other and how we can assist the programs.

We also have the Indigenous integrated family support program which works across the three departments. Again, it works with some families intensively around their quite specific needs. In a broad policy sense, that is the forum where the main service delivery agencies have come together to talk about what they are doing and how we can support each other to do that work and to do that work better.

For example, Education have been talking about the work they have been doing with Indigenous students. That is important to us as a department because a significant

portion of those students are in my care. The work they are doing there is very important to us. It is important to Health as well because the work that they are doing with those young people will have benefits later on both in terms of better education and better health outcomes typically and in terms of what Education might identify with the families and the support they might need.

That is the forum where we try and bring it all together. It is very much from a service delivery perspective. There has been a quite a bit of growth in that. It started out as the chief executives of Health and Education, chaired by the Chief Executive of Disability, Housing and Community Services. That has increased with senior representatives from both the central agencies, with the Chief Minister's Department and Treasury attending. The Chief Executive of Justice and Community Safety has recently become a member.

Most interestingly, we have just had a request from the Chief Police Officer asking if he could join the membership. That is probably the first you have heard of that, Chief Minister. That is quite a good sign for us in terms of the way in which the chief executives or chief officials from various organisations see the use of sitting down and talking about what we are doing overall, what are the specific programs and how can we support or work with those programs, or leverage off those programs in many ways to try and work broadly across the community. The other work that we do is specifically around some quite complex families and indeed the relationship we have with Health and Education through the IFSP.

MS BRESNAN: In terms of any plans that might be developed, the reconciliation plan is mentioned here and you have mentioned the service delivery plan. Are they developed in conjunction with that particular forum?

Mr Hehir: The reconciliation action plan was a Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services specific project. We did that ourselves. We let the task force members know and they have all been provided with a copy of the report. Education are close to finalising their reconciliation action plan. When we gave our copy, the Chief Minister's Department representative came back and said, "Would it be possible to do a whole-of-government one? Would that make sense?"

MS BRESNAN: It probably would.

Mr Hehir: We are having that conversation: "Because we have got some agency ones, what could you do with the whole-of-government level? What is best done at an agency level?" That is advice that we will take at some point, but it is that sort of process which will be discussed in that forum.

MS BRESNAN: So there is a possibility we would see a whole-of-government one?

Mr Hehir: The question is being asked, and we need to come back and say, "Is it going to work or not?"

Mr Stanhope: One of the other outcomes at one level, Ms Bresnan, from the creation of the task force and the work that it does—one of the difficulties within government in relation to this issue is working holistically. As Mr Hehir says, so many of the

families—for instance the ones that Justice works with—that have children that are in the care of the head of the department are the same families that Education has particular issues with in terms of their attendance at school or their achievement, or lack of achievement at school.

As we go forward, the chief executives are meeting and are reporting to me regularly. One of the issues that are highlighted is the lack of good data. It is a matter of some concern to me, for instance, in the last Productivity Commission report on disadvantage in Australia, that the ACT was not measured against a number of indicators because of the size of the sample and a lack of faith in the integrity of some of the data. That might be all right in relation to national comparisons, but in relation to the ACT and our own decision making I have concern around some of the data available to us. One of the exercises that we are now pursuing, which is really a direct outcome of some of the work and some of the difficulty we have in answering some questions in relation to how to measure progress, is the depth of the data that we have available to us.

Again, an issue of particular concern that I have been seeking to pursue is a better or new approach in relation to education. There are just over 1,000 Indigenous children at school in the ACT. Almost every single one of them is in a public school. As against the performance of non-Indigenous children, they are performing at about 15 per cent less. I cannot believe that with the great advantage we have as a small jurisdiction, a city state with only 1,000 Indigenous students, we cannot case manage every single one of the 1,000 Indigenous students within the government school system.

I met with the new chief executive of the department of education just three or four weeks ago and raised this issue again. Mr Watterston has assured me that it is at the top of his priorities to do precisely that. We have done it in the past, but not rigorously. My thinking and some of the experience we have had is around regular reporting through the chief executives task force where we attempt to work across all government agencies.

These are the most difficult issues that any government in Australia has to deal with—at the intractable edge of government delivery and policy dealing with issues of disadvantage that Indigenous children suffer. We can do a lot better than we do, even though in relation to educational outcomes we lead Australia. We lead Australia quite significantly in terms of educational outcomes by our Indigenous student cohort. Indeed, we have made fantastic advances in years 3 and 5 most particularly. In relation to some indicators, Indigenous children within ACT schools are indistinguishable from non-Indigenous students. We are the only jurisdiction in Australia that achieves that outcome, but it is not nearly broadly enough spread.

The attrition rate between year 6 and year 7 is still high. We still lose Indigenous children out of the system in the transition to high school. That is just simply not acceptable. Again, the attrition from year 10 to year 11 is 10 times higher. I just say that; I do not know what the number is, but it is massively higher. I just cannot believe that we cannot address those issues, but we have to do things differently. One of the really serious issues we face is the dropout rate at the end of year 10.

The other issue we face—and I discussed this issue specifically with Mr Watterston the other day—is that, to the extent that we manage it through our system and our processes, and indeed with the support of families, more and more Indigenous children as a proportion are now going into college at year 11, but as a proportion the number of Indigenous children that do not receive a year 12 certificate—again, I do not know what the percentage is—is massively larger.

MS BRESNAN: One of the things we have heard in the education committee is that—just looking at a specific program—Gugan Gulwan provides assistance but it actually ends at year 10. There is not really a lot there beyond that going into the college system or years 11 and 12 to provide that assistance and keep the kids in there, which might be one of the reasons why it is there.

Mr Stanhope: I believe the support has to come from within the college. If I were running a college, if I were the principal of a college and I had 10 Indigenous children in my college I would not sleep at night if I did not get each of them through with a certificate at the end of year 12. We are now getting Indigenous children through year 12 in reduced numbers as a proportion of the number of Indigenous children starting year 12. We are making great progress. A significantly larger number of Indigenous children are getting through to year 12 but the number that do not get a year 12 certificate, even though they finish year 12—I wish I had the proportion here; I cannot believe that with internal supports, assistance and case management we cannot do 1,000 per cent better than we are doing. I have had this conversation with Mr Watterston. My expectation is that every principal of every school and every college will take a personal interest.

In fact, I put it to Mr Watterston that I would expect every principal of every ACT government school, when asked by the Minister for Education or the Chief Minister to personally name the Indigenous children in their school, to do it without hesitation. I would expect that if I went to a school and asked them to give me an oral rundown on any given day without advance notice how their entire cohort of Indigenous students was performing they would tell me. That is a challenge that I have laid down for Mr Watterston. With 1,000 children across 90 schools I would expect every principal at every one of those schools to be able to tell me the name of every Indigenous student in their school and to know on a daily basis what their educational performance standard was on that day. Mr Watterston said he was prepared to accept the challenge.

MS PORTER: You made brief mention of the cultural centre. The report talks about the increased usage of the centre. Can we get an update on that? Going back to the recreation action plan, how is that being implemented? I know you say it is a departmental rather than a whole-of-government one, but how is that being implemented, given that we are also looking at expanding it? Can I have answers to both of those questions as supplementaries to things that have come up in the past?

Mr Manikis: I can talk about the cultural centre and the recreation action plan. We have received a report from the cultural centre about their activities throughout 2008-09. They have had the cultural centre utilised on 312 days throughout that reporting period with community organisations coming to the cultural centre and utilising the facilities to deal with issues relating, in the main, to Indigenous affairs.

I can say to you that throughout 2008-09 there has been quite an increased level of activity. I am talking about the formal use of the cultural centre when I talk about 312 days. I am talking around about 30 to 40 organisations that have made use of the place on multi days, as well as cultural activities that have been held there during NAIDOC Week and other significant days as well, and that continues. We have finalised the refurbishments there now. It is fully operational and we are looking forward to an increase in the cultural content.

Mr Hehir: In terms of the reconciliation plan, I might just start and I might ask Neil Harwood to provide some of the details. Neil was the senior executive adviser to the group that developed the reconciliation action plan. That is useful in terms of understanding the process about how the plan is developed as well. In terms of the monitoring of it, there is a full-year report which we put up on our website which tracks our progress against our commitments. It is called a reconciliation action plan because it requires actions. You have got to commit to things; you have got to commit to targets; you have actually got to say when you will achieve something by. We report on that annually. We had a quarterly progress report just recently internally. We certainly monitor it quite closely. I might ask Neil to talk about the process.

Mr Harwood: With the quarterly report, one of the action items in the reconciliation action plan is around having a reconciliation newsletter. That is a document that we will be producing quite regularly, quarterly. It is through that newsletter that people are provided with information in terms of progress around implementing the reconciliation action plan.

For the reconciliation action plan, we have a range of issues at the corporate level. We talk about acknowledgment of our country at the start of the meetings, displaying flags, displaying artwork throughout the building. As part of the process of developing the plan, we also have a reconciliation working group, which is an ongoing working group, and it is through that working group that we monitor progress on the actions.

In terms of some other things that might be in that plan, at the end of the financial year, in around July, we will be providing a report back to Reconciliation Australia. We will be reporting on our progress through that mechanism as well. So there is a range of things—an internal working group within the department to monitor progress and then it reports to Reconciliation Australia.

MR HANSON: Chief Minister, with respect to the genealogy study, you presented a statement to the Assembly on 10 December and I have had a look at that. Obviously, it is a complex thing because we now have quite a few players in terms of Ngambri, Ngarigo people and the Ngunnawal as well. The report says it is proposed that the study will be done in an inclusive manner and that the affected families have been, in the main, fully and appropriately consulted. Is that just the Ngunnawal families? What process of consultation are we doing with the Ngarigo and Ngambri, and how are we going to proceed so that we do not just end up where we already are, which is with competing claims? Is this report going to get any further definition around Ngunnawal or is it going to have a look at this in a more open manner and consult also with those other groups that are putting in claims?

Mr Stanhope: It will be inclusive and expansive. I take the point you make, Mr Hanson. The government is looking for a resolution of some of the issues that, unfortunately, divide the community rather than unify it. I attended the last four United Ngunnawal Elders Council meetings to seek to better understand some of the issues that have in recent times created some friction, which I am sure we as elected representatives are all aware of in terms of representations that we receive from time to time.

It is a matter of some concern to me, to the government and, indeed, to my colleagues within the department—the extent of the issue around competing claims of traditional custodianship which, as a reality, are as a result of the identification by a group within this community as Ngambri and a group that have accepted an identity as Ngambri people and, in accepting that identity, have rejected a previous identity which they embraced, that of being representatives of the Ngunnawal people.

I attended the United Ngunnawal Elders Council meeting as a result of representations that I was receiving in order to seek to better understand the depth and level of the concern. I was distressed at the level of concern, anger, distress and division that has been generated within the Canberra Indigenous community. One should not underestimate the depth of the division that is unfortunately the reality within the traditional custodian ownership group within the ACT or within the region.

I raised at that meeting and had a discussion—a very difficult discussion, I might say—about the genealogy and its importance. Many people within the community are now almost looking to a genealogy study as something of a lifeline or a buoy to sustain their connection to country. I tried to make the point, but it was a point that was not accepted by anybody at that particular meeting, that—and I am aware of this in relation to previous genealogies—as a result of the paucity of records, as a result of the nature of relationships, and I think as previous genealogy show, some families who have identified as Ngunnawal for their entire life, including for generations, and there will not be a capacity to substantiate a connection. I have a grave concern about the implications of that. It was a point that I raised as a genuine risk. We discussed the implications of genealogy and the implications for those families who have always identified as Ngunnawal, who would not be confirmed through a genealogy because of perhaps a lack of records.

I made the point about my own family, that my mother's father was given up for adoption at birth and I cannot trace my family on my mother's side beyond my mother. That is in the context of English record keeping. So in relation to some of the records around births, deaths and marriages within this region, particularly affecting Indigenous people in the 19th century, there is a grave risk in genealogy. But the unanimous view at the United Ngunnawal Elders Council meeting was to proceed and be damned.

MR HANSON: My understanding is that all of the affected groups want it—

Mr Stanhope: They do.

Mr Hanson: because each believes that their claim will be—

Mr Stanhope: I have agreed that we will fund it. I am just, for the record, expressing a significant concern I have about the usefulness of the utility and the capacity for a genealogy to resolve problems. There is this expectation—I believe an unreasonable expectation—that this will resolve all issues. I fear it will exacerbate some issues around identification. The government at the moment relies on self-identification. I believe it is the best and most appropriate way. If a person identifies as Ngunnawal, and if the consensus or the majority view within this community is that this is the country of Ngunnawal people, I believe the government has no option but to accept that position.

MR HANSON: There are a number of competing groups, though.

Mr Stanhope: There are now. The Ngarigo certainly have always expressed that the limestone plain was the northern boundary of country which was traditionally Ngarigo. The Ngambri is very recent; it is an identification that has only been current for 18 months and it is an identification that is accepted by just one of the 12 families that identified.

MR HANSON: Have you spoken to the Ngarigo at all or have there been discussions with them?

Mr Stanhope: Not recently, no, but at different times I have. But you raised, quite reasonably, a claim for interest which the Ngarigo people assert. I am hopeful that we will have the capacity to fund the genealogy in this coming budget. I believe it is important that we do it now. To go to your specific question, it must include, of course—

MR HANSON: Does it include all the groups and does it come at it from a clean slate?

Mr Stanhope: That is my—

MR HANSON: Obviously, if you are identifying as Ngarigo or Ngambri, it is going to say—

Mr Stanhope: I know.

MR HANSON: that it is situated in the—

Mr Stanhope: The position we have now—I do not fully understand it and I guess this goes to the heart of it; I do not understand it at one level at all—is that there are people now, and this is the difficulty we have, identifying as Ngambri and who will not identify as Ngunnawal, and people identifying as Ngunnawal who will not, and will never, identify as Ngambri, yet they are all cousins; they are related by blood. I do not know where it is going to lead us but it may lead us to a position where we simply acknowledge three.

The difficulty the government has at the moment—and Mr Manikis could go to the mechanics of this—is that six years ago, when the United Ngunnawal Elders Council

was established, we did it through a rigorous process of self-identification with every family. We started with one family that identified as Ngunnawal, asked Mr Manikis, who facilitated this process, to identify every other family group that they acknowledged and recognised as Ngunnawal and then went to those families and asked them whether they recognised as Ngunnawal and asked them to identify every other family that they recognised and identified as Ngunnawal. Through that process, there were identified 12 family groups that accepted that the other 11 family groups were Ngunnawal.

So we arrived at a position where each of 12 families unanimously recognised 11 other families as Ngunnawal families. We asked them whether they would meet—and they did—as a group and we asked them whether they would advise the government on a number of issues: “How do you wish to be addressed? How do you spell the name by which you wish to be addressed? Do you wish the government to acknowledge you as the traditional custodians? Do you wish the country over which you claim or assert traditional custodianship to acknowledge or welcome through signage people to this country? If so, what form do you wish the signage to take?”

Each of those questions was answered: “We are Ngunnawal people. This is how we spell Ngunnawal. We want signs erected at the entries to the ACT acknowledging that this is Ngunnawal country, and we would like to welcome people through that signage to this country.” That advice was provided essentially unanimously. In fact, there was one dissenting family to the spelling of the name “Ngunnawal”. But there was unanimous agreement that it was Ngunnawal country. Eleven families, I think, accepted the spelling of “Ngunnawal” and all families wanted erected signs welcoming people to this, their country, Ngunnawal country. The first of those signs was unveiled by Matilda House, who now, of course, asserts that she leads a family that are Ngambri people. So on what basis does the government overturn that unanimous advice? And the genealogy is now part of the process for all of these matters.

MR HANSON: With the study, when it is formed, can you provide Assembly members with a copy of the terms of reference—

Mr Stanhope: Absolutely.

MR HANSON: for what the genealogy study will actually inquire into?

Mr Stanhope: Sure, absolutely.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. We are moving on.

MRS DUNNE: I want to ask a quick question on this. In agreeing to the genealogy, has there been any agreement that they will be drawing on the previous work or is the previous work considered discredited?

Mr Stanhope: Some people think the previous work is perfect and other people think it is completely flawed. I think that the point Mr Hanson makes—

MR HANSON: There is a lot of previous work as well. It depends which previous

work you refer to.

Mr Stanhope: Some previous work, that is right.

MR HANSON: There is one by the government in 1998.

Mr Stanhope: The challenge for us is the challenge that Mr Hanson acknowledges—that there is nothing to be gained by having another process that is just going to be accepted if it suits your purpose and completely rejected if it does not. I do not know how we achieve that, but I think we achieve it through having as much rigour as we can bring to the process. We are just now beginning to work it up. This will be subject to a budget bid.

MR HANSON: I think whoever conducts it has got to be seen as thoroughly independent.

Mr Stanhope: Absolutely. One of the great difficulties with some of the previous work is that the majority of people that identify as Ngunnawal do not believe that the work was objective. They believe it was commissioned by and supports a particular view by one family. That is the view that was expressed to me. It is one of the difficulties, and this is my point: if you do not like what it says then it is convenient to simply reject it in its entirety. I am not sure that that is entirely fair. But it is what we need to avoid, certainly, in the future.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, minister. I think time has beaten us. There will be possibly some questions given to you in writing, and we look forward to your responses to those.

Appearances:

Burch, Ms Joy, Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Minister for Children and Young People, Minister for Ageing, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Women

Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

Hehir, Mr Martin, Chief Executive

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

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

Whitten, Mrs Meredith, Senior Director, Governance, Advocacy and Community Policy

Hubbard, Mr Ian, Director, Finance and Budget, Policy and Organisational Services

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, minister and ladies and gentlemen from the various departments. Welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Health, Community and Social Services inquiring into the 2008-09 annual and financial report of the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services. With a sense of *deja vu*, minister, can I invite you to make an opening statement?

Ms Burch: I thank the committee for the opportunity to discuss the department's works across the areas of ageing, multicultural affairs and women. I would like to take a few moments to highlight some of the activities and achievements in each of these portfolios. Before I begin, because some of the officials actually do not stay the distance, can I just take the opportunity to thank the officials in the department for the wonderful work that they have done in 2008-09 and also acknowledge my ministerial predecessors, Ms Gallagher and Mr Hargreaves.

On the portfolio of ageing, members will be aware that the Office for Ageing has been involved in major work to address issues around rapid ageing of the ACT population. This presents many challenges for both the government and the community. Our approach is squarely focused on the promotion of positive ageing, supporting and encouraging Canberrans to plan for their older years and to stay active and engage within the community during those years.

To formalise our approach during 2009, the Office for Ageing, in partnership with the ACT Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing, developed the ACT's strategic plan for positive ageing. In fact, I launched this plan publicly yesterday at the Majura Community Centre in Dickson and the plan is themed around our ambition to create an age-friendly city. I am quite happy to table a copy of the plan at the end of today's hearing. The Office for Ageing will partner with the ACT Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing in guiding the implementation of the plan and the World Health Organisation's check list for essential features of an age-friendly city will be used to monitor the plan's progress.

During the reporting period, 12 projects were funded under the ACT seniors grants program to promote social inclusion. A total of \$85,000 was made available—a figure

that this year will be boosted to \$100,000. The supported programs focused on initiatives that assisted older Canberrans to remain active and engaged in the community. The office is also redeveloping the ACT elder abuse prevention program in accordance with recommendations made in the strategic review of January 2009. The aim of this program is to respond to incidents of elder abuse and to reduce elder abuse in the ACT community.

In 2008-00 the office worked closely with Housing and Community Services ACT to plan for the establishment of a permanent seniors club in the Tuggeranong area. Also during the reporting period a feasibility study was undertaken to identify a site, and a construction budget of \$1.5 million was allocated.

Work in my portfolio responsibility of multicultural affairs was equally productive. Members will need no reminding that this government has a dedicated focus on supporting and enhancing multiculturalism through its policies and programs. During the reporting period there was considerable work in developing a new ACT multicultural strategy and this culminated in my tabling of the document in the Assembly just last week. The plan focuses on six areas identified by the community as being of the highest priority. The actions associated with each strategy aim to improve the government's service provision and enhance equity and access to services.

Another source of pride was the success of the 2009 National Multicultural Festival. The event attracted some 170,000 people and again we saw terrific support from the multicultural community, diplomatic missions, international students and Canberra more generally. The 2009 festival demonstrated once again the capacity of the multicultural, arts and business communities to work together.

The government has acknowledged that the 2009 festival ran over budget, something that I intend to fully address in 2010. While partial cost recovery from community participants will be a feature of the 2009 festival budget, I have instructed my department to ensure that this does not undermine the inclusive participation of community groups and individuals. I am confident that the coming festival program will fully meet community expectations.

Throughout the reporting period the Theo Notaras Multicultural Centre continued as a hub of multicultural activity. It houses representative groups from six peak bodies and 27 community organisations and during the year 300 meetings and more than 400 events were held, including citizenship ceremonies and fundraisers for the recent natural disasters in the Asia-Pacific region.

We are particularly proud of our work experience support program, a well-established and respected initiative which is delivering many positive benefits for its participants. In the reporting period there were 40 participants, 17 male and 23 female, from 13 different countries. We are aware that 20 of these participants have now secured full-time employment.

The ACT Muslim Advisory Council was established in December 2005 and has provided a vital and direct link of communication between the Canberra Muslim community and the ACT government. I am particularly impressed by the council's ability to promote harmony between the Muslim and the non-Muslim community. The

council implemented national action plan projects, which included a two-way media program and the treasures of the Middle East school project, to enhance Muslim integration in the broader community.

Finally, I turn to my portfolio responsibility for women. This government is committed to actions that enable ACT women and girls to fully participate in our community. The new ACT women's plan is currently being progressed. In July 2009 the government released a discussion and companion paper to enable individuals, organisations and the community to provide feedback on the development of that new plan. Community consultations were conducted from July and included targeted outreach forums with a diverse group of women.

The new plan will also be informed by the second women's summit that was held in July 2009. The ACT government has also committed to increasing women's economic independence and participation in the workforce. The impending microcredit program, only the second government scheme of its kind in Australia, gives women access to small interest-free business loans, enabling those eligible to create or grow their own business. The tender process for this program is being finalised and it is anticipated that it will commence early in 2010.

The return to work grants support the participation of women in the workforce. There was an initial slow uptake of these grants but more recently an advertising campaign has been successful in raising their profile. These return to work grants particularly assist vulnerable women with children to overcome some of the barriers they experience when looking to enter or return to the workforce.

Again I thank the committee for enabling me to outline some of the work and we welcome your further questions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. We welcome Mr Seselja, Ms Hunter and Mrs Dunne to this hearing as well. I will start off with a question on multicultural affairs. Page 61 of the annual report relates to the 2009 Multicultural Festival. What was the total cost of the festival last year? Minister, I am asking you but I presume you—

Ms Burch: I do have a figure, but the detail I am happy for Nic Manikis to give you because I am sure you all have some questions on this; it seems to be of interest to you. I am trying to contemplate whether I add this to the ongoing score to see if you are the one that reached the century, Mr Doszpot.

Mr Hubbard: The total cost of the festival for last year amounted to a little bit over a million dollars—\$1,069,000.

THE CHAIR: Okay, and what was the original budget, Mr Hubbard?

Mr Hubbard: It is quite a difficult budget to actually put out, quite simply, but it was the combination of funding that comes in from the government through GPO, sponsorship dollars and also some revenues from various box offices. We predicted it would be about \$800,000 in total for the budget.

THE CHAIR: There seems to be a little bit of a discrepancy between what the budget blow-out was—

Mr Hubbard: Yes, exactly, because the budget is your best guess going forward. When we wrapped up and saw what the actual was, we found that the sponsorship that we had included in the budget was considerably less than we thought it would be; therefore, the gap between the revenues coming in and the expenses going out widened. That is why you see the budget deficit at about half a million. That is how that occurred.

THE CHAIR: Okay. So the budget we understood was around \$418,000.

Mr Hubbard: No. That is the government funding to support the festival and that is actually \$410,000.

THE CHAIR: When did you realise the extent of the budget blow-out, what it was going to be?

Mr Hubbard: It takes quite a while. We thought that we were in trouble, probably, just after Christmas. You would appreciate that it was a pretty tough year that year with the global financial crisis. We knew that we were going to get a lot of pressure on sponsorships. Nic and his team were dealing pretty closely with the sponsors. Based on the previous year, we thought we would have a certain sponsorship budget. Like a lot of the organisations that the department deals with, we were getting a lot of messages coming back that sponsorship dollars generally, whether they were going into NGOs or into the festival itself, were dropping off dramatically, as you would appreciate, as businesses were looking after themselves and were being a bit more concerned about how they were tracking.

We got a pretty solid indication that probably that revenue stream was dropping off even slightly prior to the festival itself. But remember that the festival is pretty early in the year and most of that news that we were getting was in that December-January period.

MR SESELJA: So that \$410,000 that the government contributed: what did that end up being? \$1.069 million is the total, presumably, including income coming in from sponsors and the like. So what is the total government spend from the \$410,000?

Mr Hubbard: Clearly the \$1,069,000 represents the total expenses for the budget, for the festival itself. We got the revenue directly in from the government, being \$410,000, recognised as specifically for the Multicultural Festival and then we got sponsorship sales of just \$100,000, which is your ticketing and your sponsorship. Clearly the gap there was just a little bit over half a million which we had to find across the rest of the department, as you would if there was a deficit in a particular area.

MR SESELJA: You talked about the sponsorship dropping off. That is obviously one small part but it is a \$500,000 blow-out. What were the other parts that made up that \$500,000 increase?

Mr Hubbard: I will get Nic to give you an idea of where the additional expenses came in, but one of the things that we saw, and probably the dominant thing that came in, was that the footprint of the festival itself grew incredibly. When you look at the participation, which is shown in the strategic indicators in the annual report, the actual participation of the festival increased by 50 per cent. That brought with it the far increased footprint. To service that footprint we saw significantly increased costs in things like infrastructure for the stalls themselves and the electrical work that had to be done to connect them all up. We had quite a significant increase in the rent hire, infrastructure, utilities, rubbish collection—all the things that go for a much bigger footprint. That probably accounts for a \$250,000 or \$300,000 increase in that festival.

MR SESELJA: Is that itemised anywhere?

Mr Hubbard: We do not usually break it up, but we look at cost centre codes. We report it as expense codes.

MR SESELJA: Are you able to break it up? Presumably the work has been done and you would know what makes up that 250 and what makes up that 500.

Mr Hubbard: Definitely. We analyse it right down to individual cost codes as to what we thought would happen and then what actually happened.

MR SESELJA: Is that able to be provided to the committee?

Mr Hubbard: I am happy if the minister is happy to provide the—

Ms Burch: If the department think that is a reasonable thing to provide, yes, I am happy to provide that, including the other requests that I think Mr Doszpot has put through to the department.

MRS DUNNE: On that subject: you said, Mr Hubbard, that the footprint expanded greatly. That was the move to Glebe Park?

Mr Hubbard: Yes, the—

MRS DUNNE: If that is the case, what were the motivators for that and who made the decision to extend it to Glebe Park?

Mr Manikis: The decision to move to Glebe Park and increase the footprint was based on a couple of things. Over the previous two or three festivals there was an increase in the audience participation in Civic where we had the footprint confined just to Garema Place and City Walk, as you may recall. Over those years we were getting messages from emergency services and others that it was starting to become a bit of a safety issue. That was the first consideration: we really needed to start thinking about expanding the footprint. You cannot expand the footprint as it was anywhere other than down into Glebe Park. There was no other place unless you went up Lonsdale Street. The reasonable way to go, we thought, was Glebe Park.

This was also coupled with the late surge of community groups. The festival has always been run on a demand driven basis. As community groups wanted to

participate we would say, “Yes, no worries.” We never had reason to put a fence around participation. Last year, particularly around December-January, we had a late surge of community groups. We ended up with 60 or 70 groups, late in the piece, that we had to accommodate. Bearing in mind the advice about safety, we expanded the footprint into Glebe Park. That was a decision that we took.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, is there any contemplation of limiting the number of people that can have access to stalls for the beer and sausage fest?

Ms Burch: We are mapping out the footprint of the Civic area, the pedestrian precinct within the Civic area. We have a number of three-by-three—I am sure Nic can give you the numbers. Should groups want a six-by-three then that reduces the total number. So there is a limited footprint. Nic can give you some more information.

MRS DUNNE: So there is not going to be Glebe Park this year?

Ms Burch: No.

Mr Manikis: Can I just say that the lesson we have learnt from 2009 is that we need to define what the festival is all about. It is a community-based festival; it is for the community to participate in. We have got to give every opportunity for the community to participate in that event. We have learnt that Glebe Park has not worked on a number of levels, least of all the budget and the cost side of it. We have also learnt that the community was not jumping up and down about being out at Glebe Park.

We have listened to the community. We have moved the event from a demand driven event and put a fence around participation through our participation policy that we have now got up and running. That policy does quite a few things. First, it restricts the footprint in the Civic area and defines the number of three-by-three stalls, as the minister has just mentioned. We have got 256 three-by-three site spaces for the Saturday, which is the most popular time of the event. We have restricted the event to Friday night, Saturday and Sunday, rather than meandering through to the second weekend.

The objectives of that participation policy are really about maximising community participation and also allowing the community to make a small financial contribution towards the infrastructure of the event on a partial cost recovery basis to make it a true community-government collaboration. We have about 250 three-by-three sites. We have not heard any complaints about the policy at this point in time. We have heard from commercial operators who are to pay a larger fee. We are treating them as quasi-sponsors because, after all, it is about the community; this event is not about anything else. Apart from the length of the festival changing and a charging regime which allows for a small contribution by the community towards the costs, it is a clear statement about what the festival is all about.

MS BRESNAN: When you said you are listening to the community in terms of the location—using Glebe Park as an example—is that a formal process? When you said you listened, was it a formal evaluation process which led to that?

Mr Manikis: We got comment on an informal basis from community groups.

MS BRESNAN: It was not a formal process?

Mr Manikis: Not formal for 2009. We usually do evaluations every two years. We did one in 2008 and we have got one planned for 2010, but we do a lot of listening.

Ms Burch: It is my understanding that the majority of the stall holders down in Glebe Park made a number of comments that it did not work for them and it was not a success down there—a lot of people did not venture down into Glebe Park.

THE CHAIR: Minister, can I ask: what is the budget for this year's festival?

Ms Burch: The budget for this year's festival is 418 or thereabouts. That is the government contribution. We would be seeking a sponsorship on top of that.

THE CHAIR: So we will have the same budget, \$418,000, which was theoretically the budget for the previous year—

Ms Burch: Plus there was sponsorship.

THE CHAIR: which was over 10 days. So now we are talking about 2½ days, not three days as has been mentioned in the press.

Ms Burch: It is Friday. There will be activities—

THE CHAIR: On Friday night—

Ms Burch: There will be connected and related activities starting on Friday. It will be Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

THE CHAIR: So we are talking about 2½ days with the same budget as we had before for 10 days.

Ms Burch: Friday, Saturday, Sunday.

Mr Manikis: That is right and—

Ms Burch: I beg anyone who walked through Civic during the 2009 festival and saw the empty stalls to say that was a good use of taxpayers' dollars. I do not think it was, which is why we have compressed it down to a weekend.

THE CHAIR: Talking about good use of taxpayers' dollars, were there any contracts in place with any of the organisers of the events, such as the Fringe Festival? Did we have individual contracts in place?

Mr Manikis: Yes, we had contracts in place with service providers.

THE CHAIR: So how did the budget blow-out occur? If you had contracts, who did these people talk to when it came to budget decisions? We just can't understand how

the budget blow-out occurred.

Mr Manikis: What happened is that we got 60 additional community groups coming in over a couple of weeks in that December-January period. As I said before, in the absence of any participation policy or any written promulgated guidelines where you could say, “No, you’re not participating,” what we did was add stalls. When we had 60 or 70 stalls down in Glebe Park we needed a stage, we needed security, we needed garbage collection, we needed light and sound. What happened was that these costs just continued to—

MRS DUNNE: So Glebe Park accounted for the half-million dollar—

Mr Manikis: Glebe Park accounted for most of that half a million dollars.

MRS DUNNE: What were the other things that were accounted for then?

Ms Burch: I think that question has been asked. We have said that we will provide it to you, Mrs Dunne. What needs to be recognised is that neither this department nor I thought that was a way to run a festival, which is why we have got a tight budget, which is why it is down to three days, which is why we have implemented oversight groups and things like that. We are happy to talk to you around some of the regimes and processes we have put in place.

MRS DUNNE: So how is it going to be bigger and better?

Ms Burch: As I have stated a number of times, we will work to budget and we will deliver a community driven and community welcomed wonderful festival in February.

MR SESELJA: Who authorised the additional spend? I think that is what Mr Doszpot was getting at. Where was that authorised and at what level?

Mr Manikis: I had the delegation for that.

MR SESELJA: So you did not speak to your minister about the additional spend? That was able to be done at an officer level?

Mr Manikis: Not at that time.

MR SESELJA: When was the minister informed that the budget was being blown out and when did the minister approve the additional spending?

Mr Hubbard: As Mr Manikis has said, he does have the delegation to commit to expenditure. He was using a budget that was drawn up and—

THE CHAIR: What amount is that expenditure to?

Mr Hubbard: he believed that he had sufficient flexibility to make that judgement. His budget, as I said, was 800,000. This year we have pulled the budget right back to probably 550. As sponsorship comes in and commitments are made we have a bit more flexibility. One of our strategies for this year—and it goes to your question,

Mr Doszpot—is that in terms of all the major costs that are in our budget, which includes that list that I will provide you, we are having contracts for those and they are fixed. They will not give anyone the latitude to be able to go and say, “If the number goes up from 50 to 90 you can charge us more in the future for that gap.” We have constrained that. We are going to have a fixed price approach to the budget and have an envelope for it which will help us meet the overall budget.

Mr Hehir: If I may add to the answer, Mr Chair—

MR SESELJA: Just before you do, Mr Hehir, I do not think the actual question has been answered as to when the minister was informed and did the minister approve of that additional spend. I do not think we have had an answer to that.

Ms Burch: Perhaps it would come if you let Mr Hehir finish.

Mr Hehir: I think Mr Hubbard’s circumstance was that the minister was not asked to approve an additional spend, to my knowledge. I will need to check that.

MR SESELJA: Okay.

Mr Hehir: But I certainly do not recall any brief passing me to that effect.

MR SESELJA: Was the minister kept informed of these changes to the parameters throughout the process?

Mr Hehir: I will need to check our notes for that. There is a point in time when I was on leave when some of this was happening so I would need to check that. I think it would be fair to say that both myself and—

THE CHAIR: Could we just include those questions with the answers that we are seeking—if you would not mind answering those as well?

Mr Hehir: Yes. I think it would be fair to say that both Ms Lambert and I are extremely annoyed about the lack of budget control in this area. A lot of the changes that you see in this year’s festivals are a direct result of my advice to Mr Manikis and to Ms Sheehan about the need to get the costs under control, the need to have a look at the extent of the festival and the need to have a look at charging policies. If we are providing the opportunity for organisations to make a significant amount of money I believe it is appropriate that we recover our costs on that and that, in commercial circumstances, we seek a commercial return over and above cost recovery.

I also had a long discussion with Mr Manikis about the need to try and have a look at what the intent of the festival was. Out of that came the participation policy. Certainly there were a number of commitments given by people previously in the position that we felt needed to be honoured, given they were commitments external to government. This also added to the cost. Accordingly, I suggested that we needed to make sure we kept the focus of the festive tight. We have been given very clear instructions by our minister that she does not expect to see any budget blow-out this year. For the first time that I can recall we now have a contingency. That contingency is set at quite a high percentage of the total cost and we will not commit beyond that.

I have also asked the deputy chief executive of the department to have an internal audit to examine the process of last year's festival to identify where the systemic problems were and whether we need to make further changes to the changes that we have already identified to the community. I expect that report to be provided to me in the next couple of months. Unfortunately, it will not be available before the timing of the 2010 festival in terms of being able to implement significant changes in processes et cetera, given most of that planning is well and truly underway and/or complete. I have asked that the department look at a number of factors and, very broadly, at the processes that occurred to ensure that they do not occur again.

MR SESELJA: So you will now be taking a more personal role in oversighting to ensure that some of that lack of cost control is not repeated?

Mr Hehir: I already have taken quite an active involvement. When the draft figures were advised to me I was not very happy, I think it would be fair to say. In fact, I was extremely unhappy. I immediately set about discussing with Mr Manikis and Ms Sheehan processes around ways to bring the costs back towards where they should be—the need not to anticipate significant sponsorship dollars in your planning, that you need to treat them as a lucky outcome. In a very real sense, if you do not have them tied down you do not work towards them. There are a number of things that I have already put in place. I am expecting quite a comprehensive report from my internal audit team on where they believe processes could be improved further and what other action we should take.

Ms Burch: As mentioned to Mr Seselja, there is a departmental oversight committee with community groups on it. There is very tight control over the programming and the ongoing mechanics of the festival.

MR SESELJA: That oversight committee was not there before? This is a newly established—

Ms Burch: I do not know if it was there.

Ms Sheehan: For the two previous festivals, we have had a committee which has included whichever organisation has been organising the volunteers for the festival and it has had the sponsors on it. Those committees played a valuable role in terms of advising on issues of importance to the sponsors but they did not have an active oversight role. The difference with the arrangements this year is that, first of all, we have a very tight project plan. We have an extremely robust risk register. Mr Manikis and I meet weekly with the project plan and we have a weekly report on the budget expenditure. On the risk register, we look at what risks have emerged and how those have been mitigated in the week.

About 95 per cent of our contracts have been signed, as Mr Hubbard outlined. That means we have fixed costs for the items in the festival. There is no expenditure authorised outside the budget that has been determined. We are meeting with the sponsors on a regular basis. That was previously a monthly basis but now it will be on a fortnightly basis until the festival, so that we can make sure there are very tight controls on the delivery of this festival. It will be a wonderful festival but it will be a

festival on budget.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We have to move on from this topic. There are a number of questions that I believe the department is committed to supplying to us and we look forward to that. And there will be some further questions coming from the committee. Ms Bresnan?

MS BRESNAN: Thank you, chair. My question is in relation to the elder abuse prevention program, which is on page 57. Was this the program which ADACAS previously ran? I want to get clarification of that. It states in there that a review of the program has occurred and 10 recommendations were made in January 2009. What has happened to the recommendations? What is happening with the actual program now and where has it gone to?

Ms Burch: Ms Bresnan, I do remember the lively discussion, yes.

MS BRESNAN: I know you mentioned it in your opening comments but the detail was not there.

Ms Burch: No, we are happy to talk about it.

Mrs Whitten: The elder abuse prevention program is currently under review. We have brought on board a policy officer to complete that review by about February next year. The aim of that review process is to respond to incidents of elder abuse and reduce the incidence of elder abuse.

MS BRESNAN: In the report it states that a review was conducted and the final report was delivered in January 2009.

Mrs Whitten: The review itself was in relation to an overview of the whole program, and that was conducted by Communio. In terms of implementing the recommendations from the report, we brought in a policy officer to do that. As part of that, the aim is to reduce the incidence of elder abuse in the community. We are doing that by developing a coordinated response across government and working with the community sector as well.

We have expanded the network that already existed. That includes community-based organisations plus the Public Advocate, the Public Trustee, the Human Rights Commission and a number of other community-based organisations like Alzheimer's ACT and Carers ACT. The role of that network is to advise the Office for Ageing on the redevelopment of the elder abuse program.

The other aspect of the program was that there was an information and referral line which was funded through SupportLink. We worked with SupportLink in terms of ending that funding relationship. We have brought the information line back into the Office for Ageing from 1 October this year. The telephone line has received about 21 telephone calls since 1 October. We have been working with those members of the community who have made contact about referring them to a number of service organisations, depending on the nature of the issue that is raised in that telephone call.

In terms of the network, the network also includes Legal Aid; they also receive calls, as does the Office of the Public Trustee and the Public Advocate. Part of the revised program is to have a coordinated way of collecting data around the number of calls and the number of incidents of elder abuse. So we are still working through the data collection side of a revised program.

MS BRESNAN: Have the services continued to be provided throughout this whole period?

Mrs Whitten: Absolutely.

MS BRESNAN: So it has not actually stopped. When it finished with ADACAS, it has continued on. There has not been any reduction in services that are provided?

Mrs Whitten: That is right.

MR SESELJA: We did have a discussion, as Ms Burch alluded to, in estimates. I know you are referring to a review but when we were talking about this at estimates you talked about needing to see a second six-monthly report from ADACAS. You said in estimates that the program goes until 30 June, that there had been one six-monthly report from ADACAS and the second report needed to be seen. Have we seen the second report from ADACAS and what did it show?

Mrs Whitten: It was quite high level. The outcome of that was that there were about 17 cases that ADACAS managed during the 12-month period.

MR SESELJA: So that was all that second six-monthly report showed? It did not give any new information—

Mrs Whitten: No.

MR SESELJA: in addition to the first six-monthly report? So that just gives basic figures in terms of the work that they have done?

Mrs Whitten: It was one-off funding for that 12-month period and during that 12-month period ADACAS reported that they managed 17 cases. ADACAS still have a responsibility through the HACC program to also support HACC clients in relation to this as well.

MS PORTER: My question is about the national partnership agreement on concessions. Reciprocal transport concessions are mentioned on pages 9 and 57. I have had in the past a lot of inquiries from constituents about this issue. How is it now operating?

Ms Burch: The national partnership on concessions?

MS PORTER: Particularly on reciprocal transport concessions.

Ms Burch: There is a national agreement. Part of this agreement continues the practice of earlier, whereby states and territories make available rebates for certain

concessions for pensioners, and the commonwealth contributes to the cost of funding those concessions. Under the agreement that we have at the moment, the ACT received \$776,000 for the six months from January to June in this reporting period and the funding is subject to indexation by wage-costs index. I am sure Mrs Whitten can talk to you more, but I think I mentioned an hour or so ago that concessions cover energy, water, sewerage, general rates, transport, motor vehicle registration, drivers licence and spectacles.

MS PORTER: I am interested in how it works when a person travels from here to another state.

Ms Burch: We now have national—

MS PORTER: That is what I am interested in.

Ms Burch: It has been a long time coming.

MS PORTER: I know.

Ms Burch: We now have mutual concession recognition.

Mrs Whitten: Yes, so all states and territories have signed up to the agreement. The minister has identified the funding that the commonwealth provided in the first six months of this year. In addition, under that payment schedule, there was about \$80,000 for the territory in relation to the schedule around public transport—that part of the framework or the agreement related to public transport. For 2009-10, there is about \$168,000 that the ACT will receive. That means people who hold seniors cards in another jurisdiction can visit the ACT and they will receive a concession for their public transport travel in the ACT. And ACT residents with a seniors card can also use that concession interstate.

Ms Burch: There are 42,000 seniors card holders in the ACT, which is around 96 per cent of—

MS PORTER: Have we had any feedback from COTA or anyone about how that is working in terms of whether it has made a difference for people? Are they appreciating it?

Mrs Whitten: I think prior to the signing of that agreement the Chief Minister had already written to a number of ministers in other jurisdictions because there was an identified need by our residents. Although we had in-principle agreement from the Northern Territory and Tasmania to have a reciprocal arrangement in place, that eventuated with the signing of this national agreement. I think that because we have now signed it that has made a difference to people.

Ms Burch: Certainly, I have had personal feedback from people who have welcomed it, particularly for visits to Sydney and Melbourne to family and friends.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, how advanced are we with the development of the 2010-15 women's plan? I note that the last women's plan expired in September. Where are

we? What work remains to be done and will there be any significant policy or service delivery changes?

Ms Burch: The plan is well into the development stage. The ministerial council for women are working through that. They have had a number of drafts; there have been a couple of iterations of that and community consultation and input which are fine-tuning the final draft. I was speaking with the chair of the ministerial council just last week, at an event at the Women's Information Referral Centre, and we are planning for International Women's Day to be the launch release of that plan. Mrs Whitten, do you have any further comment on that?

Mrs Whitten: Yes thanks, minister. The development of the second women's plan has been undertaken in consultation with the ministerial council on women. Also, we have convened an interdepartmental committee so that most departments across the ACT public service are involved in the development of the plan. There was a women's summit in July of this year and, depending on who you ask, there were about 90 people who attended that summit. So it was very well attended.

Through that, and also the consultations that the ministerial council on women have undertaken, they particularly focused on some specific groups within our community, particularly individual women and women's groups who sometimes might not attend a more formal consultation process. With their feedback through their submission and other submissions that have been provided by members of the community, plus the feedback from the interdepartmental committee and also the consultations which the Office for Women have undertaken, they undertook consultations, for example, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

We have got a range of feedback. In terms of that feedback, we will be seeking advice shortly from the minister in relation to a redeveloped plan. As the minister has indicated, that is something that will be held around International Women's Day in 2010.

Ms Burch: There was broad community consultation, and even having an online survey available. We got over 360 submissions through that process. So there was a good mix of reach-out to women and girls in the community.

MRS DUNNE: What cognisance will be given to the previous plan which was completed in September? What evaluation will there be of that plan and is there going to be any sort of carryover or development of thinking as a result of the completion of the first plan?

Mrs Whitten: As part of the consideration of the second plan, the Office for Women also issued a discussion paper. That looked at the first plan. A secondary part of that discussion paper was a publication called *Taking stock*, which looked at the indicators that were in the original plan. So they have been published, they are on the website and I happen to have some copies here which I am happy to provide to the committee as well. The themes and objectives in the first plan are very much informing the direction of the second plan.

MRS DUNNE: Are the indicators going to be a bit more rigorous than they are in the

first plan or are we going to be looking to track improvement or otherwise from plan to plan?

Mrs Whitten: One of the initiatives that the government has committed to as part of the parliamentary agreement is around gender measures. So the new plan will also take into consideration some of the work that we commenced around gender analysis. So, yes, it will be more robust than the first plan.

MR SESELJA: On page 207 of the annual report it says that the Office for Ageing provided two dedicated “sanctuaries” for ACT seniors and breastfeeding mothers at the 2009 Multicultural Food and Dance Spectacular. Will something similar be provided for this year’s festival?

Ms Burch: Yes.

MS PORTER: I want to follow up on what Mrs Whitten said about gender analysis. It is mentioned on page 65 of volume 1 of the report. What kind of gender analysis are we—

Ms Burch: I think what we are looking at in the first instance is a particular project within the mental health sector. We will look at that in the first instance and try and gain some learning from that about how it could work in a broader spectrum.

Mrs Whitten: ACT Health, in mental health, are currently conducting an analysis of information in relation to seclusion and restraint. There is a national mental health seclusion and restraint project. As part of that commitment, which is a long-term commitment, ACT Health are going to conduct some analysis with an aim of reducing seclusion and restraint in the psychiatric service unit.

The way that they are doing that is by looking at quantitative data in relation to patients in the unit and using qualitative information from surveys which are also conducted with consumers and carers who have used that unit. ACT Health are working through that process and we hope to be able to provide the minister with a report on that pilot project which will then inform any further policy development. We hope to provide that in the later part of this financial year.

Ms Burch: It is exciting work—complex work but exciting work.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mrs Whitten. You are being overworked here this afternoon. Minister, you mentioned 42,000 seniors card holders in the ACT. I think that was the figure you used?

Ms Burch: Yes.

THE CHAIR: What work does the Office for Ageing undertake on analysing and understanding the population changes in the ACT?

Ms Burch: As part of our Canberra social plan, there are a whole range of things. We know that, by 2020, one in five Canberrans will be 60 years and over.

THE CHAIR: It is almost that now, judging from those figures. It is 42,000.

Mrs Whitten: We do that in partnership with the Chief Minister's Department, who have a demographer. Also, the statistics in terms of the ageing population have informed the development of the strategic plan for positive ageing, recognising that there will be a greater proportion of people over 60 years of age as we go further into this century.

Ms Burch: Part of that positive ageing is around preparing the whole community. It is around preparing the community to age positively and to be healthy, and to have in place those systems and structures. We will leave a copy of this with you. It is beyond just the Office for Ageing; it is across all agencies and their responsibilities across their portfolio areas.

THE CHAIR: What does the office define as "positive ageing"? How is it defined?

Ms Burch: Positive ageing is around being active, participating, having social networks, being healthy, being well, being connected to the community. I will find the words but you can read it.

THE CHAIR: I look forward to reading that, thank you.

Mrs Whitten: Yes, it is on page 6 of the strategic plan. One of the aspects in terms of one of the reports that was undertaken last year, and which we received this year, was around inclusion. One aspect of growing older sometimes is that opportunities to participate in the community are less available, and this plan is aiming to improve that.

MS BRESNAN: I want to ask about the day refuge for women that Toora Women run. Is there any information about the number of women who are accessing the day refuge for women? I understood, in terms of the funding they received, that they had to divert resources from the existing services they provide to run this program and did not receive any additional funding to run it. Could that be clarified and do you have any numbers on people accessing?

Ms Sheehan: To take the second part of your question first, Ms Bresnan, it would be quite misleading to say that Toora had to divert any resources at all to run the day program. In fact, Toora approached Housing and Community Services with a proposal. They are the only women's service that has 24-hour staff coverage because of the nature of the single women that come to stay at Toora. It is a congregate living model and most of our services now are standalone properties.

In the congregate living model there are a number of communal areas, including an area that had been dedicated for staff sleepover because of the 24-hour nature of the facility. Toora felt that there could be some use of the communal areas as a drop-in service for women who might be rough-sleeping. That was the sort of innovation that we had been looking for in the homelessness services sector and Toora were very innovative in coming to us with the proposal.

One thing that we were concerned about in the configuration of the refuge was that, because there were already between, depending upon the demand on the day, perhaps

eight and 10 women at the refuge, in one and sometimes two areas, to have a number of other women dropping in might be quite hard on the women that were there in the refuge. Under the previous commonwealth-state housing agreement under the crisis accommodation program, we had a specific capital fund, and what we did was to make some modifications to what was previously the staff sleepover. We were able to create a really lovely new room with its own ensuite so that the women could drop in without having to share a communal space with other women that were staying at the refuge. But if women staying at the refuge chose to go to the other space, they could.

Toora's proposal was: "We think that with the combination of our refuge staff and our outreach workers we're quite well able to offer that service for women to drop in." So the department was very pleased to contribute a reasonable amount of capital funding to make those changes at the refuge and Toora was using their existing resources, who would have been providing services to that group of women anyway.

In terms of the number of women that are using the refuge, Toora have done the first six-month report to the department. I would need to go back to the report to give you a definite number but the number that is in my head is that about five to six women were using it and most of those women were actually women who Toora was already providing a service to. And it was not necessarily women living in the refuge; Toora does outreach services, so it was women from the outreach.

We are very happy to continue to support that. We are glad that we have done the modifications to the property. What we have asked Toora to have another look at is how many women who would not have otherwise had a service from Toora were actually dropping in at the service. We would want to see a substantial use from outside the existing Toora service using that facility in order to look at investing any more money in it. As Toora had rightly identified, they had the workers there and they could provide a service. It is great that they are providing it in a different way but you would not want to be putting more staff into that mix if you did not have a really clearly identified extra demand from other women who were not already in the Toora service for that service.

MS BRESNAN: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. That is just about it, unless there is a very quick question from any member of the committee. Thank you for attending this afternoon.

Ms Burch: Thank you for the opportunity again.

THE CHAIR: We wish you all the best for the new year and for the festive season ahead. Have a happy and safe Christmas.

Ms Burch: I hope to see you all at the 2010 Multicultural Festival.

THE CHAIR: We will be there.

The committee adjourned at 1 pm.