



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

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

(Reference: [Annual and financial reports 2009-2010](#))

Members:

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

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

WEDNESDAY, 24 NOVEMBER 2010

**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, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

APPEARANCES

Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services.....51, 108

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Amended 21 January 2009

The committee met at 9.34 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

Overton-Clarke, Ms Bronwen, Executive Director, Policy and Organisational Services, Policy and Organisational Services

Whitten, Ms Meredith, Senior Director, Governance, Advocacy and Community Policy, Policy and Organisational Services

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

Ford, Ms Lois, Executive Director, Disability ACT

Hayes, Ms Ros, Executive Director, Therapy ACT

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

Baumgart, Mr Richard, Director, National Building

Collett, Mr David, CADP Review Consultant, Government Relations, Planning and Development

Matthews, Mr David, Director, Housing ACT

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

THE CHAIR: Good morning everyone. I think we might get the proceedings underway. I would like to welcome you all here this morning to the public hearing of the Standing Committee on Health, Community and Social Services inquiry into the 2009-10 annual and financial reports for the Department of Disability and Housing and Community Services.

This morning we will be hearing from the Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Minister for Ageing and Minister for Multicultural Affairs. We will leave some of those other areas out of the equation at the moment. I would also like to welcome departmental representatives as well as members of the public, including members of the Autism Asperger Association, Mr Bob Buckley, the vice president, and Mr Marion Rupcic, Ms Alison McGregor, and Ms Esther Woodbury from the community living project. We welcome them as members of the community and we thank them for their interest in this annual reports hearing.

So on to the housekeeping before we start activities. I presume, minister, you and your colleagues have enough of these meetings by now that I do not have to go through all the protocol regarding telephones and giving your name when you first speak and all of those mundane things that we talk about before we start the meetings. I presume you are all aware of the privilege statement so we will not go through that unless anyone has any questions on any matters relating to that.

Minister, as I said, welcome here this morning. Would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms Burch: I will. Thank you for that. I am conscious of the time but I am also conscious that we are covering a number of portfolios, so I think I will just do them in one lump sum if that is all right with you, chair. I would just like to highlight some of the key messages of the department and I also want to welcome the strong interest from the community members here today as well.

In 2009-10 DHCS made \$79 million available to the non-government sector in direct delivery of services to clients in the ACT, recognising that the community sector delivers many services to Canberrans and employs over 6½ thousand workers. Under disability, 2009-10 saw a significant investment in the disability sector, and the 2010-11 budget also provided \$2.4 million over two years to cover wage cost indexation.

In the context of the decade record of investment by the ACT government in recurrent funding for disability services, we have seen funding to the sector increase from \$41.5 million in 2002 to \$74.1 million in 2010-11 and this represents a 79 per cent increase in annual recurrent funding.

In therapy services, we have seen the reward of significant investment in speech pathologists for children. The 2009-10 budget committed \$3.5 million over four years for eight additional speech pathologists. All of those new positions have been fully staffed, resulting in an enhancement of services at Therapy ACT and a decrease in waiting numbers and times for most services. I am very pleased with the outcome of this investment because, at June 2010, 279 people were on the waiting list for speech pathology services, with an average waiting time of 22 weeks. This is down from 678 people waiting for speech pathology services in the preceding year. In the space of one year we have more than halved the waiting times and waiting numbers. Whilst there are still people waiting I think the decrease has been a fantastic effort.

In 2009-10, under housing, around 23,000 people were provided affordable and secure accommodation in public housing through over 11,200 tenancies. Housing ACT stock has been maintained and upgraded with a spend of \$38 million this year, and this involves some 58,000 work orders, with over 1,300 properties receiving upgrades for new kitchens and bathrooms, paints and carpets.

Under the commonwealth government's economic stimulus package we have had an allocation of \$87 million for the construction of new properties. The original proposal with the commonwealth was for the construction of 357 properties but with our investment and commitment of land for community facilities we have increased that to over 420 properties. Part of that focus has been the older persons units at such complexes as Curtin, Conder, Macquarie, Kambah, Bonython, Chapman, Florey and Rivett, and there will be 297 properties in there.

In the area of community services and facilities, 2009-10 saw significant progress in the construction of regional hubs and community halls, with a \$30 million regional community facilities and neighbourhood hall project. Just recently I have had the pleasure of opening Bonython and Griffith—and I remember both Mr Doszpot and Ms Bresnan were at the Bonython opening.

Under carers, we have seen an investment in the carers sector in 2009-10 and

recognition of the fantastic role that carers do in our community. In our 2010-11 budget we delivered \$424,000 to establish a carers advocacy service, and I have recently announced that Carers ACT was the successful tenderer for that service.

Under ageing, in April 2010 the government released their elder abuse prevention program policy, which provides a framework for government agencies and funded community partners to prevent and respond to abuse of older people in the ACT. Arising from this program last month I called for tenders to run the ACT older persons abuse prevention, referral and information line, and I am looking forward to that successful tenderer coming on line.

Under women, the ACT women's micro-credit program run by the Lighthouse Business Innovation Centre was established in March of 2010, and by the end of September of this year 12 loans have been approved. The team at Lighthouse have built a sound business skill development into the program and are assisting a number of women, with 12 loans being approved.

Early in 2010 the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women raised the use of women's safety audits at ACT government events, and this audit of tools assists organisers to consider the issues that might prevent women from accessing a number of events hosted by the ACT government. I have written to all the ministers who manage this event and we have identified a number of events in the coming year that will undergo a safety audit for women.

Under multicultural affairs, the Office for Multicultural Affairs and the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs delivered some excellent migrant and refugee programs through organisations such as Companion House and the Multicultural Youth Service, whom the federal government also supports. The 2010-2011 budget committed \$200,000 over four years to the Migrant and Refugee Settlement Service, or MRSS, to run the state programs for after-school studies, men's African cooking classes and English language classes. We have also had excellent results this year for this 2010 Multicultural Festival, and that is backed up by some very pleasing results from the survey.

I could go on—it is quite a comprehensive suite of programs—but I am sure through your questioning we can get to the detail.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister, and thank you for your candour there. Obviously we are concentrating on disability and therapy services for the next hour, so we will get stuck into that. You mentioned in your preamble a figure regarding funding for disability services increased from \$41.5 million to, I think you mentioned, \$71 million.

Ms Burch: I think it is \$74.1 million.

THE CHAIR: In the annual report it states \$68.59 million, so—

Ms Burch: I think that \$74 million goes up to when we include the budget from this year as well.

MS BRESNAN: Is that an end of year figure rather than a—

Ms Burch: In the annual report it was the figure for that year. The figure I have quoted, if we looked at the books now, is the current figure now, so sorry about that.

THE CHAIR: That is fine. Is there any further detail on the \$68.59 million you have mentioned there?

Ms Burch: Is it detailed here?

Mr Hehir: Yes, it will be. Ian can run you through the financials. Certainly, if you look at volume 2, page 118, there is the total cost under a GPO payment. So you have got the \$68.589 million being the original target and \$68.905 million being the actual result for the year. That gives you a total cost figure above that.

THE CHAIR: How much was spent in fiscal year 2007-08 and fiscal year 2008-09?

Ms Burch: So you want some annual figures for the preceding two years.

THE CHAIR: Yes; the actual amount spent.

Ms Burch: I am not quite sure if Mr Hubbard would have that on him but we certainly can get it back to you.

THE CHAIR: I would like to know how much was spent in fiscal year 2007-08 and 2008-09. If you have not got the figures, obviously I am happy for you to take that on notice.

Mr Hubbard: Yes, we will not have those figures on us.

Ms Burch: Some of the increase was around accommodation places up by 31 per cent, community support places up by 55 per cent, community access hours up by 70 per cent, centre-based respite nights up by 11 per cent and then flexible respite up by 96 per cent as well.

THE CHAIR: You are pre-empting my question each time, so that is really good; thank you. We would like to have some actual numbers for the funding for accommodation places for 2009-10, not just the percentage, as well as the funding numbers for community support places, the number of places and funding for each of those headings. If we could have those that would be useful.

Ms Burch: So the global previous years, plus a breakdown across these categories? Yes, we can do that.

THE CHAIR: How do the figures for accommodation, community support and all of those headings compare with fiscal years 2008-09 and 2007-08?

Ms Burch: As in the percentage, what has been the growth over the last three years? So am I starting to understand, Steve, you want to see the incremental increases over the last three years?

THE CHAIR: Yes, I would like to see more than just a percentage. I would like to see the actual dollar value and the number. I think that would help all of us to understand the situation.

Ms Burch: Yes.

Mr Hubbard: Obviously, these have been in the annual reports for those years—the hours. Are you happy that they are already in the annual report for the hours and we can give you the dollars?

THE CHAIR: If you are going through it and it is simple enough for you to collate it into one consolidated report, that would be better, but it is not essential. We can look it up ourselves.

Mr Hehir: We can certainly do that for you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I have just got two other questions before I pass over to my colleagues. The Auditor-General's Office performance audit report on management and respite care services in 2009 noted that there was an unmet need of \$8.3 million for daytime care and support for adults with a severe or profound disability. What is the government doing to address this issue?

Ms Burch: On providing increased respite?

THE CHAIR: The unmet need.

Ms Burch: Just our sheer investment—the fact that we are up to over 70 per cent investment across a range of services. Flexible respite hours have increased by 96 per cent, so there is clearly some increase in that area. Unmet need continues to be an ongoing balancing act across a number of streams of support for people in the community with a disability. I might ask Lois Ford to talk about—

Mr Hehir: I might start, if that is all right. The 8.3 figure remains fairly valid. There are a couple of measures that we have used, one which would say 8.8 and one which would say 8.3. That does not tell us what we do not know. So there would still be a figure over and above that, which would be where families are providing support themselves without asking for additional dollars.

What the quantum of that is we have no idea, in reality. This is not an issue that is exclusive to the territory. The reason the Productivity Commission is now looking at a national disability insurance scheme is that this issue is common across Australia. There has been quite a deal of work done at a national level in terms of looking at that quantum. Certainly, the Productivity Commission is doing a lot of work in that space.

If I recall correctly, the select committee on estimates for the budget process actually made a recommendation in relation to that figure, which went along the lines of recommending to government that they consider funding it or addressing it. I do not have the exact words in front of me, but that is my recollection. Again, I do not have the exact words of the government response, but I think it was that these things will be considered in the context of the budget for 2011-12, which is a process that will be

undertaken over the coming months, in reality.

THE CHAIR: The question was: the Auditor-General's performance audit actually highlighted a specific area and also specified an unmet need of \$8.3 million for daytime care and support for adults with a severe or profound disability. So you do have a level of knowledge of what is missing.

Mr Hehir: Yes, we do.

Ms Burch: We do and, as I have said, it is one of the constant challenges in any jurisdiction about managing the need in disability services. In this most recent budget we have put some research into respite services as well. That will look at what are the needs, what is the model, what is respite and where are the locations. In reality, I can go knocking on my cabinet door and ask for increased resources, but other ministers will do the same. I think this little bit of work that is coming up across respite will provide some useful intelligence about how we can respond.

Mr Hehir: The intent of my answer was not to say it is less than 8.3. The intent of my answer was to say it is a minimum of 8.3—that there will be a figure over and above that that we do not know. The reality is that our figure of 8.3, which was a figure we had at that point on our website, as I understand it, was identified to the Auditor-General as being an issue. Given that level of unmet need that we know about, it is actually a difficult process to provide services because a significant number of people are missing out or not getting the full level of services. That figure is broken up into people who are not getting a service at all and the proportion of people who are getting a component of the service but not what they need in totality.

MS BRESNAN: There would also be people, which I think you have alluded to, who are not even accessing it.

Mr Hehir That is right, and we have no idea of knowing.

MS BRESNAN: No, and they are not even trying to access it.

MS HUNTER: What is the Productivity Commission including in their definition of disability? My understanding is that they do not include Asperger's and those on the autism spectrum. Is that the case?

Ms Burch: We do not know the detail, but it is an active and live conversation. I personally am looking forward to the report coming down because I think it is the best opportunity to come in and have those conversations about the definition. As welcome as this will be, should it go the way we are all hoping it will go, the devil will be in the detail about the definition, the scope and things like that.

MS HUNTER: Absolutely, considering that there is an increase in the numbers.

Ms Burch: Absolutely. I might just ask Lois to talk on respite, if I can.

Ms Ford: Just on the new question in relation to autism and Asperger's and the Productivity Commission, the definition is included in our national disability

agreement. So autism and Asperger's are included in that. I would be surprised if at least developmental delay is not included. Just going to Mr Dospot's question about what we are doing about the unmet need, we appreciate that the supply is always going to outstrip the demand and we work on that basis.

Mr Hehir: I think you meant the other way.

Ms Ford: The other way around—the demand is going to outstrip the supply. We have a registration of interest and we have talked extensively about that in our estimates process. Last year it was 120 people registering interest for need. This year it is down to 96. Of those 96 people who have got a current registration of interest for need with Disability ACT, we would be working, either directly or indirectly, with over 50 per cent of the people on that register. The majority of people on that register who are registered for need are getting some level of support.

THE CHAIR: What level of need are we talking about?

Ms Ford: This is the level of need that is defined by the individual. The respite inquiry used that registration of need, plus our last funding round, to determine that dollar figure around the unmet need. That is, as Martin said, the known need. What we have been doing progressively over the last couple of years is looking at how we can have a more efficient and effective service delivery without having to fully meet all the demand by what I call the one-on-one staffing arrangements.

We have been looking at different ways of funding. We have been increasing our ISPs and the access to our ISPs, which means people then have the ability to determine the types of supports that they think are best going to meet their needs and how they will get there. As you know, we have got the quality of life grants, which are the small grants around direct funding to individuals, which enable them to purchase equipment, technology or additional support that they think is going to assist them to better engage with the community or to engage in the workforce, or to build a natural support around them.

We have also started introducing those small direct grants in the post-schools option program so that parents or individuals can have a choice about whether they would rather have a small grant that they can use fairly simply to purchase different types of support arrangements or invest in something that they believe is going to make a significant difference to how they might develop into the future—or their son or daughter—alongside giving them more flexibility about who they might have in their support network. Again, it is aimed at building that natural support, but also building supports that are more consistent with what the individual wants.

The other area that we have been investing in through Housing ACT, but also through our grants program, is what I call the environmental technology. People may need a support worker to come in during the day or someone to come in to assist them with their activities of daily living. There are people who cannot open their door because they have limited mobility in terms of turning lights on and off, pulling curtains backwards and forwards, putting on the television, the radio et cetera. They have a personal alarm system if they are in distress so there is an ability to get people there quickly if they need to. We have been working on that a lot more over the last couple

of years so that people have a better option to stay in their own home longer with those types of environmental controls there, if that is what they choose to do, as well as, in group settings, being able to share staff across a couple of houses.

THE CHAIR: Just a specific question there, Ms Ford. How many supported accommodation places are currently available for people with disability in the ACT?

Ms Ford: Available at this point in time?

THE CHAIR: At this point in time.

Ms Ford: Are you talking about vacancies? We do not have any vacancies that I am aware of. I will just go back to some of the ways that we are funding. Previously we would do a funding round. When we got some money we would go out and advertise. People would then send in their application for what they wanted and we would assess that. The person who had the highest needs would be the first person to get whatever.

THE CHAIR: To answer my question from a different point of view, how many people have you got on the waiting list?

Ms Ford: That is what I said—96 on our registration of interest.

Ms Burch: It is down from 100.

Ms Ford: For accommodation?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Ford: I am sorry; I do not have the exact numbers. I know 64 per cent of people in the ACT are wanting an accommodation solution into the future.

THE CHAIR: Will you be able to give us a breakdown of how many people are actually waiting for that?

Ms Ford: Yes, a breakdown of the waiting list, those who are waiting for—

Ms Burch: That we know that are waiting for accommodation and registered with us, yes.

THE CHAIR: The percentages are helpful, but we would like to know the numbers.

Ms Ford: Absolutely. A large number of people on our registration of interest want an accommodation support solution now or into the future. I just wanted to make the point that we are not doing large-scale funding rounds now, which is different to how we have funded in the past. The feedback from the community is that it created an environment of competitive misery, that people needed to compete for need and the decision would be made on who was able to put in the best proposal.

We now look at our registration of interest. We attempt to look at where we can get the most compatible and best long-term sustainable outcomes for individuals and we

work with them to develop those over a period of time. We have a very different approach now. It means that quite often somebody may identify an accommodation support as a preferred option but, once we start working with them, they will say, “Well, into the future because the arrangements that are happening now are working.” So there is a shift in how people see and do.

Ms Burch: It is again noting that accommodation is managed by government and non-government providers. Just recently, we have moved a couple of properties from government provision—

Ms Ford: Three.

Ms Burch: into Able Australia as well. They are non-government.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for your answers. They have been very fully explained. I think we should move on at this point because my colleagues are wanting to ask questions. Ms Bresnan?

MS BRESNAN: Thank you, chair. My question probably flows on from what Mr Doszpot has asked about looking at unmet demand. Obviously, one of the areas that we know is a key area is around support for school leavers, particularly students with disability who are leaving school. It is identified as a priority. I am wondering, in terms of when you are looking at what the demand for those services is, whether you can give us some idea of what it will be at the end of 2009, say, and then whether you have an idea what it is going to be at the end of this year as well—the level of unmet demand of those students who are leaving.

Ms Ford: I think there were 60 school leavers this year. I will just double-check.

MS BRESNAN: This is 2010 or 2009?

Ms Ford: For the year 2010, we identified 60 young people in the education system who had a disability. Of those 60 people, 27 are engaged with the transitional service delivered through House With No Steps. That service delivers supported employment and support for people to engage in full-time employment. They will work with a person over a three-year-period. Their success rate today is very good with engaging people into supported or full-time employment. I think last year we had three young people out of the 26 that were with them that came back to us to require a more long-term, sustained approach.

We have 10 to 14 students this year that we are working with who will require an ongoing, sustained support response. We have been working with these families since the beginning of the year. All of the families now know what arrangements are going to be in place. I have to say that we had not been doing that in the past. Usually, what happens at this time of the year is that families are still waiting. We have significantly changed the way we engage with the schools and with families. Over the last three years progressively families are knowing earlier and earlier. Families knew in about, I think, September what the arrangements were going to be for the year 2011, for this school year.

All families who require a sustained response have been offered the equivalent of two days or 12 hours support plus any additional living skills arrangements, respite arrangements or some direct funding that they may require.

We have gone back and revisited, as we committed to do with families, the families that left in 2008 and 2009 who were also offered exactly the same package as families are being offered this year. Of the 23 families that we engaged with over that two-year period, 15 have increased their hours from the original package that they were given up to four or, for some, five days a week. The other families who have increased their hours marginally are happy with what they have got.

The feedback has been that 20 of the families are happy with the level of support they are getting. When I say “happy”, that is a euphemism, because obviously people are never happy-happy, for all of the obvious reasons. They are satisfied with what they have at the moment, satisfied with their interaction and satisfied with the support they are getting from the department to build this core network around them.

This year, we were able to reassure families once again that this is the beginning, this is what we offer you as a start and then, as you progress through and start to identify what your needs are, how you want to get those needs met and what their planning will be into the future, we are able to step up and step into supporting them if they need additional support.

MS BRESNAN: You said that in 2010 there were 60. Was that 60 individuals? Is that right across the system?

Ms Ford: Sixty people across the education system identified as having a disability, yes.

MS BRESNAN: You said that in 2009 there were 27 people that went into House With No Steps.

Ms Ford: This is out of the 2010 school leavers.

MS BRESNAN: There will be 27.

Ms Ford: This year there will be 27 young people who will be serviced through House With No Steps transitional.

MS BRESNAN: Then you said that you are working with between 10 and 14 families. Is that on top of those 27?

Ms Ford: Yes, that is on top of those 27. Ten to 14 families will need a sustained response and then the remainder of students do not require a response at all. So not all students that are identified with a disability require a response.

MS BRESNAN: You say that but obviously there have been students who have been identified as having a disability and have probably been in particular programs. Are you actually tracking what happens to those students with families that do not get support? The other families are getting adequate service, you said. Do you know they

are happy with what they are getting? That may not be the case. Maybe that is what they are actually getting because that is what they are being offered and they are happy to take whatever they are getting offered as well. I wonder whether you are tracking what actually happens to those other students.

Ms Ford: Yes, certainly.

MS BRESNAN: The other point I was going to make, because I know there is the Koomarri program as well as other programs, was that, while there might be other programs, you might not be directly involved with what is happening. As we know, what will happen when people go into a program is that they are going to be there for quite some time.

Ms Ford: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Can I qualify, for the ease of your answer and perhaps you can answer both of these: there are quite a number of students who need 24/7 care and during their school terms they got roughly 30 hours of support. How many of the people that Ms Bresnan referred to would fall into that 24/7 category and what sort of support are they getting? From 30 hours, I presume it is down to the 12 hours you spoke about.

Ms Ford: No. What I am saying is that, for the 10 to 14 students who need a sustained response—not just this year but every year—it changes obviously from the full school days they get offered to the two days or 12 hours support additional to any other type of support that they are having and respite support they might be getting through home and community care and additional support that we might put around them. For some people, that might be up to three days support a week or 16, 18 or 20 hours initially. That is what we offer initially. For others, it will just be the 12 hours.

What we have found is that over the two years people have built those support hours through their engagement with the service once they started to work out what are the supports that are going to be best for their son or their daughter and through other programs they have built their hours or their days up to 45 hours a week. But we start with a basic, equitable level of service for each individual. It is highly individualised, because we do work with the family and the individual. But we reassure people that we will continue to stay engaged.

A number of those young people from this year have identified that they are wanting a supported accommodation response fairly soon. We have advised them that we will be starting to work with them on developing what that is going to look like and how that will move forward.

We cannot meet all of the need, all of the time at the time. What we do is work with people to try to build that support around them. That has to date proven to be quite successful.

But back to Ms Bresnan's question. There are students who do not engage with Disability ACT, who do not identify a need for an ILP. Anybody that requests it will get an assessment from us and certainly everybody in the specialised schools is

engaged in the assessment process.

We do not track the number of people that do not go into transition or do not go into our individual support. That was what you were asking, was it? We do track what is happening with people that go through the transition program; so we get feedback about that. We get feedback on engagement, whether they get into employment. And we definitely keep track of and engage with them through our children, youth and family service. We stay engaged with those people. This year it is 10 to 14. In 2008-09, it was 23 people. We stay engaged with them over time to see what their needs are and how those needs are being addressed.

MS BRESNAN: Say there is an application made for an assessment. Typically, are there families who might apply for that and who do not receive any assistance?

Ms Ford: In the post-school options process, people will fill in the registration of interest forms. We go into the schools, provide the information, show the teachers and the families how to fill in the registration of interest. Generally, the first meeting with the schools is usually fairly anxiety provoked. Families are usually fairly anxious, really anxious. We recognise that. They usually want to express their displeasure at what is being offered. So we go back into the schools again and then, by that time, people are starting to think about what they want, how they want to do that. They fill in the registration of interest. For all students leaving schools through that transition period, we go and do an assessment with the school through the individual learning plan. We work with the school on those assessments.

MS BRESNAN: I appreciate there is that process and initially they may have got this and understandably there is anxiety. But are there families or parents who will go through that registration process but not actually get any assistance?

Ms Ford: No.

MS BRESNAN: So everyone will get the assistance that they require?

Ms Ford: They will not get everything that they ask for. Some people do. It just depends what is available. But everybody who goes through that process will get some form of assistance, either through the transitional program or through a more sustained response. Does that answer your question?

MS BRESNAN: It does. I have one final question on that. There are obviously people who register a need and there is an assessment done through the ILP process. There is some information there about what students will need, based on past experience. When you then have an idea for the following year what level of need you are going to have coming through the system, there is that ILP process, which is an ongoing process. Obviously it might not always happen but does that get built into the budget for the following year?

Ms Ford: Absolutely, yes. That gets built into the budget for the following year. It also gets built into our planning. Families themselves come up with different things that they want in different ways. We used to be fairly restrictive around the ways in which we would fund different or creative arrangements. We try not to be that

restrictive anymore. That is with the direct funding grants. So not only every year do we build in what we anticipate it to be in the following years, and we know pretty much what is coming through over the next two or three years, we also build in some different arrangements for that. Every year we add some different choices into it, based on—

MS BRESNAN: That will give you a pretty good idea of what your unmet need is. So if you are saying this is the budget, this is what the need is—and it is through the ILP process, so you have a pretty good idea—that will give you a pretty good idea at the end of each year—

Ms Ford: Only for people that are leaving school. That does not—

MS BRESNAN: But it is an element—

Mr Ford: Yes, it is an element that we look at.

THE CHAIR: Can we have one speaker at a time.

MS BRESNAN: Sorry. People will get this. But this is what they have actually asked for. You could have a pretty good idea when people are not getting what they need.

Ms Ford: Yes, we do build that into our unmet need. The \$8.3 million that was in the respite audit included that information; so we know that we will have at least 20 to 25 students coming through—sometimes less, rarely more—each year who will require a quantum of support that we build into our budget. Anything outside that we see as unmet need.

Mr Hehir: Can I clarify the answer? When we say we include it in our budget, Lois has it in her internal budget and she continues to work on efficiencies within her budget to make sure she can fund the new leavers. We actually do not get additional appropriation for it each year. That is something that has to be done through the budget process. We have consistently had additional appropriation over a number of years and that goes out through some of the processes that Ms Ford has talked about. But we do not have an automatic increase in our budget.

MS HUNTER: Minister, is this something that you are going to take on? I understand Ms Ford is saying that 12 hours of support at the beginning is provided. I have a lot of families who are in really desperate situations and they are getting very anxious, very stressed and quite angry because they are going from a school week of 30 hours to 12 hours a week. This can mean that families have to give up jobs to stay home. Minister, what are you doing to make sure that we can increase that level of service so that families are not going to have to move into poverty in some cases because they are not getting the support that they need for their children?

Ms Burch: The figures show that disability has increased and this government has supported increases. You can be assured that the unmet need not only comes to your office; it comes directly to my office as well. I will continue to advocate for increased funding for disability services. Ideally, we would have the funding that we need, but that is a challenge across all portfolio areas.

On the 12 hours, I understand the anxiety of transition. This year in particular, there is probably an increased level of anxiety, with the change of school leaving age from Black Mountain. My understanding is that there are 12 hours plus those others on assessed need. But there are families that, as I say, have come to me directly as well and have expressed that need. We are doing whatever is within our wherewithal to support those families.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. We will move on to Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: The questions I was going to ask, about the framework and what you are doing to progress the framework, have been answered, so thank you for that. I want to ask a question about the social enterprise hub and those initiatives. I think they are very good initiatives.

Ms Burch: They are absolutely fantastic. One of them, Ronnie's Succulent Snails, even got on Greg Bayliss's Triple 6 garden show the other day. So his mother will put the call out to the broader community about contributions of snails and equipment for that.

I think it is an important part of how we support people who previously could have been excluded or marginalised in our society, and that includes people with a disability. We have invested \$50,000 within the local ACT enterprise hub, plus in-kind. I will let Ms Ford expand on that because she is whispering in my ear.

Ms Ford: One of the things that we know, and a consistent message through our consultation and all the time that I have been in the ACT, is that the day-to-day support is really critical but employment is what people with disability want. They want employment, they want choice and they want to have a valued employment opportunity.

Social Ventures are one of the vehicles in terms of looking at how we can more efficiently and effectively create employment opportunities for them. Because of the very nature of the ACT, Social Ventures have done really well here because of the support from the community. They are currently delivering on 15 enterprises. We fund, as the minister said, \$40,000 to \$50,000 into that per annum, along with Health. So we have a strong relationship with Health in that. We also provide in-kind support to Social Ventures through one of our senior officers who is the chair of the Social Ventures hub in the ACT.

Additionally, we have worked closely with Procurement Solutions to develop the social tendering policy and we have started to work with them on training across government organisations on how to engage in social tendering as well as working closely with the national disability enterprises and promoting national disability enterprises to government as well, so that they will start purchasing through those opportunities.

With respect to building and creating opportunities for people to own their own business and to be employed in their own business, we have Cafe Ink, which employs five or six people with a disability, and I refer also to government procuring services

that are social enterprises and delivering goods and services through them.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Ford. We are—

MS PORTER: Excuse me, chair. I have not finished my questions.

THE CHAIR: My apologies. I am just conscious of the time, so if we could keep the answers a little bit shorter, I would appreciate that.

Ms Ford: Certainly.

MS PORTER: Continuing on, I want to know how people actually get connected to those opportunities, as we are talking about people leaving their school and now going on, hopefully, into the workforce. How do they go from that point to that point?

Ms Ford: When we are doing the initial contact with families, that contact is usually a little bit later down the track, where families are starting to come to grips with the amount of information. We will directly refer, if they have an idea, to social enterprises. Through direct funding, they may get a direct funding grant to build a business and then we will link them up with social enterprises. Also, because social enterprises have done a great job of promoting and marketing their business, a lot of individuals or families link in, and the community providers also will refer and link in and work in partnership with them. So there is a whole range of ways that people can get into that.

Ms Burch: Part of that also is the Chief Minister's inclusion awards and it is what we do under social enterprise within government. But there is that broader community buy-in as well. Yesterday, at the launch of Helping Hands, the CEO from Social Ventures Australia was talking. Helping Hands is a portal that allows the community to donate and provide assistance. So for those that are marginalised and often excluded from employment, the organisations that support them are supported by the broader community members. It is a society response as well as a government response.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. We will move on to Ms Hunter.

MS HUNTER: I was hoping to ask some questions of Therapy ACT. I am not sure if you have finished this section.

THE CHAIR: Away you go, yes.

MS HUNTER: I was interested in the waiting times. The minister may have touched on that in her opening statement. What is the biggest factor that has happened in that decrease in waiting times from 29 weeks to 11 weeks?

Ms Hayes: There has been no single factor. We have had a demand management plan in place over the last 18 months. The key strategy, of course, is being able to increase staff. In the budget last year, we got funding for an additional eight speech pathologists and four other therapists.

MS HUNTER: Are those positions filled?

Ms Hayes: All of the positions have been filled. That is certainly a great contributor, but we have been working in a number of other ways as well around the kinds of programs that we offer. We are really trying to do a lot more at the front end with people. So we are doing much earlier assessments with people and we are providing a lot more information in the first few weeks after families contact us.

We have re-done what we call our clinical pathways, which is a guide to staff around the kinds of services that they offer, so that there are some clearer expectations for people at the start of their contact with us about what services can be offered and what they can expect. There have been a range of strategies and all of them together have resulted in a significant decrease in our waiting times, and we continue to do it.

MS HUNTER: I notice you expanded Therapy ACT autism services. What sort of feedback have you been getting on those services?

Ms Hayes: Very good feedback. We took some of those new positions and we basically changed our team structure. Previously, the autism assessment and family support team did front-end assessment and then a workshop with families who were newly diagnosed. Now, that team has been expanded and provides therapy intervention services for children up to the age of eight and then a consultation service for others. That involves other therapists for our school-age and adult teens and external providers as well.

MS HUNTER: What happens after the age of eight?

Ms Hayes: They go back to having their services through our normal age-based regional teams, as they did until the start of this year.

THE CHAIR: You mentioned community consultation. Can I ask what kind of consultation there was in regard to autism?

Ms Hayes: The consultation was in regard to the playgroup component of that initiative. The initiative that we had was in relation to playgroups and play therapy. We looked at what the need was for additional playgroups in the community. So that consultation was with ACT Playgroups. We went to some of the existing playgroups for children with disabilities and talked to families about what their needs were and when they wanted specialised playgroups. We talked to playgroup providers around what support we could offer to them. On the basis of that, we decided what component of that new initiative should go into the playgroup part of the initiative and then the rest of it went into the autism services.

THE CHAIR: Should Autism have been consulted regarding their point of view on that?

Ms Hayes: We had talked to families with children with autism and we are very aware that what they are looking for is more service, more quickly. So that is what we have basically aimed to provide, and we have gone some way along that track.

Ms Burch: Yesterday, I was at Therapy ACT and met with a group of parents that are doing the early intervention six-week program. That coincided with one of those playgroups on site and talking with the families there about how they found that six weeks program. They were very welcoming of it. Some of the comments provided great insight. Also, having that conversation within a group of families that are having a similar experience and knowing that your child was also having the benefit of a therapy-based playgroup at the other end of the building was really quite welcome. So it is good to have that feedback. Thank you, Ros, for giving me that opportunity.

MS HUNTER: I want to ask a question around equipment. Many children go to Therapy ACT, a therapist works with them, there may be a piece of equipment that is provided; it might be a communication device or whatever. What is the connection between the therapist at Therapy ACT and the teacher in the school so that when that child arrives at school the teacher knows how to use that piece of equipment? How does that work? I have recently come across a case where it did not work so I am wondering what is supposed to happen.

Ms Hayes: We would certainly want to do something about a case where that did not work. Normally, if the piece of equipment is to be used in the school then the therapist would go to the school with the child and the teacher and they would work together on how it operated. That is our normal procedure. If there has been some breakdown in that then we would like to fix that. Normally, we work with the school. The department of education has an inclusive technology section and we work closely with them. Some pieces of equipment are actually owned by the schools and looked after by Education through their inclusive technology branch, so it may not in fact have been a piece of our equipment in that instance.

MS HUNTER: So there is definitely that connection, that relationship built. I know that in the past it has very much been about parents picking up children and taking them to a particular place to access Therapy ACT. In some cases you can understand that because of the types of equipment that need to be used. Has there been greater flexibility built in to your system so that therapy can actually be delivered in schools?

Ms Hayes: We have always gone to the schools to work with teachers around the strategies that they can put in place in the classroom.

MS HUNTER: But have you increased that service delivery into the schools? Has that been part of the changes you have made?

Ms Hayes: No, it has not. If you think about the numbers, there are about 120 schools in Canberra and the number of children is spread across those schools. Across five different therapies, we could not possibly be out to every school where there might be one child in one classroom. It is not a way in which we can effectively provide therapy services—direct therapy. We can go out and do a program consultation with a teacher; we can talk to them about what therapy we are doing, how that can be translated into the classroom and how it can be reinforced. But we cannot actually go to the school on a weekly or twice-weekly basis to provide therapy for an individual child.

Mr Hehir: If we were to do so, we would substantially drop our contact hours,

because of the time that the therapist would actually spend in a car.

MS HUNTER: Travel time.

Mr Hehir: Yes.

Ms Burch: It is worth noting an initiative of Malkara school—the therapy assistant. It is something that I am looking at with interest—how that operates and what benefit that brings to the school.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. We have seen a lot of angst for parents of children with a disability who have been affected by the efficiency dividend cuts in Education. What areas within disability and therapy services has the government identified for efficiency dividend cuts?

Ms Burch: Across therapy or disability, it would be—

Mr Hehir: In terms of the 2010-11 budget, we identified some high-cost residential accommodation that was, we thought, better able to be delivered through a community provider. That was the tender that the minister referred to at the start.

Ms Burch: Able Australia.

Mr Hehir: That Able Australia one. We achieved our savings through that process. I think four properties overall, Lois?

Ms Ford: Four properties, 20 people, I think.

Mr Hehir: Putting them out as a package and having one service provider to look after them all has resulted in our efficiency dividend requirements for Disability ACT being delivered for 2010-11. Of course, next year's process will go through the appropriate government budget processes for that. So we have delivered, and we are happy with the quality of the service. I am sure Lois will keep an eye on that as it is going forward.

THE CHAIR: Was there consultation carried out prior to that being put in place?

Ms Ford: With the people involved. Also, on the evaluation panel we had two parent representatives from the services that were being tendered out. So they were involved in the actual tender process from start to finish.

THE CHAIR: Minister, the question I am asking is: for this coming year, there are no other efficiency dividend cuts that you perceive—

Ms Burch: That is a budget and cabinet process and that is what we are working through at the moment. But my commitment is to maintain our service delivery to people in most need, and certainly people in Disability and Therapy fall within that scope.

MS HUNTER: Page 41 of the annual report talks about future directions. It says that,

in the 2010-11 financial year, Therapy ACT will continue to work with the department of education to enhance service delivery and that there is going to be a service partnership agreement that will be developed, implemented and trialled. Where are you up to on that service agreement and what is it intended to include?

Ms Hayes: We have a draft of that, which we have developed and which needs to be finalised some time over the next few months and go through the processes. It will actually be owned by Education, because the primary motivation for it has arisen from the review of special education. So the development of the actual agreement will be done by Education.

But we have been working towards the content of that. It includes things at all levels, starting with a planning process. We actually did that for the first time this year. We had a day with our colleagues in Education, an annual planning day, where we looked at data and need and where it was, current delivery, what we could do and what would be some priorities and some things we could improve. We looked at a professional development calendar for the coming 12 months of the kinds of seminars, workshops and so on that therapists will provide to teachers, within both the department of education and the Catholic and independent systems. So we have been working with them in a working group to prioritise what their training needs are and to put up a training calendar for next year.

Then at the program level, we are looking at how we can work better with them around some of the programs, such as the CASA playgroups for young children who may have a diagnosis of autism or through some of their special education units and in the special schools, at that sort of program level. Then we are looking at some arrangements around how we can link in better to the ILP process in the schools. For example, we have just trialled a process this year where we put a lot of time in the first few weeks of semester, we did not schedule individual appointments, we went out to the schools so that we could take part in the assessment and ILP processes in the special schools.

We cannot do that, obviously, across 120 schools in Canberra. We are just trying to look at ways in which we can have better input into that initial ILP process and then build that relationship right at the start of the year with the teachers so that we have a better way of trying to actually get programs implemented and that good consultation, otherwise teachers find it hard to take the time out to go and talk to a therapist. So we really try to build that in at the front end.

We are also working with the individual student support unit at Education about ways in which we can better coordinate services where the student support is providing support and Therapy is providing support. We have come up with some fairly straightforward communication mechanisms about how we do that better and make sure we have a coordinated approach to individual students. So there is quite a lot in it, as I say, from the broad planning through to individual student level.

THE CHAIR: As a supplementary to that, the commonwealth department of health published a review of approaches to early intervention for children with ASD. It reported that children with ASD need at least 20 hours per week of intensive ASD-specific early intervention and listed all the recognised methods. How many

Therapy ACT clients with ASD get intensive ASD-specific early intervention? Can you tell us the numbers?

Ms Hayes: In terms of what we provide for young children with ASD, we do not provide 20 hours a week for any child. At the moment, the new autism team is providing services to 250 children, under the age of eight, with a diagnosis of autism. We have 12 staff in that unit, across speech OTs, psychs.

THE CHAIR: And how many are under the age of six?

Ms Hayes: Of the 250, how many are under the age of six? I do not have that number with me but I can get it. The majority actually are under the age of six. What we decided to do was: if they were actually seven, we did not move them from their existing team to the autism team so that they did not move back again. That would not make sense to people. Really, in this first year we are taking the children up to the age of seven, if that makes sense. The new unit was to provide intervention for under-8s but we did not want to take them and then say, "You have been working with this school-age team, come and work with the autism team for a year and then go back to the school-age team." That would be too disruptive, so we left them. So the majority of that 250 would be under-6s.

THE CHAIR: Given that the federal government report stated 20 hours, is there any requirement of the federal funding that is received that the 20 hours is actually adhered to?

Ms Hayes: No. It is a best practice guide and it belongs to the commonwealth. It is not imposed on the states and territories. We do not receive direct funding for our early intervention programs from the commonwealth, so no. It is a guide and, as well as the 20 hours, it sets out quite a number of principles, the sorts of programs that should be provided. Most of those things, we are able to adhere to.

We are not able to provide that intensity of early intervention services but we are able to work with other providers, with the playgroups at CASA, with the early intervention units at Education, with our own staff. We try to coordinate with private providers where they are funded under the commonwealth funding for the two years of funding that people get there. So we try to make sure that all of those programs are working in the same direction and that all of those people are getting quite a few hours. But it is not that single, intensive program.

Ms Burch: As a final comment, the funding for the autism support coordinator will provide some facilitation and coordination across the various elements of therapy support.

Ms Hayes: So the funding that has gone to the non-government sector for family support coordination will help to ensure that families are getting all of the bits that they need and that those bits are as well coordinated as they can be.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. A final question, Ms Bresnan?

MS BRESNAN: No, as we are out of time.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for coming in. We will have a 10-minute break and resume with the next agenda item, which is ageing, multicultural affairs and housing.

Meeting adjourned from 10.40 to 10.53 am.

THE CHAIR: I would like to welcome everyone again to the public hearing of the Standing Committee on Health, Community and Social Services inquiry into the 2009-10 annual and financial reports for the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services. For the next half an hour we will be looking at Housing ACT, social housing services, output class 1. Minister and members of the department, you do not need me to go through the preamble about the privilege statement. Are you all happy with that? Thank you very much, Ms Sheehan and Mr Hehir. Minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms Burch: No, I was happy with what I said at the very beginning, across all of them, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Ms Bresnan, would you like to start?

MS BRESNAN: Thank you. I have a question in relation to eligibility criteria for accessing Housing ACT and whether or not a person is eligible for public housing. There has been a case recently that we have become aware of where someone was taken off the public housing waiting list here in the ACT. They were not able to access emergency accommodation here in the ACT, so they had to go to Yass to be given a place. This is the situation we have been told about. In that case, because they had to access accommodation in New South Wales, they then came off the Housing ACT public waiting list. Does that actually occur?

Ms Sheehan: Ms Bresnan, there are two separate issues. One would be the emergency accommodation issue. Homelessness services have no eligibility requirement whatsoever, except that you require the support of the service. If it was the case that someone needed to go to Yass to get the support that was required and they were eligible for public housing, which means that they met the income barriers and they also required the support, their name would not be removed from the public housing waiting list simply because they had become homeless. In fact, I dare say this could actually mean they may become a priority case under the public housing waiting list because they had gone from perhaps being high needs in private rental to being a homeless person, which is one of the things that would put you into the priority category for public housing.

MS BRESNAN: So that is not actually the case? It is probably something we should bring to the attention—

Ms Sheehan: No, it is not. I understand why people have not addressed why they are homeless, but it is a bit of a nonsense to say “I’m homeless in New South Wales” rather than “I’m homeless in the ACT”, because the problem is that you do not have a home and you would not lose your place in the public housing waiting list.

Mr Hehir: Part of that may be communication, which is something we would be happy to look at in terms of the individual case. What information has been provided to us and what information has been provided to the individual would be the question. The intent is that, if you have been resident in Canberra for six months, you are eligible, subject to all the other criteria being met. If you have had to leave the jurisdiction to go to Yass, that should not impact on where your actual location had been.

MS BRESNAN: Even if it has been within the six-month period?

Ms Burch: In response to emergency housing accommodation, from what I am gathering.

MS BRESNAN: You just said you have to be a resident for six months, so if they had been here but then did have to go to Yass because that was the only availability—

Mr Hehir: That is fine, as long as their previous residence was six months.

MS BRESNAN: So it could potentially be that, if it was within the six-month period, they might have to come off and go back on?

Ms Sheehan: I have recently dealt with exactly a case like that. Someone had to return to the ACT to care for their children once the children's mother died. They were residing with family members in New South Wales but the children had been long-term residents of Canberra. Of course, we allowed the father to join the public housing waiting list. It certainly did not matter that he had to reside with relatives in New South Wales while he waited.

THE CHAIR: Minister, where are we with regard to the federal government stimulus funding for social housing?

Ms Burch: We are spending it as quickly as we can. We have \$87 million, plus some funds for repairs and maintenance and some environmental-based upgrades as well. With respect to part of our original agreement, as I said in the opening statement, we started at 307 and moved up to the mid-300s. Now we are delivering over 420 properties, plus we have our own investment in that. So the package, with the commonwealth's and our contribution, means that over 500 properties will come online. We are expecting a good lot of those by the end of June next year and the bulk of them at the end of June next year.

Also, part of that which I am quite excited about is the nearly 300 older person units, which will not only provide purpose-built, new, ageing in place accommodation for those older housing tenants, but also that then releases those larger properties that will go directly to the families sitting on our waiting list at the moment. That is what I am quite pleased about. Either Mr Baumgart or Ms Sheehan can talk on the detail as to how they are progressing in different areas.

THE CHAIR: My question is: how are we going, according to the expectations? Are we on track for where we are meant to be at this point?

Mr Hehir: In terms of the initial deadlines, we are running slightly behind. That is largely as a result of rain. There are various figures depending on the actual site, but the rain delays that we have approved range from 30 days to 60 days. That is part of the standard construction contract. You actually have to allow for rain days. It is not safe for the workers to be on site constructing. As you would be aware, this has been an unusually wet six months for the ACT.

THE CHAIR: No-one is complaining.

Mr Hehir: We are, sort of. We love the rain; it is just if they could get the timing right and it only happened on a Friday evening, it would be working for us.

The issue for us is that we have had to approve the extensions. My understanding is that, for the Australian government, we are not the only jurisdiction saying that it has been a bit wet to do the construction. The majority of jurisdictions, or at least half the jurisdictions, have approached the Australian government to say that it was a fantastic idea to have 75 per cent done by the end of December; we are going to be delivering our 75 per cent, I think, by the end of February, given the rain delay and some of the shutdown period that occurs over the Christmas and new year period within the construction industry. So they are relatively comfortable.

The original intent was around the stimulus package. In terms of our spend, it will be in excess of 75 per cent or just over by the end of December. That is my understanding.

Mr Baumgart: We will have hit 75 per cent by the end of this month.

Mr Hehir: So in terms of getting the dollars out the door, we are on target. As the minister said, we were very impressed with how our packages came together with both the construction industry prices coming up and the commitment by the government of a number of sites at no cost for the project. To move from 290, which was the revised figure in terms of what the Australian government's expectations were, to 357 and then to 421, we think is a good outcome in terms of that delivery. So, yes, there are some delays; the delays are within the contractual terms.

Ms Burch: What will be the first areas coming online?

Ms Sheehan: We have already had the Curtin site handed across. Twelve units have been allocated and all of the tenants have now moved in. The next site which will come across in the next week or so is Macquarie, and Macquarie has 13 units. We are expecting most of the rest of the sites to come across in February. At this stage we are looking at Conder, Bonython, Chapman and Florey to come across in February. Because of the scale of Rivett and Kambah, where we will be completing it in different stages, the first stages will come across in February and then the rest of the stages will be delivered through to June next year.

MR COE: And Garran? Is there one in Garran as well?

Ms Sheehan: We have some older persons units in Garran, called Hartigan Gardens. Some of that is being done under nation building. It was already a public housing

older persons site. So it is not part of the group of community facilities properties that we have been constructing.

MR COE: When those sites are handed over, with regard to additional maintenance or just general issues that happen when you build something new, how does the warranty and the guarantee work in that sense?

Ms Sheehan: The construction has a warranty period, so items will be covered by the warranty. But because we are very keen to make sure that things are fixed quickly, Spotless, our total facilities maintenance contractor, have dedicated a full-time person whose job it is to inspect the sites as they are handed over and to make sure that if any issues come up they are dealt with in a timely manner.

MR COE: Is the bill for the Spotless contract for that inspection service met by the builder or by Housing ACT?

Ms Sheehan: We would be expecting the warranty period to be covered by the construction contract, and that will certainly happen. Our concern is that if it is something that needs to be fixed immediately, and then contacting the builder and negotiating for it to be done by that builder, if that means a delay which is inconvenient for the older person, that is not what we would want to achieve. So we simply do it quickly ourselves and then have the contractual arrangements pay for any costs.

MR COE: Yes, but is the cost of that inspection service on handover being met by Housing ACT?

Ms Sheehan: Yes.

MR COE: And is it usual to outsource the inspection, as opposed to having someone from the Property Group or from Housing actually do that handover inspection?

Mr Collett: Spotless inspect all of our properties, both our new construction and our purchases. So spot purchases we inspect, just so that we know what our management liabilities for them will be into the future. It is part of the contractual arrangement with Spotless and it is part of the ongoing integrated facilities management regime that we have in place.

MR COE: Given that any potential future maintenance issues will be met by Spotless, is there a potential conflict of interest in them doing the inspection and then potentially getting the contract to actually fix any issues which may arise that they may well have missed?

Ms Burch: This is how we manage our properties, our maintenance properties across our portfolio. That is why we have a total facilities management contract in place. Whether they are new properties or existing properties, the same applies.

Mr Hehir: I might start and then get David to give the detail. That was actually an issue with previous contracts. They took a portion of the total spend, so there was that perverse incentive built into our previous contracts. That is not the arrangement we

have in this place. Spotless get a lump sum fee. If there is additional work, it does not go to them. They have got the one fee to manage the contract. The work that the subbies get is the work that the subbies get. So there is no incentive in the system for Spotless to actually identify and overcharge and overservice.

That was absolutely an issue we identified in the previous contracts, so going back six years almost, 5½ years. That was one of the reasons we did change the actual form of the contract. I am not saying that the previous contractors did that, but when you looked at the pricing mechanism you would say, no, that has the potential to lead to some perverse behaviour. Therefore, we took that out of the contract. But David might have more detail than me. It has been a while since I looked.

Mr Collett: In fact, some aspects of the performance management arrangements under the contract with Spotless actually give an incentive to them to reduce the amount of maintenance, so the amount of money that is spent on planned and programmed maintenance, rather than responsive maintenance, which is one of the KPIs. The tenant satisfaction with the dwelling overall is another KPI and that feeds into the system of bonuses and discounts that are applied to Spotless. So, rather than being an incentive for them to let through shoddy properties, it is, in fact, a significant incentive for them to be rigorous in making sure that the stock is up to standard.

But the point I would make and reinforce is that it is part of the integrated process of managing our assets. We have a rolling program of condition audits that move forward. Undertaking an examination of the property at its completion if it has been constructed, or at its purchase point before it is actually exchanged, feeds into that understanding of the qualities of our stock. It may be that we have got a property that we are aware of with some disadvantages but because of its location, the form of accommodation in terms of the number of bedrooms, its location for somebody who is on our waiting list and who has a special need but who might be facing a longer waiting period because of the special need, access to medical services or whatever, we might buy a property understanding that it needs more work.

Frequently, of course, if we buy in the older areas we need to upgrade the insulation to bring it close to our standard. So it is quite a sophisticated and subtle process of going through it and making that determination about whether the building represents value for money. Spotless play a critical role in giving us that advice, feeding into that.

MS PORTER: Thank you for all that information about the partnership with the nation-building strategies. I just wanted to go to the various challenges obviously that you have with regard to homelessness and providing enough opportunities for affordable housing for people. Pages 9 and 10 outline some issues that you have. Could you talk a little bit more about those and how the challenges are being met in those particular areas?

Ms Burch: On homelessness?

MS PORTER: On homelessness and on affordable housing.

Ms Burch: On homelessness, you are right: that is a snapshot. The road map certainly set out where we were going on our way forward and that is tied to agreements on

housing and homelessness. We and other jurisdictions have a target to reduce homelessness by 25 per cent and one of the programs we have put in place is the street to home, which is through St Vincent's. I was talking with the CEO of St Vincent's yesterday about the success of that program; they are already exceeding those targets.

Internally, we also have looked at our own internal processes and systems and programs and the stay at home program is an example of that. The stay at home program works with victims of domestic violence. Earlier, often we have taken the wife or the woman of the household who has been a victim, and the children, and removed them out of the property, in many ways dislocating them at a time of crisis, which did not seem to make sense to remove the woman and the family out of their normal security of networks. So the stay at home program now removes the perpetrator, facilitates them into an alternative accommodation arrangement and makes sure that the woman and the children are able to stay at home.

We have also progressed last budget on Pilgrim House, the place to call home, which is a housing first option which puts the person in the house and works with a community provider and partner around those wraparound services. Indeed, I met a roundtable of a number of homelessness providers yesterday around how we do that. Respond in place: crisis beds are needed, absolutely. We need to do work and maintain our effort in that area. But how do we get in earlier before the crisis happens? There was quite a rigorous discussion around the table about how the sector itself can respond to that. But I am quite happy for Ms Sheehan to talk more on homelessness.

Ms Sheehan: Thank you, minister. In the annual report we particularly outlined the fact that, before we had the national partnership on homelessness, we were working from the base of the old supported accommodation assistance program. It is a very substantial program of \$20 million every year that goes into homelessness services in the ACT. So, when there was additional funding available from that national partnership, it was important for us to look at and evaluate where we think we have got some gaps in our service delivery so that we could then direct additional funding towards those gaps. So in the annual report we have gone through and outlined what were the gaps and what are the new services that we have established. The minister has been through quite a number of those new services. With the minister's agreement—

Ms Burch: Yes.

Ms Sheehan: I will ask David Matthews, who has been really the commissioner of the services, to talk about what those services are.

Mr Matthews: Ms Porter, it has been quite a year in the homelessness area, and that is nationally as well as the ACT, and we have tried to engage the sector in a reform initiative to really focus on reducing homelessness. We want to support people that are homeless, but we actually want to reduce homelessness. Through the year we have rolled out both a consultative process, which has been very extensive, and also a range of new services. The road map was launched in November. We held lots of forums around that. We received 25 written submissions and from that time we have been rolling out new services.

We rolled out the stay at home program that the minister referred to, in October, and I can say that there are three families that would have otherwise had to flee their homes through domestic violence that are being housed, placed in public housing, as a result of that program.

Coming through to January, we rolled out the new men's service for exiting detention and then through February the street to home program, which was subject to a public tender process. As the minister said, that is exceeding its targets and I can again report that 15 of 21 rough sleepers that have been engaged in that program have actually accepted accommodation, which is a fantastic outcome, and St Vincent de Paul keep working with them. Right through the rest of the year, with the common waiting list in September, the establishment of first point in November, this month, as well as the new sustaining tenancy program, we have worked comprehensively through a whole series of new programs, which, to reinforce Ms Sheehan's point, are not just about bolting on other things but fundamentally reforming new models and new ways of working to actually reach that national target.

Ms Burch: And what has been pleasing for the sector is the sector responses such as the sustaining tenancies. We have got a strong alliance of a number of regional services coming on board together, so they have got a good geographical and a good service provision partnership to respond to that. Then just recently with the women exiting AMC, again we had an alliance of three local, very strong and well-regarded women providers coming together to respond to that service.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. Mr Coe.

MR COE: Thank you. With regard to the Spotless contract, has the department received many complaints or many concerns from subcontractors?

Ms Sheehan: Mr Coe, no. The short answer is no. The department has not received complaints from subcontractors. There are two ways that subcontractors could complain. One would be directly to Spotless and then they could complain to the department and we have all of our complaints managed in the complaints management unit, but I am not aware of complaints by subcontractors.

MR COE: I understand that the most recent contract includes—it might even have been discussed at estimates, actually—the provision that Saturday is a normal working day as is Monday through Friday, and I was wondering whether that in particular is causing any issues.

Ms Burch: So that is a concern from contractors saying that when they get in to respond to a job the arrangements—

MR COE: That is right, that their performance and their expectations for delivering services on a Saturday are the same as delivering on a Monday through Friday.

Ms Burch: Certainly, it would be our expectation that Spotless categorise response to work. They respond to the need and priority based on a set of clear criteria; that is certainly my understanding. Mr Collett or Ms Sheehan?

Ms Sheehan: I am happy to answer it. There are three response times that can be chosen by Spotless in order to respond to the issues. The first response time is a turnaround of four hours and so the assessment has to be made: how urgent is the response? I can give you an example: if someone does not have hot water at two in the morning, it would be unreasonable to say they have got to have hot water by four in the morning or probably even six in the morning. You could not get someone to go out and replace the hot-water service in four hours anyway, so it is actually quite pointless to categorise that as a four-hour turnaround. But what we would say is that that needs to be fixed by close of business the next day.

Mr Collett: The next working day.

Ms Sheehan: The next working day; that is right. So, as the minister was saying, if something happens on the weekend—and again, depending upon the seriousness of it; on the weekends some things might need to be done within four hours—if it was the example that I just gave, it would not need to be done over the weekend and it could be done by 6 pm on the next working day and I think people would understand. Everyone understands just from their own personal circumstances of living in the community what is a reasonable time to have a response. So, if you are a person with a disability, you would have a very different need from another person who does not have a disability and might not need the same response time, and any decision about what is the appropriate response time is based on all of the circumstances of that particular individual or that family.

Mr Hehir: I am not aware of the particular issue. I suspect it might go to the 6 pm next working day, because the next one is, I think, seven days?

Mr Collett: Four days.

Ms Sheehan: Four days.

Mr Hehir: Four days and then 20 days; I think they are the four criteria we have got. My understanding of the general principle—and I am happy to take the individual case if you can give us the information—

MR COE: Sure.

Mr Hehir: would be that a working day is a day when you can access the materials. Most of the plumbing shops, for example, and carpentry and electrical shops et cetera are open on Saturday, so we would be saying that the materials are available, you can go and buy the hot-water system on that day, you can access the material in a relatively timely fashion. It is not an uncommon practice for large trade service organisations to actually work on the weekend and to have staff available over the weekend, particularly on Saturday. Accordingly, we would say: “It is quite common for you to have your staff available and the materials available. We would hope that you would be able to meet that time frame.” I think that would be the one that would be giving them the concern, if you are getting a concern. That is the first I have heard of it, though.

MR COE: My understanding is that, if you are taking on one of those subcontracts, you have to be available and there are certain requirements and certain standards you have to meet. If you do, for instance, take on a four-hour job, the amount of remuneration on a four-hour job is the same on Monday to Friday until 6 pm

Ms Sheehan: No. It is a different remuneration and that is one of the reasons why in this current two-year extension—and it is the final extension available under the current contract—we had the opportunity to review our response times. For the sorts of reasons Mr Hehir is outlining—what is the availability of personnel and materials at different times of the day and night and on the weekend—we actually went from a four-hour response time to a 24-hour response time. We changed that to by 6 pm the next working day and there are differential payments made based on that quick response time, again for the sorts of reasons that you are outlining.

MR COE: Okay. But are you saying that that work which is required to be done on a Saturday—

Ms Sheehan: We pay a premium for it.

MR COE: is currently receiving a premium?

Ms Sheehan: We pay a premium for work to be done within four hours, work to be done by 6 pm the next working day and so on.

MR COE: Yes, I understand that. But is there an additional premium for any work which is done on a Saturday as opposed to Monday to Friday?

Mr Hehir: David, do you not have the detail on that?

Mr Collett: We are perhaps confusing two things. Firstly, we continually strive to align our response time for urgent, semi-urgent, if I can use that expression, and routine maintenance to what the rest of the community provides so that the costs to us are not too much and the service that is delivered to our tenants is reasonable. As you can imagine, with 11½ thousand properties, we not infrequently have maintenance calls that require an immediate response—an OH&S issue, a sewer spill, an electrical problem, a problem in a house with somebody with a significant disability.

What happens is that, as the contractors have been engaged for subsequent contracts with Spotless, Spotless are focused on those contractors who are prepared to support us as we support them and who are prepared to take after-hours calls. Sometimes they will be unavailable. But in terms of taking a share of the out-of-hours calls, whether they are in the evening or at the weekend, Spotless encourage the contractors to continue to do that. The rates that they are paid are then the subject of the reviews of the schedule of rates and are purely a commercial arrangement. But we do encourage the contractors who have long-term contracts with us to be available or to make a provision to be available when we need them because we require that to service our clients.

MR COE: It is one thing to be available but it is another thing to be available, at a premium. The concern that has been raised with me is that some subcontractors have

to do work on a Saturday—and that is the nature of the work, as you have articulated—but they are not receiving a premium for working on a Saturday; yet they, in effect, have to pay their staff the premium to work on Saturdays and it becomes very hard to get staff.

Ms Burch: If I may, I think we have outlined that there are rates around response times and whether that is on a weekend, according to that. Perhaps there is a particular circumstance. I do not know what other information we can bring to you, other than what we have said. We are quite happy to take that and talk to you and work through that individual case to get to the end of it.

Mr Collett: If you were to drive round Gungahlin or any of the older suburbs that are having new construction, you would see that, particularly in the residential market, it is very common for tradesmen to be working on Saturday. There are a couple of houses going up around the corner from my place and I noticed last weekend they were at it at 7 o'clock on Saturday morning and they worked pretty much a full day on Saturday. Sometimes it is a half-day.

MR COE: That is right.

Mr Collett: For us to pay a premium for Saturday work when it is an industry standard would be disadvantaging our costs. Spotless are required to undertake those negotiations with us. If there are specific complaints, we will look at them but in the absence of something concrete I would have thought that it was business as usual.

MR COE: Perhaps you could take on notice whether 7.30 am to 6 pm on Saturday is treated in the same way as 7.30 am to 6 pm Monday to Friday.

THE CHAIR: And if it is the basis of that.

MR COE: That is right, yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Minister, how many complaints have you received or has the department recorded about disruptive tenancies?

Ms Burch: I know I get regular reports on that and, on average, there are up to between 20 and 30 a week antisocial behaviour complaints. Given that we have got close to 11½ thousand increasing to 12,000 tenancies, I think that is not too bad. We all have experiences where there is probably a pesky neighbour that owns their own home as well. But we certainly keep track of those. I am quite happy to go to how we respond to that, because everybody has the right to live in a peaceful environment, whether you are a housing tenant, a private rental or a homeowner. Perhaps David Matthews or Ms Sheehan could answer.

Mr Matthews: They are reported on page 93 of the annual report. We break down our complaints by category, including antisocial and neighbourhood disputes.

THE CHAIR: Thanks very much. I have a supplementary on that. All of us receive complaints from our constituents. One of the constituency issues I have is from someone who is living next door to a problem tenant, a public housing tenant, and it

appears that the individual concerned who has the lease with the department is supposedly utilising the premises outside the lease conditions. In other words, there are more people in the house than certainly would appear to be logical. What recourse is there? If that happens, what action can you take to either remove the tenant or ensure that there are not too many people living in the premises?

Ms Burch: There are quite strict guidelines around that. Ms Sheehan or Mr Matthews could go to that.

Ms Sheehan: Under the terms of the lease that a tenant has with us, the lease is for the person named on the lease and then any declared residents. And it is a requirement that if there are to be additional residents, and not just family visiting but if someone is to be staying for more than a three-week period, Housing ACT needs to be notified and that resident has to be approved.

On the whole, for reasons that you would understand, it is probably quite unusual to say that we would not approve an additional resident. An example that most people would be familiar with would be if an aged parent came to live or if you were supporting a relative in some way, if someone had married or had a new partner or re-partnered and so on. We often are asked to approve additional residents and we do that.

But having said that, what we will not do is approve an overcrowding situation. I am not just talking about the technical definition that we have of overcrowding, which is that someone is more than two bedrooms under their entitlement. It is a question for Housing ACT to decide whether in fact this is no longer a home just for that person but it is being used for other purposes.

Sometimes there might be good reasons why an individual family ends up having a lot more people there. An example, again, that people might be familiar with is that of a family, particularly a family of refugees that have come to Australia. They might be involved in a family resettlement. In that circumstance what Housing ACT would look at is provision of additional properties for other people as they came.

But certainly if it comes to our attention—and it does come to our attention because people notify us—that there are undeclared residents in the property, we would then use the strict provisions under the Residential Tenancies Act. The first one is: we would speak to the person. If the situation was not fixed, we would then issue a notice to remedy, under the act. If the situation persisted after that, we would move to the next stage, which is technically called the notice to vacate. That is not an eviction but it is a notice that if the situation is not fixed we would go to the Residential Tenancies Tribunal to seek assistance.

In fact, in the annual report—and I will need to find the page—we do talk about an amendment that has been made to the Residential Tenancies Act which provides for a type of order which is called a performance order. We have been quite successful in getting performance orders. I believe we have done nearly 50 performance orders.

MS PORTER: It is on page 93.

Ms Sheehan: Thank you, Ms Porter, page 93. We have had 43 performance orders issued by the tribunal in the last year that specifically direct tenants to comply with the provisions of their lease. And we have found that that is very effective. The reason it is effective is that it is one thing for your housing manager to say, “You had better comply with the terms of your lease,” but it is quite another thing for a tribunal to actually issue an order saying that that is what must happen. Importantly, if that order is then breached, that can be grounds for more serious action.

THE CHAIR: One matter that came to hand at last night’s meeting with some constituents in Calwell was that apparently there is a tenancy in Theodore that has been vacant for over 12 months. I presume you would want to know about that situation.

Ms Sheehan: We absolutely would.

Mr Hehir: Yes. There are times when there is a reason, but 12 months seems like a long time and we would certainly want to know.

THE CHAIR: I will notify you. Thank you.

MS BRESNAN: Thank you, chair. My question is in relation to community housing. On page 94 there is a bit of a discussion about some funding models that are being applied. This is something I have asked about previously, but I will ask about it again. In 2009-10 there was an independent review undertaken to look at the sustainability of government funding. Havelock was used as the example. We have actually asked for the provision of this report previously and have not received it as yet. I am wondering whether we can get some idea of what the findings were that came out of that report.

Mr Hehir: I must admit that I am not sure which report.

Ms Burch: We worked quite closely over a 12-month period and I think Oakton—

Mr Hehir: Yes, Oakton. This is the report specifically around Havelock, rather than broader?

MS BRESNAN: Yes. I do know that because, obviously from speaking about this previously, it was talking about the sustainability of government funding in community housing.

Ms Sheehan: You may be referring to a KPMG report that was commissioned by the commonwealth government. That has never been released by the commonwealth government. With Havelock Housing Association, it was a much more targeted audit and evaluation of their situation.

MS BRESNAN: And the report you were mentioning, Mr Hehir?

Mr Hehir: The Oakton report, that was the Havelock one. That has been completed and we have entered into revised arrangements with Havelock as a result of that.

MS BRESNAN: Can we get an idea of what some of the findings were that came out

of that?

Mr Hehir: Yes, I think so. Not from me, sorry, I do not have the detail of that.

MS BRESNAN: I am happy for you to take it on notice.

Mr Matthews: I can speak to them broadly. The focus around the Oakton review was that we had negotiated with Havelock Housing Association a new funding model whereby they would remit a percentage of the market rent to the department and, in a sense, retain any profits. So from our perspective, that put them into a gross revenue stream but also gave them some performance incentives. Originally, the rate of return back to the department was to be 35 per cent of market rent and we had renegotiated maintenance arrangements with them.

The Oakton review was something, again, that we willingly entered into with Havelock to look at that some months down the track to see how they were tracking with that. What it did show was that that provided them, at that rate, with a fairly small margin of operation. Havelock raised with us that they felt that they needed to have a slightly larger margin of operation to manage the risks associated with providing community housing and we worked through that issue with them. The Oakton review broadly showed there had been improvements in Havelock's performance under the new model as well, both with rent collection and with vacancy turnaround.

As a result, we reinforced those arrangements and renegotiated a new amount of 30 per cent rather than the 35 per cent. We continue to meet with Havelock Housing Association on a quarterly basis to monitor their performance but also their financial viability. In fact, I am meeting with them tomorrow.

MS BRESNAN: You have come to an agreement about the 30 per cent. Is that based on an understanding of the type of clients which they will be servicing, as will other community housing providers, and that is often the level that will be required for that?

Mr Matthews: Indeed. We also did negotiate with them the capacity to have some affordable renters. That was about supporting a mix in community housing, as we need across social housing, across the board. So at Havelock House itself and in some of their other properties, we did negotiate one-third of affordable renters. We certainly expect our community housing providers to tackle some of the hard end of the spectrum and to house the homeless as well. But we would also want to provide housing pathways for people and make sure that we have got mixes in our communities.

MS BRESNAN: In terms of community housing, given that this is probably a lesson to learn across the board, I imagine, is that 30 per cent going to be something which is going to be applied in general to community housing or is there going to be that move to the 74.9 per cent of the market rent?

Mr Hehir: There are actually a number of different models in terms of—

MS BRESNAN: No, I understand that. I am just saying that they would be reflective

of these sorts of clients.

Mr Hehir: The 74.9 per cent is a different model again. It is actually about trying to meet a gap in the service provision for people above the income eligibility for public housing who are struggling in the private rental market. NRAS, from the Australian government, which is 80 per cent of market rent, tries to do the same sort of thing.

When you look at it, the ACT is actually quite lucky in that it has one of the highest levels of public housing provision in Australia. The ACT and South Australia are traditionally the two highest jurisdictions. I think we are higher than South Australia at this point in time. We are close to double the national average in terms of public housing provision. That means we can pick up a large number of the lower income scale.

When the government released its affordable housing strategy three years ago it said that the real gap is between public housing eligibility and being able to afford the private rental market. There is a conscious strategy to try and grow some of the 74.9 per cent affordable housing providers. That has been done with CHC, as Mr Matthews said. We are enabling Havelock to have a third of their rental scheme there within that framework.

With the others, we would tend to have a look at where and how the funding has been received, in a sense. Some of the small providers are really happy working off the rebate and getting a payment. Because of their scale, that actually makes sense for them, rather than trying to introduce a bit of a riskier model for small-scale operations in terms of the income collection model which we have with Havelock.

Some of the history is actually important. We did not go to that model for Havelock without a great deal of consultation and discussion. It would be fair to say we were quite concerned that they were quite low in their rental collection. Really, their remit to us was on a best endeavours basis. Any lawyer would tell you never to get involved in a best endeavours contract. It means almost absolutely nothing in terms of being enforceable.

We wanted to talk to them about how they could improve their rental collection, have an incentive to improve their turnover time for their vacancy rates and re-allocate. At the same time we said, "We recognise you need a more viable model into the long term." We came up with a figure of 35 per cent. In the end, that was really tight for them and we acknowledged that once we got the Oakton report. Importantly, the Oakton report actually said that the model is right. The model is a good model and it provides the right sorts of incentives for a larger community housing provider to manage its portfolio efficiently. It was a bit of a long negotiation process, but there was also a bit of give and take as well as trying to move forward at the same time.

MS BRESNAN: When you say they have got the model right, is that the model that Havelock are applying with having a percentage, as you said, of 74.9? Is that what you are saying in that instance?

Mr Hehir: Yes, largely—having a mix of tenancies, having the payment back to the department for the use of our asset and being based on a proportion of market rent.

Thirty per cent of a market rent is not actually huge in terms of where some of their housing model is because they have got the group tenancies where they would actually be close to getting market rent.

MS BRESNAN: But it is a need they have, which they are servicing.

Mr Hehir: Yes, absolutely. We have been working to try and make sure that the need gets addressed as part of this. This is why we only let them have 30 per cent affordable rental, rather than 50, 60 or 70 per cent. We felt the need to make sure they stay as part of the rebated rent model as well because that is certainly the most affordable housing for those most in need.

MS BRESNAN: I take your point. It is a different model. You talked about public housing. We know there are a significant number of people who are waiting to get into public housing. Going into the normal rental market is not going to be applicable to them, whereas community housing might be. Again, 74.9 per cent is quite a high figure. Is that a figure which is going to be applied across the community housing providers, given CHC have quite a chunk of the housing as well?

Mr Hehir: The 74.9 per cent is quite high. If you are talking about median rental in Canberra being in the order of 450 to 480—let us say 450 because I can do the sums easier; or maybe 480 is easier—75 per cent of that roughly is 360. That is still quite high on a historic basis and to be 30 per cent of your income that is quite difficult. If you access commonwealth rental assistance, which you can in the community housing system, that can bring it down to about \$300 a week. To be affordable, you need to be earning about \$50,000. I am just doing these figures really roughly, but I think that is about right.

There will still be families in housing stress. Our public housing families tend to be just below the \$40,000. With children it is \$40,000 or \$42,000, depending on how many kids you have got. It is just above, and we would certainly say that is not a bad result. For a family on, say, \$45,000, it is close. Certainly, over time you would expect that income to grow to the point where they might be able to cover it off. But there are families who earn way less than that. That is certainly where we want to make sure that both our community housing providers and our public housing service provision go.

Ms Burch: As to whether that model will be replicated across the community housing providers, I think it is worth noting the different subsets of our community housing providers. TAS Housing, which is now Capital Community Housing, manages a number of residences for those with disabilities. It is a different client base—it is a different residence base—to Havelock. You also have Havelock House and Ainslie Village and their more structured, longer term housing. The difference does need to be reflected individually in some ways.

Mr Matthews: I was just going to clarify that the vast majority of people are still on an income-based system. In terms of what Havelock House charge their tenants, other than the one-third affordable renters at Havelock House and the Gungahlin singles accommodation, everybody else only pays 25 per cent of their income. The 30 per cent is an average. Some people would be paying 15 per cent of market rent.

Other people would be paying 75 per cent of market rent if they are in an affordable place. The average that they are able to remit to the department and make an operating margin on is that 30 per cent.

MS BRESNAN: I understand that. People with disabilities and people who have got drug, alcohol or mental health problems are all vulnerable families. It is a subset. They are all going to experience the same—

Ms Burch: Yes, and ECHO has another group of cooperative arrangements as well.

Mr Hehir: In a sense, it depends on the level of risk those organisations have taken. That is why I was trying to distinguish between the larger and the smaller. To have a level of vacancy for a smaller organisation would actually make them unviable very quickly on the model that we have with Havelock. They have often got less capacity to tenant quickly as well. In that case, a better model is probably the payment of a per property payment, which allows that organisation to operate, and then pass the rent through, which is what our normal arrangements are for a lot of the smaller organisations.

It is a difficult area. It is very hard to say one model is going to fit everybody. For example, the Tamil Senior Citizens Association housing is a really small model. It has got nine tenancies. One of those tenancies falling vacant will be a really difficult exercise. Their target group is quite specific and tight. Therefore, better payment operations have been payments per property and they just pass the rent through. We are really happy with that for a small organisation. It was just Havelock being a larger organisation and our saying, “Well, we think that there are areas where you can improve.” We went with a different model. I think overall they are happy with that.

THE CHAIR: We have got about seven minutes before we conclude this aspect, so if we could just keep the answers a little bit tighter I would appreciate it. Ms Porter?

MS PORTER: Thank you. When we were talking about the homelessness issues we did not take on youth homelessness. I know this is dealt with quite extensively on page 93. As to the success of the program that you mentioned on page 93, where it only had one tenancy that actually fell over—if I read it correctly—do we have any sort of modelling on what the future demands will be in that area and how you are going to manage future demands?

Ms Sheehan: That is a really good question. As I said, the youth housing program is something that we are particularly proud of in public housing. Historically, although most tenancies are not entered into until 18, because it is a contract like any other contract, the housing commissioner has exercised discretion to reduce that down to age 16 and has given a tenancy to 16-year-olds. As anyone with a 16-year-old, 17-year-old, 18-year-old child would know, it is very hard for a young person to undertake a tenancy successfully by themselves, and particularly without any type of family support, which is often the situation that you get.

The purpose of the youth housing program is to provide support to the young person from the time of application so that the youth housing managers see that young person from the time that they apply for public housing. Often that is when they come

through the priority list, right through to their tenancy, and then they help them to sustain their tenancy.

In terms of the demand for that sort of program, there are things that we know that tend to make young people look for housing. This is where our links with our colleagues in the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support are so important. Young people coming out of care will often be looking for housing and sometimes public housing is an appropriate support.

We also have some programs to support young people coming out of Bimberi. We also know that with 50 per cent of young people that enter the homelessness system it is actually caused by breakdown in family. A lot of research has been done that gives us some indicators of the sorts of services that would be needed.

We have been very proud to co-fund with the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support a six-month research project looking at the causes of youth homelessness and suggesting the models of service that are best going to support young people. Not every young person is going to be suitable for public housing. Heaven forbid that that is the only option that young people ever have—public housing—but it is an important thing.

The minister is reminding me that a really important support that we have for young people, which is very much geared towards stopping them falling into homelessness, is called the “couch surfing program”. That is, for young people that are temporarily not living with their parents or with other family members—and it might be through a disagreement that can actually be mended with the family—they are supported in another environment for a time to mend those family relationships and to be able to return home.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Sheehan.

Ms Burch: If I can, on youth homelessness—

THE CHAIR: Very briefly, Ms Burch. I would like to move on.

Ms Burch: I was quite pleased to launch and work with the Catholic University around a toolkit for working with children in the homelessness sector. Whilst I understand the question was on our response to homelessness, the sector identified a need in terms of how we focus our attention more on the needs of children, because they do come through this crisis with various traumas and understandings. I am quite pleased that that toolkit is in place and it is available across the homelessness sector.

Ms Sheehan: Having had a period of homelessness is a big indicator for a person going on—not just to have been homeless as a child but to be homeless as a young person and an adult.

THE CHAIR: Thank you both for your answers. At the beginning of the session we talked about how you were going with the implementation of the federal government’s stimulus funding for social—

Ms Burch: We are going well.

THE CHAIR: Yes, we understand that. How many of the social housing projects that are underway relate to people with disability? Are there any of those that relate specifically to disability?

Ms Sheehan: Yes, there are, Mr Doszpot. Most particularly—and this is the second project that we have had the pleasure of dealing with St Margaret’s Uniting Church in Hackett—we are constructing properties there, and previously we have done special purpose properties and head leased them. This is to particularly respond to the mature carer issue, which is parents who have children who are perhaps entering their 30s, 40s or even 50s, who are looking for long-term accommodation for their children. What is ideal about this program is that St Margaret’s Uniting Church has actually brought the land into the program. Through nation building we have been able to provide the construction. That will go on to be transferred to St Margaret’s. That is a really great outcome.

THE CHAIR: Is that the only one specifically, or are there other projects as well?

Mr Collett: Mr Doszpot, all of the public housing that is being built on the community facilities land is supportive housing. Whilst it is targeted at older people, a number of those will have a range of disabilities. It is all class C adaptable, without threshold steps and with garages that meet the standards for disabled housing. A number of units in each of the larger sites have been built intentionally as three-bedroom units, rather than two-bedroom units, to allow accommodation for a live-in carer because a number of our elderly tenants have carers. In fact, all of the housing that has been done on the community facilities sites is suitable for people, albeit aged, with a disability.

Ms Sheehan: Can I just add there, Mr Doszpot, that CHC Affordable Housing is constructing 26 nation-building properties at a site in Gungaharra. CatholicCare are actually purchasing three of those properties and they are intending to have that for disability supported accommodation as well.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, much appreciated. One final question: how many breaches of tenancy agreement are there before ACAT at the moment?

Ms Burch: How many?

THE CHAIR: How many breaches of tenancy agreement are there before ACAT?

Mr Hehir: We will need to take that on notice, but can we just define the range of questions there? There will be some things where we are seeking a conditional order, which is the process we talked about earlier. There will be some things where we might be seeking an eviction order, which is the final and most serious stage, and there might be orders around rental compliance.

THE CHAIR: No. I understand that they are all before ACAT, so, yes—

Mr Hehir: Yes, they will be and there will also be some access orders. Sometimes

when people feel they have lived there long enough not to have a visit from us, they say, “We don’t need you to visit anymore” but we say, “Yes, we do.”

THE CHAIR: I do not necessarily need your answer now but if you could answer that, that would be great.

Ms Burch: We might provide that with some subcategories.

THE CHAIR: Could you also provide the cost that is involved in going through those processes?

Ms Sheehan: I can answer that now. The answer is that we have an in-house advocate who takes all of our cases through the ACAT. When it comes to moving from the ACAT through to appeals to the Supreme Court or the Administrative Appeals Tribunal, we use the ACT Government Solicitor.

THE CHAIR: And the in-house advocate is fully funded by you?

Ms Sheehan: That is right, as an administrative services officer grade 6.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. I think that just about reaches the end of our session for Housing ACT. We will move on to community development and policy, minister.

Ms Burch: Chair, can I just take the opportunity to thank the Housing ACT staff for their efforts in the last 12 months. Thank you. And, in retrospect, I thank the Disability staff as well.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, and I would like to thank all the departmental staff for appearing here before us today.

Are you ready, minister, to move on to community development and policy?

Ms Burch: Before we do so, Mr Doszpot, could I just refer you to page 164 on your last question. We are happy to come back with the status quo at the moment, but there are some numbers around information before the ACAT. I am assuming you just want a snapshot at this point in time?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Burch: Okay. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. As time is moving on and I am aware of all of our busy schedules, we might get to the next schedule. Ms Porter has just gone for a few minutes; she will join us in a couple of moments.

I would like to welcome everyone for this next session, which is part of our Standing Committee on Health, Community and Social Services hearing into annual and financial reports. We are looking into community development policy, output class 3. Minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

Ms Burch: No. I am happy to leave my very beginning statement to stand. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: In that case we will get into questions and my opening question is to you, minister: what is the current proportion of the population over the age of 60 in the ACT?

Ms Burch: The exact number I do not think I can tell you off the top of my head. I know it is the fastest demographic, but I am sure Ms Whitten will have that information. Being the fastest growing demographic is why we are very keen to get in place a strategic plan for positive ageing and also doing the work in housing and across government in other areas of support for that demographic. Ms Whitten?

Ms Whitten: At the moment in 2010 the ageing population over 60 years is 15.8 per cent of the ACT population.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much.

Ms Burch: And I think we are expecting that to rise to 20 per cent.

Ms Whitten: To 24.1 per cent by 2050.

THE CHAIR: I believe Mr Seselja has got some stuff on that.

MR SESELJA: Yes, I do. I think it sets out some of those numbers at the beginning of the strategic plan for positive ageing. I think the 2020 numbers you are expecting are around 20 per cent. What assessment has been done in terms of policy, in terms of what kind of pressures that will be putting on government services in particular, and particularly the operations of the department over the next decade?

Mr Hehir: Having a look at some of the work we are doing across the department, it is unlikely to have a significant impact on our children and young people area. When we have a look at our housing portfolio, most of our investment of the nation-building funds was actually targeted towards accommodation for the aged. We certainly see that as an area of growth, and we will continue to work with the government on how we continue to grow our accommodation suitable for aged people within our public housing portfolio.

I have forgotten the exact details of it but there is also a push for having more accessible housing constructed in Canberra. I am not sure of the actual methods. I need to take that on notice.

In terms of some of the other service providers, we are often a facilitator or an identifier or an information holder rather than actual service provider in that area. So we have been having a look at our mechanisms to make sure information is out there and accessible to people. Our online portal is one of the very first steps of that process. That is, I suppose, the broad aspect we have taken, given that we do not provide a huge amount of service directly to aged people within the community apart from through public housing.

Ms Burch: It is about across housing, increasing the information. Also, one of the new projects through LAPS in Weston Creek is that virtual response or virtual service, so we are looking at what we need, not only from government, from this department across government, but also with the various community providers in this virtual—it is called virtual something.

Ms Whitten: Virtual village or 55-plus network.

Ms Burch: Yes, and that is being managed, it is piloted and we are looking at that work in Weston Creek through Communities@Work and I think that is an important area. But also what is not the responsibility directly of this government is aged-care beds but we continue to bring on more—is it licences or—

Mr Hehir: The Australian government issues the licences.

Ms Burch: And they have certainly increased over time and I know down our way we have seen Monash village grow exponentially over the last little while—down in Isabella Plains too.

MR SESELJA: Just on some of those other ones, you noted, Mr Hehir, that you do not provide necessarily all of those services; they are provided by other agencies. I think one of those that is provided by another agency is the home and community care service. What assessment has been done—working with, I think, Health that administers that—on what kind of strains are likely to result from an ageing population on that particular service and particularly the budgetary implications for the ACT government?

Mr Hehir: I could probably answer you in part if not in full. That area is actually an area of work that we are also working with the Australian government on. There are discussions occurring from COAG processes around where responsibility for those particular programs sits. That model actually has a growth funding model attached to it. My recollection is that it is nine per cent. I could be wrong; it might be eight. It is similar to the rest of the health growth funding model so, because it sits within that portfolio, it has the same processes involved that Health have; there is an annual increment well and truly above the CPI that the rest of us get as an automatic part of our budget process. So it has a growth component identified within it. I am not sure whether that growth component has been reviewed in the last two years. I suspect that that growth component is unlikely to be reviewed until we actually sort out the responsibilities with the Australian government around that and I understand that that process is ongoing but hopefully will be resolved.

MR SESELJA: And at this stage that is, I think, a 60-40 split between the commonwealth and the ACT.

Mr Hehir: That is right.

MR SESELJA: Are you confident then that that growth aspect is going to be sufficient to provide that service or are we envisaging that there will have to be changes to that service in the way that service is delivered in the future?

Mr Hehir: I think for the detail you would have to ask the Health officials. We certainly work with them on the use of that funding, mainly around our disability clients. But certainly my understanding is that there is a lot of national work occurring in that area. I actually think that that funding was given the growth funding at the same time as the health budget was given it, broadly?

Ms Burch: Before.

Mr Hehir: Before. You would need to seek the detail from the Health officials.

Ms Burch: It is also worth noting, Mr Seselja, that for the first time, and it is on page 250, we have made a response to the strategic plan for positive ageing and, I think, other agencies, because it is an across-agency, across-government response that is required.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Bresnan.

MS BRESNAN: My question is in relation to that because it flows on. You have mentioned positive ageing strategies. You said it is across departments, but how is it actually being communicated to other departments so that the services on the ground are reflecting what is being stated in the positive ageing strategy?

Ms Whitten: Last year when we developed the strategic plan there was a working party, which involved representatives from each department as well as members of key stakeholder groups within the community. We are about to recommence a consultation process with those similar members, and we are meeting at the beginning of next month, in terms of seeing how progress has occurred in relation to implementation of the actions under the strategic plan. Of course, agencies have reported in their annual reports on the progress that they have made against the actions in the strategic plan as well.

MS BRESNAN: We probably have this with a lot of strategic plans or strategies that get applied across government. We know the population is ageing, we know we are going to need these services and we have got this plan. I take your point there, but how is it actually being built in and what sort of accountability is being put in place? We have got reporting, but will it actually make a difference in terms of the services that are coming in on the ground? An example is that in the strategy itself there is not a lot of mention about preventative health, but that is a pretty key measure in terms of ageing population and falls in fitness—how those sorts of issues then get built into what departments are doing.

Ms Whitten: The other mechanism that we have undertaken is that the plan was developed in consultation with the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing. In the intervening period, the members of the MACA have also met with departments, as well as the Office for Ageing, in terms of progressing particular actions and asking for accountability as well. In addition to that, the implementation plan also has a checklist from the World Health Organisation about age-friendly cities and the intention is to establish a benchmark survey against that particular checklist in the new year as well. So they are the methodologies by which we can work with agencies and with the community in terms of progressing awareness of this plan and influence directions as

well.

MS BRESNAN: So can we expect to see, if we are reporting on the positive ageing strategy, that it will actually show what departments are doing?

Ms Burch: Yes, and I am expecting by the middle of next year to come back with the first report, progress report.

MS BRESNAN: I am aware of how the councils work, but does the MACA put forward recommendations and does the government have to respond to anything it puts forward so that what it is suggesting as a representative body is actually taken account of in government policy?

Ms Burch: As they work through and partner with this first year of progress, I think some of that response and their advice will be a natural fall-out over the next six months as we work through the first years of implementation, and being able to gauge the response and the tone of programs that other agencies are putting in place.

Mr Hehir: Certainly, in terms of development of the positive ageing strategy, they are a key member and certainly the chair of MACA did not hold back. He had plenty of ideas and he wanted to make sure that we heard them and I think he is relatively pleased with our level of response to it.

THE CHAIR: We have an hour to cover roughly four different headings, so we will spend another couple of minutes on ageing, then we will have to move on to other areas. Are there any urgent questions on ageing?

MR SESELJA: I have a couple more, if possible.

MS PORTER: Can I ask one?

THE CHAIR: Ms Porter has not had a question yet, so one quick question from her.

MS PORTER: I think this will be very quick. On page 250, action No 3 is to develop and promote an online seniors information portal. It was planned to be launched in 2010. How is that going?

Ms Burch: It was launched and that was probably one of the early priorities out of the plan and was a direct result of commentary from MACA and other organisations. There is a lot of information out there but it is dispersed. So the portal captures all of that. It sits within DHCS at seniors.gov.act.au. I am sure that is what it is. It is quite a straightforward way of accessing information. It was launched at Belconnen seniors a couple of months ago and it has been well received. Certainly, MACA and the seniors groups continue to keep an eye on it and will continue to do so. They are invited to provide updates and commentary about what it can do to be improved.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. Mr Seselja?

MR SESELJA: I have a quick one. I am not sure whether it sits in this area. Has the department had anything to do with the development of the legislation on retirement

villages, which I think is before the Assembly or has been developed?

Ms Burch: Certainly, I have been in discussions with Ms Porter about the retirement village legislation. It sits to the side of our policy framework and area of what we do. But certainly there are a number of people in the age group of 55-plus. They have an interest in retirement villages. I work closely with Ms Porter about that. A number of people make comments to me about the benefits, the non-benefits and how you fine-tune that to give them security and a surety of housing options into the future.

MR SESELJA: What was the department's role in the development of that legislation?

Ms Whitten: I think the legislation was a private member's bill from Ms Porter and was an exposure draft that was released earlier this year. The government would obviously form a position about that particular piece of legislation. The responsibility rests with the Attorney-General, given that the regulatory aspects of it are overseen by the Office of Regulatory Services.

MR SESELJA: Just to clarify it, the department did not have any role in the development of that legislation?

Mr Hehir: No, we would not have a formal role in the development of the legislation. Our role, as with any private member's bill, is giving advice to the government on that, what we see as any issues or positives about it.

MR SESELJA: What consultation then is the department doing in relation to it? Obviously, there are a lot of interested seniors who are approaching members of the Assembly and who know the government—

Ms Burch: It is predominantly through Ms Porter, because it is her private member's bill. Certainly, MACA, as an advisory group, provide comment to me. What they are there for is to chew my ear at every opportunity and that is what they do. They are out in the community and a number of people come to them. But with regard to a formal position from me, it is that it is Ms Porter's private member's bill and I share with her the commentary that is brought to me as Minister for Ageing but also as a member of the Assembly.

MR SESELJA: But isn't the government developing a position, as a government, in relation to the legislation?

Ms Burch: Yes.

MR SESELJA: So is the government, therefore, doing its own consultation or is it just relying on that which is done separately?

Ms Burch: I think we have said the responsibility sits with the Attorney-General.

Ms Overton-Clarke: That is still to be determined. My understanding is that there are a number of contextual matters. At the moment there is the Productivity Commission's review into aged care. So the government, as the bill goes forward, will

need to decide the timing and whether it waits or not for the outcome of the Productivity Commission's report.

THE CHAIR: We will now move on to multicultural affairs and the first question on that. Thank you very much to the contributing departmental representatives. Welcome back, Ms Sheehan. Mr Manikis, welcome. Minister, the first question to you is: the level of funding to the ACT Ethnic Schools Association has decreased by approximately 14.4 per cent since 2006-07. What is the reason for this decreasing trend in funding support?

Ms Burch: The Ethnic Schools Association is funded through the Department of Education and Training. The department of multicultural affairs have provided some support dollars and some additional dollars to support language facilitation across various groups in Canberra because that is in our best interest and that is what we do to support different ethnic groups. But the ESA's core funding is through DET. I believe you would be aware of that.

THE CHAIR: I am aware of it. I am also aware that there is some funding coming from multicultural affairs and—

Ms Burch: We have provided, I think, \$20,000 over the last couple of years and we are aware that it has been a source of discussion. So we continue to talk with ESA about how we can support them to deliver their services, in addition to the core funding from DET.

THE CHAIR: Is that ongoing funding of \$20,000 or is it only for this year?

Mr Manikis: It was in the budget a couple of years ago, for four years in the outyears.

THE CHAIR: And it is ongoing?

Mr Manikis: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Why has the number of applications under the multicultural radio grants program fallen by 18 per cent since 2006-07?

Ms Burch: Why have the applications fallen, as in people applying or—

THE CHAIR: Are people getting adequate resourcing for their applications?

Ms Burch: We promote them and advertise them quite extensively.

Mr Manikis: We certainly do, and many radio programs do not just have our radio grants program as the sole source of revenue. And some radio programs, I understand, do quite well from other sources—for example, through their embassies or through their communities and voluntary efforts. By and large I cannot think of any reason why it has fallen, in terms of the numbers, but certainly we do promote—

Ms Burch: Not the dollars, though. The dollars—

Mr Manikis: The figure has been \$120,000 over the last few years. That certainly has not changed but the numbers—

THE CHAIR: My understanding is that the multicultural radio grants program has decreased by 18 per cent. The number of successful applications has decreased by 16 per cent as well.

Mr Manikis: That would relate directly to the assessment and how they perform against the criteria.

THE CHAIR: But the total dollar value has not decreased?

Mr Manikis: No, the total value has not decreased.

Ms Burch: No. I think it might be growing. I think last budget—

Mr Manikis: It went from \$100,000 to \$120,000.

MS BRESNAN: My question is in relation to the strategic indicators that are in the plan, the multicultural strategy, particularly on refugees, asylum seekers and humanitarian interests. One of the performance indicators is about the four meetings that you have with representatives to discuss the particular issues that are affecting them. Has there been a consideration of having a review of the issues that are brought up during this process? In relation to having those four meetings, are they adequate to address the issues that are coming up? I understand that there are quite a few issues coming up around that.

Mr Manikis: RASH—we call it RASH, which is the refugee and asylum seeker and humanitarian committee—meets four times a year. You are right. The representation on that committee is made up of those refugee and asylum seeker support groups, as well as people who are in our services across the ACT government and some representatives around the table. That committee is information sharing, for the most part, but is also about putting the issues on the table that come from the community that they experience and want to have dealt with. I think it has worked quite well to date.

We are reactive to the issues. We take them away and work on them and bring them back to the next meeting or out of session, the resolutions. All the committee members are free to discuss matters, either bilaterally with us or when we are developing responses to issues. We work in little groups or what have you. It is quite an active group. It is not just a sterile four meetings and that is it and we close shop and walk away. There is constant interaction between the members.

Ms Sheehan: A great example of that would be the issue of domestic violence. In relation to the ACT housing domestic violence policy manual, that group requested that there be a presentation on the manual, and that happened. As a result of the raising of the issue of domestic violence by that community generally and the presentation of the manual, domestic violence has been added as a standing item for consideration of the group. I think that is a good example of what Mr Manikis is saying. It is a vibrant consideration of new and emerging issues for the community.

MS BRESNAN: You just said that there has been a statement. You said that it is quite reactive and that it is potentially more proactive in terms of developing a policy statement around the issues that are coming out of that group. We know the sorts of services that are in the strategy and that refugees are accessing. There is quite good information in it. What about actually having a policy statement developed out of that group and it being a bit more proactive on what is happening? It might not fit in the strategy but it is about having a separate process.

Ms Burch: I think it is worth exploring but it is also then having that conversation with MARSS, Companion House, CatholicCare and those individual services as well about how we respond to asylum seekers and refugees. RASH provides a forum but then MARSS provides an additional forum as well.

MS BRESNAN: I understand that this is a forum where you are getting a lot of groups together and they are providing those services to these communities. So you have a pretty good form of knowledge around doing something a bit more proactive, given it is a growing concern for the community.

Mr Manikis: A refugee and an asylum seeker policy is worth exploring in the context of our multicultural strategy because that is one of our focus areas in the strategy anyway. What has been quite successful with this group is the actual practical, on-the-ground issues and responding to those in a way that is effective and efficient. There are a lot of issues that just require some sort of fix or solution, and that is what we are seeing out of this group—putting a framework over the top of it, doing some policy development work around it.

The ACT government already has a policy that fully supports asylum seekers and refugees in terms of its service delivery. It has the Human Rights Act. There are layers of policy around this. As I said, one of the focus areas in the strategy is around support for refugees and asylum seekers.

Ms Burch: Perhaps what we could do in future reporting is note some of those direct actions or themes that come out of the RASH discussion.

Mr Manikis: Yes. Maureen mentioned the domestic violence manual and the information that was sought by those service providers. Another one was just information. There was a thirst for information about services to asylum seekers—contact details, description of services, making sure that there is quality. When you are providing services to refugees you also do the same for asylum seekers. We are working through that. We have already produced a document for distribution which gives those details as a result of the discussion in RASH. And that is what I meant by the practical stuff that comes out of there.

MS BRESNAN: Someone said that there is a desire to have a bit more cultural policy content, using them for information. There is an information provision that would help them as well. You should actually act on that and use that information which you are getting.

Ms Burch: And I think what we will do is report on some of those actions that come

out of those different groups as well.

THE CHAIR: Ms Porter?

MS PORTER: Thank you, chair. In the multicultural strategy there are several items under “children and young people”. I was wondering whether you could give us a bit more background on those services that are listed and how they are going.

Ms Burch: One of the things I was quite pleased about was being able to support Multicultural Youth Services to relocate from a quite crowded and apparently increasingly problematic environment over in more central Civic to expanded rooms across the way at the Notaras centre. That has afforded the service the opportunity to expand and gives them more enhanced amenity around their meeting rooms and counselling rooms. But it has also allowed the young women to develop their own space separate from the young fellows. Mind you, there is a lot of intermixing goes on, but women can retreat to the peace and quiet of their room at the same time. Mr Manikis, you have probably got a swag of other things that you have been doing.

Mr Manikis: I think the main thing is that, as you rightly point out, Multicultural Youth Services, the peak representative body, are in appropriate accommodation now. A large number of their clients use the space, which we are very pleased with. In the last budget, the government made provision for an allocation of \$25,000 a year—\$100,000 over four years—for outreach multicultural youth services. That has been signed off for the Multicultural Youth Services to conduct work around the girls room or the women’s room that the minister has just mentioned. There is some programming around that and some outreach services with their clientele as well. That has been another development, so we have backed it up with funding as well.

Ms Burch: Some of the positive partnerships across other areas in the department are the child and family centres that are running targeted playgroups, picnics, play gatherings and support gatherings for new communities—those from Burma and other areas as well.

Mr Hehir: There is actually quite a nice partnership. Bendigo Bank, the Tuggeranong group, provided us with some funds for the Tuggeranong Child and Family Centre to undertake some work with families from multicultural backgrounds and to have a look at what services they might like to access and so on. We have actually developed a suite of services from that centre which we are pushing out to the other ones as well. That was the one where the community came to us and said, “We’re interested in you doing some work with us.” It was through the Bendigo Bank rather than the multicultural community, but they were really happy with our suggestion. I think they are quite happy with the outcomes of that.

THE CHAIR: Just looking at the efficiency dividend caps that are hanging over most agencies, how will Multicultural Affairs be affected by that?

Mr Hehir: The proportion of their cut is actually relatively small. We are unlikely to apply it specifically—

THE CHAIR: Can you qualify that—how small?

Mr Hehir: Less than 13, I think.

THE CHAIR: Thirty thousand?

Mr Hehir: Thirteen.

THE CHAIR: Thirteen thousand?

Mr Hehir: Thirteen.

Ms Burch: That is a lean machine, anyway.

Mr Hehir: It is a really small sum. It is unlikely to be picked up in the overall thing we deliver essentially, I suspect. We always ask Nic to make a contribution!

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Has the review of the 2010 Multicultural Festival been conducted yet?

Mr Manikis: Yes.

THE CHAIR: What were the findings?

Mr Manikis: It was a survey of 3,000 people. It was quite a substantial survey. I am happy to report—

Ms Burch: Very positive feedback.

Mr Manikis: Extremely positive. The survey found that 92 per cent of those who attended would recommend the festival to a friend or others. Ninety-five per cent of those attending were satisfied or very satisfied with the food and dance spectacular. We got over 100,000 people at the event, even though it was a reduced event over two-and-a-bit days. By all measures, the survey found that there was a high degree of satisfaction by the community, by participants. It was incident free, once again, which is a very important aspect of our operation. More importantly, it augurs well for 2011 at this point in time with unprecedented responses.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for that. How did the costing work out?

Ms Burch: It came in on budget, bar a squeak, didn't it?

Mr Hehir: A thousand dollars or so.

Ms Burch: So that is very pleasing.

THE CHAIR: In terms of what you were just alluding to, 2011, are you looking at changing anything for 2011?

Mr Manikis: In terms of the budget, I am happy to announce that HSBC has come on board and that has been formalised.

Ms Burch: That is very good news.

Mr Manikis: It is very good news. So there is a little bit more funding in the bottom line. I mentioned before the unprecedented response from the community. The stall income has doubled at this stage. That is because communities now are realising they would like to come in on the Friday, Saturday and Sunday. They are paying a discounted rate if they come in for three days, but that has increased the bottom line as well.

We have also got a couple of other sponsors in the wings and are waiting for an outcome. By and large, we are going to implement at this stage the same footprint and the same popular format we had in 2010 for 2011. We are introducing the Indigenous showcase, which is going to be under the banner of the National Multicultural Festival but organised separately by an Indigenous group, and a Turkish bazaar. The Turkish community have come on deck as well.

THE CHAIR: And no talk of a fringe festival being incorporated into it?

Ms Burch: It is well housed over at the Folk Festival.

Mr Manikis: We had a fringe festival.

Ms Burch: Can I just make mention of the Multicultural Festival? Whilst it was incident free, we will run the women's safety audit through the Multicultural Festival as well because we are expanding it—expanding it and shortening it—but the Friday, Saturday, Sunday will be very intense. Some of the interests of the community groups, coming in over those three days rather than just concentrating on Saturday, were also part of the feedback from the community. They would turn up on Sunday and wanted to be able to delight in the foods and the different community groups that were there on the Saturday.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much.

MS PORTER: I wanted to know how the satisfaction of the festival compared to previous years. I read in the report about the involvement of volunteers. I know that you are calling again for volunteers to help in this upcoming festival. Does the report list how many volunteers there were?

Ms Burch: Mr Manikis has probably got that number, but it is always well received—

Mr Manikis: It is.

Ms Burch: and served by volunteers.

Mr Manikis: We probably would not be able to do it if we did not have the volunteers. So that is a statement. They get a lot out of it as well. It is a two-way street, as you know. There were about 120 volunteers in 2010. The number fluctuates from year to year and is between 120 and 150. This year we are looking at having a specific discrete volunteer program that serves the festival. Most of those volunteers are

bilingual or multilingual and are highly skilled in that area. There are other occasions throughout the year where volunteers with those skills could be quite useful. I am thinking next year maybe with the census. We have had approaches from census 2011 for volunteers that are multilingual or bilingual. We are looking at giving our volunteers that we are putting together at the moment an opportunity to not only serve the festival but also other events throughout the year, including the census.

Ms Sheehan: Since changes to the occupational health and safety legislation in 2009, we will now be treating volunteers as having the same obligations as our own staff. We are taking that very seriously. What that means is that we will be providing really substantial training for our volunteers on health and safety so that we can look after their health and safety as well as the health and safety of people attending the festival.

MS PORTER: That is very good news.

THE CHAIR: And they are covered by insurance, I presume?

Ms Sheehan: Yes, they are.

MS PORTER: Just on the first question I asked about satisfaction between last year and the year before?

Mr Manikis: It is a slightly increased satisfaction rate, yes.

MS PORTER: So with the more intense way it is run people seem to be happier?

Mr Manikis: Yes. I think the Canberra community are much attracted to the outdoor community events.

MS PORTER: Yes.

Mr Manikis: They largely remain the same from one year to the next. They have just been put into one weekend. What is really not there is those indoor events, like the theatre and the indoor events that we used to have. That is really what has been done away with in the reduction. The outdoor events are still there, which attract a high approval rating.

Ms Burch: I have been very active in talking with the diplomatic corps about how they share their culture more broadly over the year with Canberra. I am talking with the Russian embassy at the moment about them bringing something across. Just last weekend the five Latin American countries that celebrated their 200 years had the wonderful Classical Latino. It is a broader calendar, rather than just the Multicultural Festival.

MS PORTER: We had the Russian film festival, didn't we?

Ms Burch: That is right.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister, that is much appreciated. One final question from Ms Bresnan.

MS BRESNAN: It is around interpreter services, which is mentioned on page 231 and it is part of the multicultural strategy. I appreciate this is an area which is outside the department, but do you know whether training is provided to people so they know when it is appropriate to use interpreters? I guess the specific examples might be for schools or Care and Protection to make sure they are actually being used in these circumstances.

Mr Manikis: ACT Health, I think, provide training. In the context of cultural training across agencies, I understand that the use of interpreters and how they go about doing that is part of the cross-cultural training that occurs across agencies. We used to provide discrete training programs for a couple of hours for service counter staff on how to use interpreters. It is something that we have not been doing in the last year or two, for the simple reason that there are a lot of agencies and it looked like we were duplicating, but we will certainly look at that in future.

MS BRESNAN: Again, it is the issue about where it is listed as a strategy and actually promoting it. Have you had any concerns brought to you at all of instances where they might not have been used?

Mr Manikis: No. That is why it has been dropped down the list a little, because we have not received any complaints.

Ms Sheehan: What I can say is that we now have training in Housing ACT specifically on the issue of how to provide services to refugees. We have had a good relationship and I meet quite often with refugee support organisations. They have drawn our attention to the fact that, while, shall I say, white Anglo-Saxon Australians might be quite vocal in their demands for services when they are an applicant, that would be exactly the reverse for refugees. They now provide training to our staff, which includes the appropriate use of interpreters and a culturally appropriate service so that the responses that people actually want to give are elicited, and we are providing services in the correct way.

MS BRESNAN: Do you know whether education and, say, Care and Protection also provide that sort of training?

Mr Hehir: Off the top of my head, I am not aware whether there is any specific training. Certainly, an awareness of how to work across different cultures is fundamentally part of their training. I would need to check on whether they have been trained in the use of interpreter services.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. A supplementary to Mrs Dunne and then she is going to ask the first question on the women's area.

MRS DUNNE: Could I follow up on that? I had an instance brought to my attention earlier this week in the courts. Someone was before a magistrate and did not speak any English and there was no interpreter available. The magistrate was constrained in saying, "Do I bail this person or do I keep them until we can find somebody who can explain the situation?" Who is responsible for ensuring that the court staff are alerted? Is that a JACS responsibility? How does the Office of Multicultural Affairs relate to

that to ensure that appropriate interpreter services are available and who monitors whether there might be shortages in any particular languages? A couple of languages that they sometimes have shortages in were brought to my attention by the magistrates earlier this week.

Mr Manikis: There are a couple of issues there. One is: are interpreters called to the point of service provision? That is the first issue, and that is about educating service counter staff, court attendants and all the rest of it.

The second issue, of course, is the availability of interpreters. I am aware that, in terms of availability of interpreters, the TIS, the Translating and Interpreting Service, is one phone call. It is a three-way phone call that can occur, and that draws on a pool of interpreters all over Australia. So the issue about shortage of interpreters does not really ring true.

MRS DUNNE: Yes, that was my first response: where was TIS on this particular—

Mr Manikis: Yes, that is right. There are instances, of course, where you need someone in person. From time to time you hear that it is very hard to get on to interpreters. They may be generally available but they are not available at the time that you want them. It is something that we can encourage. We can encourage people to get accredited by NAATI, the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters. We can do that campaigning. But, ultimately, it is up to the people that have that second or third language to get themselves—

MRS DUNNE: Properly accredited.

Mr Manikis: Yes.

MRS DUNNE: TIS is run by Immigration; is that right?

Mr Manikis: TIS is run by Immigration at the moment, yes. And that is promoted.

MRS DUNNE: And what is your—

Mr Manikis: We do promote it. ACT government policy is that interpreters are to be provided at the counters. So that is the policy, and the service is free of charge.

THE CHAIR: Mrs Dunne, we might have to hold it there.

MRS DUNNE: Could I ask one more question on this. Are there areas where you are aware of particular shortages? It was put to me that some of the Sudanese languages were a problem for the interpreter services.

Mr Manikis: I am interested to hear about that because about a year ago the office provided software to the Sudanese community so that they can translate. So that is translation. I have not heard that interpreting was an issue. We responded to the complaint that they could not translate information but we had not received any indications from the Sudanese community that, with respect to interpreting in their language, in Dinka, there is a shortage. I understand that there are quite a few Dinka

speakers who are accredited and who are running around the place. But we can look into it.

MRS DUNNE: I will take the matter up with the Attorney-General.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Manikis. That ends the multicultural session, so thank you for your attendance.

Mr Manikis: Thank you very much, Mr Chairman.

THE CHAIR: Minister, we now come to the women's section of your responsibilities. Do you want to give a preamble?

Ms Burch: I am happy with the earlier statement, particularly having regard to time constraints.

THE CHAIR: In that case, I have elected to defer to our colleagues with the shadow responsibilities. Mrs Dunne will ask the first question.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, this is essentially a question that was hospital passed to you by the attorney when Ms Hunter and I asked about this the other day, and it relates to the accommodation for the Women's Legal Centre and other legal centres. What progress has been made in addressing the issue of accommodation for the legal centres?

Ms Sheehan: I am really glad you asked that question, Mrs Dunne, because the Women's Legal Centre had made a decision to move to the Griffin Centre. In fact, the social housing and homelessness services were very pleased to provide them with a grant to assist them to do that, and that would involve them providing free legal clinics for drop-in services at the gateway services for people accessing services. But at the last minute they decided not to move.

MRS DUNNE: So how much was the grant you were proposing to—

Ms Sheehan: From memory, it was a small grant. I think it was somewhere between \$10,000 and \$15,000, but we were going to receive quite a great drop-in service. I am not saying that we will not still be able to proceed with the drop-in service, but we would have been very happy to help them relocate to the Griffin Centre. So they have taken the decision not to do that at the moment and they are considering their options more generally now.

MRS DUNNE: But the issue arises that DHCS is their current landlord at Havelock House, and for the Tenancy Advice Service.

Ms Sheehan: In fact, Havelock Housing Association is the landlord and in the same way, although we own the building and we own the Griffin Centre, the ACT Council of Cultural and Community Organisations would have been the landlord at the Griffin Centre.

MRS DUNNE: So the attorney's suggestion that I take up their accommodation issues with you as the responsible minister is not correct?

Ms Burch: It is complex. Certainly, they write to me and they make representations both to the Attorney-General and to me. I have been there; I have visited there. Their services are cramped. That is why the offer about the Griffin Centre has been put in place. Both the attorney and I need to look at finding some solution. The comment they make is that they want to remain central. They have some wishes that make it more complicated for us to be able to provide a solution. Being central in Civic is one of them. So the option to move them to a community hub was not an option for them. When we have restricted criteria regarding their interest and desires, it becomes more complicated about how we house them. But point taken; they are crowded.

MRS DUNNE: So from your point of view, you are aware that it is an issue but you have not really made any progress on it?

Mr Hehir: I think what we said was that we were working with them to move to the Griffin Centre. They made a decision not to. It is difficult for us to force them to move.

MRS DUNNE: It has been put to us that they did not have enough money to move to the Griffin Centre.

Mr Hehir: In fact, we were trying to facilitate that, as Ms Sheehan also said, by purchasing additional services to give them some cash to enable the move. It was certainly part of our strategy to support that move. Again, if that was not sufficient, we are happy to have a further conversation. But we have certainly been working proactively with the Women's Legal Centre in terms of what their options are, and that includes exploring whether they were willing to work outside Civic. A number of organisations have been. They have said no, they want to be in close proximity, and that is fair enough. We are working with them. Just because they have said no to this move at the moment does not mean we are not going to continue working with them, and we have been looking for ways that we can support them to move.

MS HUNTER: I want to go to the women's plan. It talks about an interdepartmental committee or a women's plan implementation group that will guide the actions of the women's plan. Has that been established and who is on the committee?

Ms Whitten: Yes, the women's implementation group has been established and met on 12 November. It comprises senior executive representation from each of the departments and also the chair of the Ministerial Advisory Council for Women.

MS HUNTER: When that plan was put together, there were a number of consultation activities undertaken. Because it is not just a women's plan and it is also about girls, how many young women or girls were involved in those consultations and how did you go about ensuring that they were represented?

Ms Whitten: There were a number of consultation mechanisms that were undertaken last year for the development of the women's plan. One of the first forums was a forum of women. I think young women attended that particular forum. I think there were about 90 people who attended that particular forum. In addition, the Ministerial Advisory Council for Women undertook specific consultations with particular groups within the community, particularly those women who might not necessarily come to a bigger forum. So the members of the council actually undertook a program of targeted consultations which included young women as well. In addition, the Office for

Women met with particular groups within the community. With respect to the proportion of young women, I am not clear on that now, but we can see if we can find that information.

MS HUNTER: I also wanted to follow up on the gender disaggregated data project. There was a trial that was running through ACT Health, I understand. Where is that up to and what role is DHCS playing in all of this?

Ms Burch: Certainly, we are considering a report at the moment about what we do with that. I will go to Ms Whitten to talk in detail, but it has shown us that this is not an easy thing to do. This is quite a complicated and, in many ways, challenging and expensive thing to do. So we are looking at some options about how we can apply that across programs and services. Ms Whitten might be able to give a bit more detail on that.

Ms Whitten: There is a bit of information on page 55 of the annual report. The gender measures pilot was undertaken by ACT Health last year and this year. The Office for Women worked with ACT Health in terms of developing the pilot. That also included the training that was required to be undertaken to develop the pilot. I think there is some information about that at the back of volume 1 of the annual report, where we report on progress against the women's plan.

Essentially, the pilot was in the mental health area of ACT Health. It looked at gender data in terms of any particular inequalities between men and women who were in the secure unit in Mental Health. The reason why that particular area was identified was that there is a good collection of data in Mental Health, so we had a very good source of data to work from. One of the outcomes we were looking at was whether it was possible to develop an impact statement arising from that pilot. That is the subject of some information that has been provided to the Minister for Health and the Minister for Women. We are looking at that detail now in terms of whether it can be applied more broadly across particular parts of government.

MS HUNTER: When you say "impact statement", that is what it is about? It is about how it can be rolled out and implemented across other areas?

Ms Whitten: That was one of the outcomes that we were looking at.

MS HUNTER: Is that what is included in the impact statement?

Ms Burch: It is an important bit of work, but we learnt a lot through the process as well about some of the training, the resource requirements and the training within staff to be able to look at the data, analyse the data and do what we need to do with the data to get a sensible and rigorous impact statement. So there are a number of layers to what this project has actually shown us.

Mr Hehir: In essence, what we found was a very intensive process around a relatively constrained area that took a long time. That, from my perspective, starts to say that it is very difficult to roll that sort of process out across every part of the ACT government service. It would be really intensive and take forever. That means we need to think about when and how we use this particular tool and also what other tools we need to have a think about in terms of the broader issue across the government.

Certainly, my understanding is that it found really useful information, but it was a really intensive and, for the numbers, relatively expensive and time-consuming project. That does not mean you do not do it; that means you do it where you think you are going to get the best value from that sort of exercise. For other areas, you think about what other mechanisms you are going to have. So that is going to take us a little bit of time to work through. We will probably need to have a think about how that impacts on other agencies as well as the overall government position.

MS HUNTER: Minister, you will get that impact statement. Are you going to make that publicly available? What happens with it? What is the process?

Ms Burch: That is still being considered by both my department and through the Minister for Health. We will come back. This bit of work has been on the table for some time, so I am interested in bringing out what we can bring out and make available what we can. But at the moment it is an active work in progress across my department and that of the Minister for Health.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. We have one final question from Ms Porter.

MS PORTER: I am happy to put it on notice because we have run out of time and we have another meeting to come back to very shortly. I am interested in knowing how the micro-credit program is going, how many actual recipients there are, for how long those particular projects that have been funded have been going and how much interest there is in actually establishing more. Perhaps you could take that on notice.

Ms Burch: The short answer is that it is absolutely well received and going fantastically. It was established in March and, from March to September, 12 loans have been approved. Probably more than that have applied. In fact, I was talking to one woman who had such a good business proposal that she was moved on to a business enterprise group rather than the women's micro-credit program. Certainly, the diversity of programs coming through is reflective of the innovation and it means that I think we got it right. I think it is a great project and I am quite happy to report often about the success of that. But there have been 12 in the six months to date.

MS PORTER: And 12 continuing? Are they continuing on?

Ms Whitten: It is 10 loans per year.

MS PORTER: Ten loans per year?

Ms Whitten: Yes.

MS PORTER: I see. Thank you very much.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, minister, and thank you to members of your department for spending this time with us this morning.

Meeting adjourned from 12.51 to 2.07 pm.

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

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

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon, everyone. I would like to welcome you to the public hearing of the Standing Committee on Health, Community and Social Services into the 2009-10 annual and financial reports of the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services. This afternoon we are looking into the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, output class 3, output 3.2. Minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

Mr Stanhope: Thank you, Mr Chair. No, I have no specific comments to make. But of course, as is always the case, my officials and I look forward to being able to assist where we are able. So thank you.

THE CHAIR: The annual report, on page 237, refers to the building blocks as endorsed by COAG. One of these building blocks is schooling. How does a target of halving the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy fit with a decision announced in October for cuts to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literacy and numeracy office program?

Mr Stanhope: I have to say, in relation to the performance of Indigenous children within our school system, I think you will see from the report and the statistics that our schools perform extremely well against national benchmarking in relation to all schooling, including the educational outcomes of Indigenous children within our schools. We have extremely good results on a comparative basis with the rest of the nation. Of course, we look forward to the day when we close the gap completely but we are well on the way to achieving that. We have programs in place in our schools in relation to particular targeted support for Indigenous students or indeed all students who are at risk of not achieving. And we continue to maintain that effort.

In relation to the specifics of your question—and I must say I will probably have to take some advice on that—of course, it was a proposal that was advanced as part of a discussion around how to meet an efficiency dividend that had been imposed on all ACT government agencies. In the context of that discussion, how it went and the outcome, I would have to defer to Mr Hehir or to Mr Manikis. I am not quite sure of some of the detail on that particular issue.

Mr Manikis: I can advise you that there were six or seven positions and they are going to get absorbed. They are going to get taken out of the program.

Mr Stanhope: In the context of the implications about all the administrative

arrangements that were in place, I will have to take that on notice and am more than happy to provide information from the department of education.

MR HANSON: Those positions have been disbanded?

THE CHAIR: So you will be taking it on notice?

Mr Stanhope: I will but it does need to be understood that one of the issues and one of the difficulties sometimes which I experience in an estimates hearing in relation to Indigenous affairs is the nature of the way in which Indigenous affairs is raised. Some see it as a weakness; others, of course, as obvious or logical. Whilst I seek to maintain an oversight role as the minister for indigenous affairs, I am not responsible administratively for the education of children.

The issue that you raise is not an issue that was addressed by me as minister for indigenous affairs. It was an issue within the remit and the responsibility of the minister for education. So I do not have the specific detail. I was not involved in the specific decision making or the specific outcome. I am happy to take the question on notice but I will have to get that information from the department of education.

THE CHAIR: I guess there is another level here as well, that your government has committed, in response to the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body report on the outcomes of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body estimates hearing in 2008-09, to improve and maintain literacy and numeracy outcomes through personalised learning strategies. What we are talking about is how these cuts will affect them. The government overall has made a commitment to that. I take your point.

Mr Stanhope: We made a commitment to closing the gap and ensuring that in the ACT we will close that gap, but we have a vision, an aspiration, a determination to ensure that in relation to any national testing of outcomes—all students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 are tested nationally—in time, we will close the gap to the point where there is no separation between the outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Having said that, of course, there is on page 237 a table of the positional stage reached in achieving that particular outcome in the ACT.

The bottom line, of course, is that we have, to a greater extent than the other jurisdictions in Australia, achieved that. And from time to time in relation to some cohorts in some years, most particularly years 3 and 5, we have in a particular reporting period on occasion achieved that particular outcome where it was not thought possible. And that is a great achievement and a great outcome for schools within the ACT. We have not been able to maintain it consistently and we have not been able to maintain it, most particularly, into high school.

But look at the numbers. Look at the outcomes in the reporting period as reported in relation to outcomes for years 3, 5, 7 and 9 in reading, in writing and in numeracy. You will see from the numbers, particularly if you have the national comparisons, the results being achieved within the other states and the other territory, that the ACT consistently does far better than any other jurisdiction in Australia. And you will see in these numbers the extent to which the gap is being closed, and closed quite

dramatically. I point, in relation to this, for instance, to reading year 7, Indigenous and non-Indigenous. The differential is two per cent, 94 per cent to 96 per cent reaching national benchmarks in relation to reading.

Again, of course, there are other areas where the gap is larger but across the board we will not be satisfied until there is no differentiation, until one cannot distinguish, until the gap is closed. But it is something that we are working on assiduously and we have not taken any decisions that will impact on the progress that we have made. I give you that assurance. We will continue to put major effort into closing the gap across the board, particularly in education. But there is still a significant way to go. We acknowledge that.

I take your question seriously, Mr Chair, and I will ask the department of education to respond to this committee fully, with the assurances that I have just given that we are not diminishing our effort in this area. I think I would need to leave it to them to explain to you the ways, the methods and the methodology that they will be using to ensure that they do not diminish their effort. I just cannot do it for you but I will ensure they do it.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Ms Bresnan?

MS BRESNAN: Thank you, chair. My question is in relation to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service delivery framework and implementation plan. In response to question on notice 1057 it was noted that the findings of Professor Larissa Behrendt will be taken into account in developing the framework and in delivery of the framework implementation plan. I was wondering when that framework and implementation plan will be developed and completed and who was involved in the development of that plan.

Mr Manikis: The framework was approved by government at the beginning of the year. We are in the last stages of drafting the implementation plan. It has been looked at quite closely by the agencies, the draft that we have got on hand at the moment. Agencies have commented, provided their input. It is quite a comprehensive piece of work. The process in developing the implementation plan involved comprehensive community consultation and great assistance by the elected body, in the sense that the elected body itself led the community consultation forums as well as consultations with Indigenous-specific organisations we have in town, a separate process with them to get input into the implementation plan.

The implementation plan is not far away from becoming public. It is subject to government approval in the next little while. But it has had quite a substantial amount of community input. We have taken Larissa Behrendt's matters and issues into account, as we have done with the great input that has come to us, and suggestions from the community as well and the community organisations.

Bear in mind also that that service delivery implementation plan is based on the urban and regional development strategy that is a schedule to the national Indigenous reform agreement. And what we are trying to do is not have layers and layers of these plans and spending all our time on reporting. We are trying to align a lot of this reporting so that we only report once on a raft of things.

We are also trying to get that implementation plan in a form that not only responds to the community's suggestions and views but also allows us to be reporting against that plan. In doing that, we are using the same information report to COAG that we are required to use.

MS BRESNAN: There is the *What works* report. Have you drawn on that? Obviously, the urban regional development strategy is relevant. Have there been other bodies of research you have looked at which would be applicable to the ACT?

Mr Manikis: Yes. But the centrepiece is the urban and regional one. And you will find that the five action areas from that actually form a basis, and that is the way the implementation plan is constructed. We are looking at things that are unique to the ACT. The urban and regional service delivery strategy from COAG is supposed to address the fact that the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders live in urban areas or regional areas. So our service delivery framework implementation program is based around those five action areas. And what we have done is customise it within the local scene.

MS HUNTER: You mentioned the elected body leading parts of the consultation. What about the United Ngunnawal Elders Council? Were they involved?

Mr Manikis: They were. They were invited along to the elected body's consultations, along with the rest of the community. I think they were invited to both forums, both the Indigenous community one and the general community one that they held.

Mr Stanhope: There is, of course, some significant overlap between the United Ngunnawal Elders Council and the elected body at the moment. For instance, there are the co-chairs of the United Ngunnawal Elders Council, Roslyn Brown and Fred Monaghan, both of whom are members of the elected body. The two current co-chairs of UNEC are also members of the elected body. So there are certainly very good linkages between the two organisations.

Having said that—and I have discussed this issue very openly before—the government continues to work with the United Ngunnawal Elders Council in an effort to assist in building capacity within that organisation to take a stronger leadership role in relation to consultation and advice to government on issues affecting traditional owners and custodians. Most particularly in recent times, I think in the last three months, it is fair to say that Mr Manikis and his office and I have been involved at some level and have been working in a very concentrated way in seeking to facilitate the development capacity within that organisation. But there is still some work to do.

MS HUNTER: And do you regularly receive advice from both the elected body and the United Ngunnawal Elders Council?

Mr Stanhope: I receive quite regular reports and updates and engage reasonably regularly most particularly with the elected body. It has to be said, Ms Hunter—and you may be aware—that I have written to every member of the United Ngunnawal Elders Council in the last month as part of the process which Mr Manikis is leading, expressing concern that the United Ngunnawal Elders Council finds it difficult to

develop a consensus view on anything or a view which it finds itself able to provide to government on issues that the government wishes to receive advice on. We have been working to assist the United Ngunnawal Elders Council to better structure meetings, to develop agendas that they are prepared to seek to address, and that they seek to achieve outcomes that the government wishes to hear in a structured way from the United Ngunnawal Elders Council.

The model, as it currently operates, is not operating particularly successfully in the delivery of advice to government. And to be frank, it is because of the inability of the organisation to ever agree on anything. I do not wish to overstate it but the United Ngunnawal Elders Council is not providing consistent advice to the government, not from a want or a desire on the part of the government but from—

MR HANSON: How long has that been going on? Has that been ongoing since its inception?

Mr Stanhope: Yes. It has been an ongoing issue and the government has adopted a number of strategies with a view to seek to address the issue, with a view to achieve more rigorous and structured advice and a more productive relationship. We have tried. One of the difficulties, in a sense, has been our determination to show the organisation the respect that we believe it deserves in terms of developing its own agenda, its own processes, and of course coming to its own conclusions in relation to the advice that we would like to receive. But our efforts have not been particularly successful.

MR HANSON: I have seen the letter and I appreciate the brief that was provided from your office. If that body is incapable, essentially, of fulfilling its function of providing advice to government, what role is it serving?

Mr Stanhope: I do not believe it is incapable, but it is certainly—

MR HANSON: Or is it at the moment proving incapable?

Mr Stanhope: It is not, I do not believe. It has certainly not reached meeting its potential. One of the difficulties is that I meet individually with the members of the United Ngunnawal Elders Council and have very productive discussions, to the extent that the conversation reflects the particular view of the person I might be talking to but once the individuals come together as a collective, I have to say with great respect, the capacity then to come to even a majority position, let alone a consensus position on any item, has been wanting.

MR HANSON: Given that this has been going on for some time and that you have made a number of efforts to address it, have you set a time at which, if it is not resolved, we do not continue with this body? How long do you continue with a body that is not actually providing the role that it is meant to provide to government? Do we just continue to—

Mr Stanhope: I believe yes. The United Ngunnawal Elders Council represents the traditional custodians, the traditional owners of this land, and I think it is very important that there be such an advisory body. I believe it is appropriate that the

government support the existence of that body and I believe it is appropriate that we seek, while showing due respect, to facilitate the developmental capacity.

MR HANSON: But it is not providing advice that you can count on, based on the evidence you have just given and briefings that we have been provided.

Mr Stanhope: To date, I think it is fair to say—and I say this with great respect to the individual members of that council; I have put this in writing, as you know—that I have expressed politely, in writing, that the government is concerned that it has not received advice. I believe it needs to be addressed, and that is why I have taken the step of writing, because the level of my concern has grown, which is the point you made, and over time the government has attempted to show a due and appropriate respect and we want to continue to do that.

But we want to also assist. And we have been doing that through my letter and through Mr Manikis's attempts at building some capacity, discussing, implementing a process, developing an agenda, agreeing with the agenda, being prepared to discuss the agenda, agreeing that, if an agenda has been agreed by the whole, it is appropriate that there be resolution or an outcome in relation to each of the agenda items and, once there is an outcome to an agenda item, then the outcome can be conveyed to the government and the government can respond.

I do not want to overstate it but it is fair to say that I cannot recall the last time I received a report from the United Ngunnawal Elders Council with a recommendation flowing from an outcome of an agenda item. But I believe that over time the capacity will develop, the relationships will grow. But it is difficult and it needs to be addressed. I believe we need to convey a sense that, in a way, we are posing the question without posing it directly to the members of the United Ngunnawal Elders Council to perhaps ponder the *raison d'être* of what they believe they see.

MS HUNTER: Minister, you mentioned that you had put forward some reforms or suggestions to assist with building capacity. What are they and how have they been received?

Mr Stanhope: I would be happy to provide you with a copy of my most recent letter, which goes to some of the structural issues. At the last full meeting that I attended, I discussed the same sort of issues that I have now included in the letter and raised the issue about relationships, respecting and supporting the chair, not moving motions of no confidence in the chair at every meeting and not talking over, some basic issues around letting people speak, and personal relationships. There have been some very uncomfortable issues and incidents featuring at meetings of the United Ngunnawal Elders Council. I hesitate to say these things publicly, but I believe that we need to be open and honest about the capacity and the nature of the relationships and the organisational issues.

We now face another issue, and I believe it is reasonable for members of the Assembly to know these things. I receive regular representations from members of the United Ngunnawal Elders Council; I think it is an outcome of every meeting that members of the United Ngunnawal Elders Council hesitate to acknowledge that other

members are traditional owners. I receive regular representations. I have never attended a meeting where the case is not made or the allegation is not laid by one member that most of the other members are not Ngunnawal, are not traditional owners. I have received correspondence to the same effect, asking me to intervene, to have people removed.

A member of the Ngarigu group has initiated action in the Human Rights Commission against me, alleging breach of her human rights as a traditional owner, in that we recognise the Ngunnawal people and not the Ngarigu. We have a request now to the Human Rights Commission that I remove all references to Ngunnawal wherever appearing and that the United Ngunnawal Elders Council be replaced by essentially a United Ngarigu Elders Council, because the Ngunnawal are not traditional owners. Of course, there is another group, the Ngambri, who claim the same.

We now have a situation where there are three distinct groups—the Ngunnawal, the Ngarigu and the Ngambri—all claiming exclusively to be traditional owners. The claim of the Ngarigu has escalated to the point where the matter is now an active issue before the Human Rights Commission.

MS PORTER: So, Chief Minister—

Mr Stanhope: It is in the ACAT.

MS PORTER: Chief Minister, going to that very question that you are discussing now, on page 66 it talks about a genealogy study of the traditional custodian families in the ACT. It says the study will commence early in 2010-11, so one presumes that study has commenced?

Mr Stanhope: Yes.

MS PORTER: In terms of meeting this challenge that you are talking about at the moment and what you are dealing with at the moment, how will that benefit that process?

MS HUNTER: And could I also add to that: who has been engaged to do the work?

Mr Stanhope: I will defer to Mr Manikis, but I have expressed the view to the United Ngunnawal Elders Council and each of the elders represented there that there is a view within the community that it will resolve all issues. I do not believe that. I put the view quite honestly that, sometimes in life, be careful around what you wish for. I used my own family experience as an example, but I do not think I managed to explain myself. In pursuing my family tree on my mother's side, the family tree stops dead at my mother's father. We believe he was almost certainly illegitimate and that he was placed in an orphanage. We simply know nothing beyond that. That was in London, where there was record-keeping and records of these things.

Certainly, in relation to many Indigenous people in Australia, that level of record-keeping and capacity to validate will not exist. I do hold a concern that, for some people who assert a certain attachment, the genealogy study will not be able to establish that, and people that are now accepted as Ngunnawal, Wiradjuri or Ngarigu

and who assert that but who, through a genealogy, cannot have it proven clinically, will now, in the eyes of others, be found to have not been what they always asserted.

The communities are putting great faith in the genealogy and we have agreed to it. Mr Manikis has pursued the structure for that, and I will ask him to go to that. We are doing it over two years. We are consulting extensively. We are not restricting it to people who claim to be Ngunnawal. We are actually including people who, as Ngarigu, claim to be the real traditional owners, along with the Ngambri, the Wiradjuri—indeed, any Indigenous person who believes that they have a connection with this place, the ACT, the limestone plains, is being invited to participate.

I am hopeful—and it goes to the point that Mr Hanson raised, to some extent—through this that we do have a new start, and that there will be some capacity for us at least to agree on who might appropriately claim to have a traditional attachment or association with the lands now incorporated within the ACT.

MR HANSON: It is difficult to extrapolate that far forward, but given your—

MS HUNTER: Could I just finish that off and find out who is going to do the study, because it is quite critical about who carries it out.

Mr Manikis: Yes, it is. We want to make sure it is independent, so it is not—

MS HUNTER: Indeed, yes.

Mr Manikis: And that is the point you are going to.

MS HUNTER: Yes.

Mr Manikis: We have said before, and this is well known through other forums, that it is a two-part study. So the first part is to interview the families and get a bit of a family history, a family tree situation going, and a report at the end of it. We envisage that report to be in about June or July next year.

Mr Stanhope: Who is doing that report?

Mr Manikis: It is a woman called Joy Murrin and another woman called Ardeth Pemberton. Both of them are professional genealogists. It has only been over the last little while that we have been able to secure their services, but they have already started interviewing people and we have given an undertaking to the UNEC families that we would start off with them, those 12 or 13 families there. As the Chief Minister said, we will move on to the Ngarigu and the Ngambri as well. Of course, Ngunnawal descendants can be found all over Australia and there are 1,100 possible names at the moment.

Mr Stanhope: That is just the Ngunnawal—people identifying as Ngunnawal.

Mr Manikis: Just identifying as Ngunnawal. We are going to honour our commitment to the members of UNEC. We have kicked off with their families. What we are aiming for is that, at the end of June or July, there will be a report that will

have who is connected to whom in a family sense, like a family tree. There might be some surprises for the family groups as well. This might turn up relatives they never knew and they might have been living next door to them. So this phase of it is quite exciting.

Even more exciting and more complex and difficult will be the next phase. In July next year, once this report is on the table, we hope to get native title people up in New South Wales who are experts in this area—getting those family trees and the work that has been done in the first phase and testing the connectedness to land of those family groups. That will be the second phase. Hopefully, that will tell us a few things as well.

I have had some great discussions with the Kay sisters, who came to us with a proposal recently about a memorial to the traditional owners here for all the centenary celebrations, the celebration year; they would like a memorial. Their relatives were here when Canberra was surveyed and they were taken off and sent off to the Edgerton Reserve, which was the precursor to the Hollywood Reserve up in Yass. We have had some terrific discussions in the office. What has happened there is that one, two or three years ago, we did not even know they existed. They have just come out of the woodwork. They live up on the north coast somewhere. They have heard about it and they want to be part of it down here. Their grandfathers, great-grandfathers, grandmothers and great-grandmothers were all involved. The Europeans get compensated to come off their land; the rest get into Edgerton Reserve.

THE CHAIR: Can I suggest that we wrap this up and move on to the next question?

Mr Stanhope: Yes, that is fine.

THE CHAIR: I think you had a supplementary.

MR HANSON: I want to know if we are still within the cost; that is the first thing. I know it was \$150,000 at one stage, wasn't it?

Mr Manikis: It is \$100,000; \$50,000 over each year for two years.

MR HANSON: The other thing is—

Mr Stanhope: I have my suspicions about whether we can keep it within cost.

MR HANSON: Yes, it sounds like it is a big study. With your foreboding, be careful what you wish for, you may actually find that this creates more problems than it resolves.

Mr Stanhope: I think, at the end of the day, it will not. But along the way, there could be some pain. We need to be very aware of that. I believe there may be some pain and some challenging discoveries for some people. That was my point. But I think ultimately it will be very positive and very productive. But along the way, it might be painful for some members of our Indigenous community.

MS HUNTER: Although you mentioned earlier, minister, that you are not necessarily

responsible for particular delivery of services in education and so forth, I wanted your thoughts on the child protection stats that we are still seeing. They are very alarming—68.2 out of every 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are on orders, compared to 6.2 for every 1,000 and so forth. This is all part of the closing the gap initiative. What can we be doing to reduce these numbers that we are not already doing?

Mr Stanhope: I agree with you, Ms Hunter. I think there are some areas where we have done particularly well in the ACT and where we are easily distinguishable from the rest of Australia, and education is one of them. But there are some areas where, despite the relatively prosperous nature of this community and our individual prosperity as Australians, in relation to some areas of Indigenous disadvantage, we do as badly as the worst places or states in Australia—some of the statistics in relation to child protection.

I think one of the explanations—I will ask Mr Hehir to go to this—is the level of reporting, the fact that we are a city-state, and the level of monitoring, reporting and response by this jurisdiction. On one level, some of these statistics represent progress in the identification of children at risk and the fact that we are seeking to intervene to protect and enhance their lives.

There are some areas. You named one; I will ask Mr Hehir to go to it directly. It is also, of course, linked to Indigenous incarceration, most particularly of Aboriginal young people, youths, and some of the issues that we face at Bimberi. In any discussion around Bimberi, it is important for members of this place to note that, without suggesting for one minute that there should not be the level of scrutiny there is, in relation to perceptions around safety in school classrooms, I have had something of a concern that we know that more than half of the children at Bimberi are Indigenous. To the extent that whenever teachers or a union suggest that staff have concerns around safety, around being in a classroom with six or eight children, they are talking about Indigenous children. Some of these perceptions that are raised around some of these issues need to be borne in mind.

That does not deny the basic fact that Indigenous children at Bimberi are appallingly over-represented. The level of over-representation is similar to that in relation to child protection. An area where we are not distinguished from the rest of Australia is in life expectancy. Indigenous people within the ACT, along with Indigenous people around Australia, on average, will die 12 years before each of us sitting around this table. In relation to child protection, I will ask Mr Hehir to go to some of the issues.

Mr Hehir: There is no doubt that there is a significant overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and young people in out-of-home care and in the care of the chief executive, which are slightly different categories. I suppose the first point is that we have to have the best interests of the child in our decision making. That does at times mean that we will go to the magistrate and say, “We believe these children need to be removed.” There is an awful lot of work before that, though, and that is where I think we can make inroads in terms of improving the outcomes.

MS HUNTER: This has been a focus for a little while, so I am wondering why we are not seeing a reduction. There are intergenerational issues that are going on. I want

to go to the heart of that. It is about the best interests of the child, of course, but—

Mr Hehir: We are not seeing a reduction in our overall figures either. We thought last year that a two or three per cent growth was a fantastic outcome compared to our standard 10 to 11 per cent growth. In proportion, I do not believe there has been a significant increase in the number of Aboriginal children against the proportion of non-Indigenous children. Their over-representation is high.

Some of the classic factors that will go to that will be the socioeconomic status of many of the families, the fact that many of those families will not have had proper parenting themselves, either through removal or through their parents not knowing how to parent. So you do have that intergenerational issue. The reality is that it is going to take us a long time to work through some of these issues. We will be dealing with the children of some of the children we are working with right now into the future. The strategies we have to put in place are about how we can we minimise that and what we can actually do to start to address it.

There are cumulative impacts, of course. Certainly, one of the issues we struggle to deal with is that often the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are much larger. That means when we are dealing with one family, the potential for a large number of children to come into care is quite high. The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families that are larger than the norm is quite high.

That is one factor that is an issue. We saw that towards the end of the year. We had, I think, two or three large families come in and take our numbers up a little bit. Two of those families were Indigenous and there was a quite large number of children—five or six. I am sorry, we have got three people sitting here who come from families of nine, but still, by modern terms, it is a large number. So that makes it more difficult to address.

In terms of looking at the long term, one of the two key measures that we would regard as being indicators of possible good outcomes would be stability of placement. We absolutely and fundamentally know that stability of placement when a child comes into care is a really good indicator of better outcomes for that child and young person. The other measure is for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to be placed in accordance with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander placement principles. Again, connecting that child to their culture is also something that we would regard as being a good indicator of success.

MS HUNTER: Are you using any internal targets around reducing the numbers?

Mr Hehir: No, we do not use internal targets. That is a debate we have had before. Unfortunately, in this area targets drive behaviours. I do not want my child protection staff saying, “I’ve hit my quota; I can’t go over.” That is not the decision-making framework they need to have when they are looking at the protection of children and young people.

We talk consistently about the figures and why are not they going down. In policy terms, we talk about wicked problems. This is absolutely one of them. The cyclic nature of low socioeconomic status, the poor history of parenting largely associated

with the removal of children in the first place and often the quite horrendous conditions those children experienced in the care of the state have made it quite difficult for a significant generation of Aboriginal parents to raise their children properly.

I do not know that we have got a solution. We do keep on working. Part of what we do before we make the decision to go to the magistrate is to say, "How do you support the family? How do you actually grow them? How do you actually get them to understand and be a good, strong parent?" How do you get the parent to accept that some of the behaviours of the people they are associating with are not good for their children and they are going to need to make some decisions around that?

We do a lot of work with families in terms of trying to improve their understanding of what they need to do to raise their children. There are some fantastic examples where people respond positively to that, and there are some examples where people do not get it. They just do not understand why they cannot raise their child the way they want to raise their child. That can include children as young as five, six and seven drinking, children being allowed to climb on roofs, children not attending school—all of those sorts of issues. It is about actually explaining to people, "No, fundamentally, that can't be allowed. It's not a cultural thing. It's just poor parenting." We need to work with families to do that, as we would with a non-Indigenous family. Sometimes families get it; sometimes they do not.

I think the issue around Bimberi is perhaps a little bit more complicated, and certainly worse. The level of representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in my out-of-home care or care of the territory is around 20 to 22 per cent. That is a very high figure. On any given day for Bimberi, it is rare for it to be below 30 per cent, and quite commonly to be at 50 per cent. There have been times when it has been over 50 per cent.

Mr Stanhope: This would also reflect that, on the national comparisons, as I understand it, the number of non-Indigenous children that we incarcerate is the lowest in Australia. We as a jurisdiction are very good at keeping non-Indigenous children, white children, out of custody. That distorts the numbers to some extent. Just on those numbers—where, of, say, 15 children in detention, seven or eight are Indigenous—there are seven or eight non-Indigenous in a population of 360,000. That is an incredibly low percentage, and it is as a result of the relative prosperity and the demographic of those that are prosperous and the advantages that brings to their children. As a result of the nature of this city, we have very good diversionary practices. We have parents who understand systems—that is, non-Indigenous parents who are, by and large, prosperous, knowing, understanding, educated.

What we do very well as a city is that we do not lock up our non-Indigenous children, for a whole range of reasons—all with reasonable explanations—which creates a situation which does not diminish the challenge if we have that very high level of success with non-Indigenous children in relation to non-custodial sentences, because they are all naughty—I see them, and there are lots of them playing up and doing dreadful antisocial things—but we manage to divert them from custodial sentence, but we are not diverting Indigenous children.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, minister. We might move on to the next question. Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: The Indigenous elected body provided a report into its estimates hearings and the government responded to that report. Can you give me an update on the action that you are taking? There were a number of items, I think—employment strategy, better information, information on government services, the liaison officers at Calvary hospital and so on. I was wondering if you can give me an overview on the program.

Mr Stanhope: Sure. Mr Hehir can give progress on that. As you are aware, the Indigenous elected body has just held a second round of such hearings and is in the process of finalising the proceedings and reporting to government. I think in terms of capacity and understanding of our systems the next report will be far larger, with a whole range of additional recommendations. I think it is a very healthy sign of the process. But in relation to the first report, I would ask Mr Hehir—

Mr Hehir: I might start with some of the key ones. I can only remember about three of the six recommendations off the top of my head.

MR HANSON: I think you have only got four minutes left.

Mr Hehir: I will try and do it quickly then. There was a recommendation around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment in the ACT public service. A significant amount of work has been undertaken with that. My understanding is that we are one or two months away from having an overall government strategy in place. Within our department, we are probably a little bit closer. We are a matter of weeks away in terms of having an employment strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people put in place. I understand the documents are broadly consistent. Ours is just a little bit more focused on us.

There was reference to legal issues, one of which was the permanent funding for the Aboriginal women's liaison position, which I think was implemented in the 2010-11 budget. There was a particularly important recommendation from our perspective—and certainly, from the communication I have had with the Chief Minister, from his perspective—in terms of data. It has been very difficult to actually establish Indigenous data each month within the ACT. Often we do not record data. Our processes of collecting data have not been strong.

Under the auspices of this department we have got an ACT government Indigenous data project underway. Those of you who have dealt with data will know that it is going to take some years to actually come to fruition in terms of having a good comparable dataset, but the work has been started. I think that is a really important thing to have done. We have got the majority of departments' information in. Again, work has been progressing quite well on those three. I cannot remember the other three off the top of my head now. I need to go and check the other three key recommendations.

Mr Stanhope: We are actioning them all. We would be more than happy to provide a report to the committee on that.

MR HANSON: A progress report?

Mr Stanhope: Yes.

MS HUNTER: Is that in any way connected to some COAG indicators that need to be put in place?

Mr Stanhope: I must say it was following the last COAG meeting where closing the gap was the primary agenda item. The closing the gap report produced by the Productivity Commission was tabled. I was gravely concerned in relation to the number of indicators where the Productivity Commission could not report on the ACT because of the data. We have a small sample. I think there are under 4,000 people who identify as Indigenous in the ACT. It is a small sample and it is easy for the data to be skewed.

It was of great concern to me that, with the combination of the small size of the sample and the non-availability of data, we have a number of very significant holes in our understanding, and that is not acceptable. I am determined that we resolve that issue of non-availability of data, accepting that we will still have some issues of scale and we will have to be careful in terms of how some of the data is identified or interpreted.

MS HUNTER: I know Ms Bresnan and I did raise that a lot with each department during estimates. It was an issue.

Mr Stanhope: It is a gap and we can close some of those gaps. We have progressively been doing that.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Based on the number of questions we have got through and the length of the answers, I think what we might do is put any further questions on notice. I thank the departmental representatives and the Chief Minister for appearing before the committee.

Mr Stanhope: Thank you very much.

The committee adjourned at 2.59 pm.