



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2016-2017**

(Reference: [Appropriation Bill 2016-2017 and Appropriation \(Office of the Legislative Assembly\) Bill 2016-2017](#))

**Members:**

**MR B SMYTH (Chair)**  
**MR J HINDER (Deputy Chair)**  
**MS J BURCH**  
**MR S DOSZPOT**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**FRIDAY, 17 JUNE 2016**

**Secretary to the committee:**  
**Ms K Harkins (Ph 620 50435)**

**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.

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## **Privilege statement**

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Witnesses must tell the truth: giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter, and may be considered a contempt of the Assembly.

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*Amended 20 May 2013*

**The committee met at 9.14 am.**

**BALLANTYNE, MR DANIEL**, Chief Executive Officer, Belconnen Arts Centre

**THE CHAIR:** Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and good morning to all those listening to us today via the electronic services. Welcome to day one of the Select Committee on Estimates 2016-2017. Here we go again!

The proceedings today will examine the views of 15 community and industry representative groups in relation to the 2016-17 budget, and the expenditure proposals and revenue estimates for the ACT Electoral Commissioner in relation to budget statement A. The study of the government's budget will commence on Monday of next week, when the Treasurer will appear.

Please be aware that the proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are being broadcast as well as being webstreamed.

I understand Ms Burch has a statement that she would like to make.

**MS BURCH:** Yes, thank you. I wish to declare a potential conflict of interest between my responsibilities as a member of this committee and my previous role as a member of the executive in the ACT government. To prevent any such conflict from arising, whilst I will be an active member of the committee during the discussions, there will be times when I will not participate in deliberations relating to my previous involvement regarding matters that fall within the scope of this inquiry.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Burch. Witnesses are also asked to familiarise themselves with the privilege statement that is provided on the table. Could you please confirm that you have read the pink privilege card, and that you understand the implications of privilege?

**Mr Ballantyne:** Yes, I do.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. We now welcome the Belconnen Arts Centre CEO, Mr Daniel Ballantyne. Would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr Ballantyne:** Yes, I would, thank you. I have a little talking paper that I would like to present to committee members. I have not had an opportunity to speak with you, Steve, about the Belconnen Arts Centre, but the two other committee members here are familiar with the issues in relation to Belconnen Arts Centre. Given that this is only a 15-minute segment, I will make some assumptions about knowledge of the project.

To begin with, I would like to go to page 3 of 4. Belconnen Arts Centre has been open since 2009 and it has featured in the ACT government's infrastructure plans as a project to be completed by 2020, some 11 years after it was opened in 2009. To date, the ACT government has spent \$400,000 on planning for the completion of the arts centre, which was always a two-stage project. The arts centre is an award-winning

operation in terms of the delivery of its program. However, its program is bursting at the seams. It is constrained by the facility.

The benefits of the arts centre are quite well known. A completed Belconnen Arts Centre was identified as a key driver in the recently released Belconnen town centre draft master plan. A completed multi-purpose arts centre will help to grow Belconnen town centre as a destination. A completed arts centre will be a catalyst for the transformation of the Emu Bank precinct, which is a premier precinct adjacent to Lake Ginninderra.

The live performance venue in the completed Belconnen Arts Centre will fill the gap created in closing and relocating Belconnen Community Service. Arts centres also have proven economic multipliers. In the past we have provided to committees, the ACT government and departmental bureaucrats examples of the economic multiplier and effect that Salamanca Place and Wangaratta Arts Centre have provided for their communities, further to the social inclusion and creative potential of these facilities.

The ACT budget for the completion of the Belconnen Arts Centre was disappointing. The BAC board acknowledge the constraints in capital funding in the ACT public sector. However, the ACT budget position is, according to this budget, improving, and it is planned to achieve surplus only in the next couple of years. Furthermore, the capital infrastructure plan outlined in the ACT budget is \$2.9 billion. The \$15 million that would be required to complete the Belconnen Arts Centre, and indeed the shoreline of Lake Ginninderra, represents a mere 0.52 per cent of that infrastructure budget.

We understand that the project has already had a significant commitment, and we think it is time for a new and different strategic approach. We seek a commitment from the ACT government to continue its engagement in completing Belconnen Arts Centre, and specifically committing to a time line to complete the arts centre. The ACT government should work with the Belconnen Arts Centre board and staff to develop options for an innovative and strategic approach to fund the completion of the arts centre that integrates the ACT budget, its infrastructure plans more broadly across Belconnen town centre, and its land release program.

We would like the ACT government to work with the arts centre board to develop opportunities for private developers investing in Belconnen's town centre. As you are probably aware, there is massive development proposed for Belconnen town centre. We think it is still possible to make a 2016-17 budget commitment to keep the project alive, noting that the last significant budget commitment was made in 2012 and that only a small amount of that commitment is yet to be expensed.

I have proposed over the page a series of options, which range from continuing with the detailing of the plan right through to a full arts centre completion. These options clearly range from very small and modest sums through to very significant budget commitments. We think that options 1 or 2 are entirely realistic in terms of the current budget, and would see continued activation and progress on the arts centre which also assists the process of raising money outside public funding for the arts centre. It shows that there is an ongoing commitment.

Our basic request to this committee is to consider advising the government that the continuation of the project can be done in a number of ways and that there are a number of options, some of which are well within the infrastructure program and others that are modest budget proposals to keep the project activated. I would love to answer your questions.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you for that. For the record, how much was in the budget this year for the Belconnen Arts Centre?

**Mr Ballantyne:** As far as I can tell, nothing.

**THE CHAIR:** With respect to your proposal on page 4 of the document, you think option 1 and option 2 could still be funded in this year's budget?

**Mr Ballantyne:** Given the quantum advised, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** And parts 3 and 4 would be done in—

**Mr Ballantyne:** Subsequent budgets.

**THE CHAIR:** the subsequent years.

**Mr Ballantyne:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** That would still allow the centre to be finished by 2020 in line with the infrastructure plan?

**Mr Ballantyne:** No, the time line at this stage would suggest it would not be completed in 2020.

**THE CHAIR:** If you did parts 1 and 2 in the 2016-17 budget and parts 3 and 4 came in subsequent years, when would it open?

**Mr Ballantyne:** Realistically, 2021-22. These are project management questions. If you wanted to increase the funding and reduce the quality, you would get the project earlier.

**THE CHAIR:** The total scope is \$20 million?

**Mr Ballantyne:** We are saying \$15 million to complete the arts centre. There would be additional funding, which is yet to be fully detailed, to complete the Lake Ginninderra foreshore.

**THE CHAIR:** So the foreshore funding would be on top of this?

**Mr Ballantyne:** It would be.

**MS BURCH:** There have been discussions around what stage 2 is. Are you and the Belconnen Arts Centre fairly confident that you know what stage 2 is? You made mention that, with Belconnen Community Service moving, there is the loss of a venue.

Are you very clear about what is in stage 2?

**Mr Ballantyne:** Yes, we are. We have already been through a lengthy process of some two years duration, in planning what this facility could look like and how it integrates into the existing arts centre. This also includes some corrections to the existing structure. The idea is to have a multipurpose live performance space with increased foyer space and increased numbers of studios to activate what at the core is a community cultural and arts development program based on arts, dance and theatre—the full range of arts and cultural facilities. At the moment the arts centre has very little opportunity to present live performance.

**MS BURCH:** So it is not like you are starting from scratch?

**Mr Ballantyne:** No.

**MS BURCH:** Would the plans that you have in mind accommodate the growth of the area in the longer term?

**Mr Ballantyne:** I believe so. I think we went about it with a 20 to 30-year horizon. Quite often these facilities are built to meet immediate needs. The experience of other arts centres and facilities around the ACT has been that they have had to have catch-up renovations consistently over time.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I apologise for my slightly late arrival. I was coming from a different activity. You expressed your disappointment at the government's commitment to your project. Were you given any expectations from the government as to what sort of support you could expect for this project?

**Mr Ballantyne:** “No” is the short answer. The government has continued to work on some of the finer detail of the project. For example, we have been in project meetings with project managers up until very recently, but this is trailing out, I suppose, the last significant budget commitment, which goes back to 2012-13.

**MR DOSZPOT:** When you first started, you must have put in requests for funding at that point. Were you given any indication as to what sort of support you could expect?

**Mr Ballantyne:** No. It has already been in the context that the government makes its budgets, that there are competing priorities, and that they will consider the project seriously.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I think you have already expressed your disappointment at the fact that you have not got anything in the budget, as I understand it. We all, obviously, understand that there are competing priorities, but have you had the opportunity to talk to the ministers concerned with this area?

**Mr Ballantyne:** Oh, certainly; absolutely. I do not think there is any lack of knowledge about this project, and I have always felt that we have had good access to government, and indeed both sides of politics, about this matter. Indeed, I have remarked publicly, and many people have remarked to me, that it is broadly supported. It comes down to priorities.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I think, as you indicated, that the \$15 million required to complete your project is a pretty small percentage of the overall budget that the government has to work with. What are you expecting this committee to do?

**Mr Ballantyne:** I have given the committee some options to consider. I think it is important that, in order for this project to continue to be able to be engaged by the community, to be engaged by other funding sources and to continue with the detailed planning, there is a recommendation to fund aspects of the project in sequence and a commitment that over subsequent budgets this is a project that is going to be developed.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** All right. We might leave it there. I apologise for the short time. The committee has decided today to try to fit in everybody who put in a submission, so there are some 15-minute slots and some half-hour slots. We will be at this all day. Mr Ballantyne, thanks very much. The committee will consider it and take it up with the minister at an appropriate time.

**Mr Ballantyne:** Thank you.



**DOUGLAS, MS LOUISE**, President, RSPCA ACT

**VEN DANGE, MS TAMMY**, Chief Executive Officer, RSPCA ACT

**THE CHAIR:** I welcome the RSPCA. I do not think you were here when we started. Before you on the table is the pink privilege card. Could you please confirm for the committee that you have read the card and understand the implications of privilege.

**Ms Ven Dange:** I confirm it.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Would you like to make a brief opening statement?

**Ms Ven Dange:** Yes. On 7 February 2016, the stray cat that we named Maximus came into the RSPCA shelter in Weston. Maximus was our 100,000th incoming animal since we started using our current tracking system, which began about 10 years ago. Our statistics for the 50 years prior to that were not quite as easy to analyse. However, if you consider the possibility of 10,000 incoming animals a year for the past 60 years of our existence since we have been at the same location, it is an awful lot of animals that we have had to care for.

Fortunately, the number of incoming animals has actually been going down in recent years. The most obvious drop began after the ACT set the precedent by becoming the first state or territory, in 2001, to implement legislation for mandatory desexing of cats and dogs by the age of six months. For puppies in particular we have seen a steady decline of incoming animals since then, almost half of what it was in 2001, in fact. However, incoming kittens did not follow the same trend. In fact, despite additional legislation passed in 2008 that reduced the compulsory desexing period for cats further, to three months of age, we have actually seen an upward trend, with 12 per cent and nine per cent annual increases in the past two financial years.

Why did legislation changes work for dogs but not for cats? We believe that there are a number of reasons, including the lack of education and enforcement of the legislation, which largely sits outside our responsibilities. Nevertheless, RSPCA ACT decided last year to start doing something about this.

We share this information with you today because every animal that comes into our shelter requires resources to care for it. And while we acknowledge that the ACT government is contributing towards some of these costs in this 2016-17 budget, the increase in animals requiring our help is still an expensive and unwanted trend.

Despite the absence of forward planning and the 12-month funding cycle that was given to us by government in the past few years, last year we ourselves began a three-year plan to reduce the number of incoming animals using a multi-focus approach. We started with a three-year cat desexing program campaign that we have been able to start because of help through a private grant and support from public vet clinics. Collectively we desexed 360 cats for free for low-income owners last year. This year we hope to help more cats and more owners, with the help of seven local vets here in the ACT. We also started an education program last year. First it was school holiday programs, and we plan to extend that range of educational programs in the next two years.

You, too, have supported us by the recent passing of legislation in the Animal Welfare Act recently, but there is still more work to do there, particularly around penalties for animal cruelty crimes.

RSPCA ACT's financial challenges are well known, yet we are still investing in these types of proactive measures to reduce our long-term costs and to prevent animal cruelty. We are asking the government to further invest in these proactive measures, as the increasing cost of incoming animals in our shelter is truly a community problem, not just one for RSPCA to solve alone.

Finally, we cannot allow this opportunity to pass today without pointing out the continuing funding by the ACT government of the greyhound racing industry: over \$1 million a year. Yesterday the New South Wales special commission of inquiry into greyhound racing completed the most comprehensive study on the industry ever in Australia. While the report is yet to be released to the public, we expect it to validate the appalling animal welfare issues that have been shown in various media sources, including ABC's *Four Corners* report last year.

Some people would say that these findings have nothing to do with the ACT. We would completely disagree. We did an analysis of online race results and using other publicly available information that we could find. We looked at 784 races held in the ACT between 2011 and 2015 that featured over 2,000 greyhounds based in Australia and New Zealand. From this, we found that 93 per cent of all local participants were based in New South Wales; just 24 of the approximately 400 trainers were from the ACT, with only 12 of these individuals still competing this year or in 2015; seven out of eight greyhounds that started each race had New South Wales based trainers.

We also found that the greyhound that won the biggest ACT race of the year in 2013 was later suspended following the live baiting revelations in New South Wales; the former greyhound racing New South Wales chief steward, who was found to be directing others to produce misleading injury records, was in charge of at least 11 ACT-based races across the last three years. Finally, at least seven trainers from New South Wales and one trainer from Victoria that have had links to live baiting have raced in the ACT at least once.

These facts cannot be ignored. In fact, they point to the total inadequacy of allowing such an industry to continue to be self-regulated. Up to this point, the ACT government has led the way in animal welfare legislation across the country, proving not only that this can be done, but that the lives of animals indeed matter. The continued funding of over \$1 million a year to this industry goes against everything else this territory has done as a leader in the animal welfare industry. We encourage you to review such arrangements in light of this information provided you today.

**THE CHAIR:** Thanks very much. We might go through the issues as you have raised them. The ongoing funding—how much did you receive in this year's budget?

**Ms Ven Dange:** We understand it is about \$740,000 that specifically is going to be used for the management of stray cats, and there is a small contribution towards our inspectorate as well.

**THE CHAIR:** But that is only for a year,

**Ms Ven Dange:** That is only for 12 months.

**THE CHAIR:** So there is no certainty?

**Ms Ven Dange:** No.

**THE CHAIR:** What is preferable in an ideal world? Three-year funding?

**Ms Ven Dange:** We are using a three-year plan ourselves from a strategic point of view. A three-year plan would be ideal. We start our negotiations with TAMS in January every year, so it is about six months of work that we have to do just to get one year's worth of funding. It is obviously difficult for us to plan further without that source. Even though it is only 15 per cent of our total revenue, it is still important, and it does pay for services we provide on behalf of the government.

**THE CHAIR:** All right. And the lack of the education program: what do you envisage such a program would look like, and what would it do?

**Ms Ven Dange:** With a lot of the animal welfare legislation, including the Domestic Animal Act legislation, the general public do not know about it. If you asked people out there whether there is any kind of requirement to have an animal desexed, you would find that a large number of people would not know that. Even with the breeding legislation that was passed last year, most people do not know that that is even in existence.

With any legislation that is passed that affects the general public, there needs to be an ongoing educational campaign—and enforcement of it. How many animals do we see coming into the shelter every day that are not desexed, are not registered and are not microchipped? That is all required by law, yet people do not know that. And there is no enforcement vehicle—or little in the way of enforcement vehicles.

**THE CHAIR:** With the enforcement, what is required there?

**Ms Ven Dange:** It is a responsibility of Domestic Animal Services to enforce these things. They are doing a fairly good job with dogs, which is why we think that the incoming puppy numbers are coming down, but cats are still not being regulated at the same level.

**THE CHAIR:** Is that a lack of resources, or are cats just hard to enforce or—

**Ms Ven Dange:** Some of it is legislation. The Domestic Animals Act only allows the seizure of cats in cat containment areas. They can find a roaming dog and do something about it, but they cannot do anything with a roaming cat unless it is in a cat containment area. Domestic Animal Services do not have any facilities, or even vehicles that can contain cats, so if they pick one up they will come right to us. Even in areas of reserves or areas where we know that there are a lot of stray cats or perhaps feral cats, they do not have the capacity or facilities to do that. We do take

care of these animals as they come into our shelter but there are still missing resources to help them enforce that.

**MS BURCH:** You made mention of longer-term planning. You start negotiating for your funding in January. Have you had longer-term funding? There are two questions: have you had longer-term funding and is it linked quite specifically to what would be a shared goal from a government point of view relating to legislation and the requirements of the Domestic Animals Act?

**Ms Ven Dange:** We have had three-year funding before; not since I have been a part of the RSPCA, but we have had three-year funding in the past. In respect of shared goals, we understand that there is some work being done right now to look at the animal welfare strategy, but that has not been done yet. Therefore, our goals are our goals because there have not been any proclaimed goals by the ACT government for animal welfare.

**MS BURCH:** Given that it is 15 per cent, it would be reasonable for the government funding to be linked to some of those that are quite clear and narrow within their legislative responsibilities in many ways, because your institution is much broader than that.

**Ms Ven Dange:** That is right. We have actually offered funding to be linked to that, such as a reduction in funding for the number of incoming cats. That would actually provide motivation both to the government and to animal welfare organisations like us to reduce that funding. Although it looks like we are actually losing out because we are getting less money, we will not need as much money to pay for all these stray cats that are coming in.

Even after we have done the desexing program, if I look at May-on-May comparisons for the year, we are looking at a four per cent increase for incoming kittens still. We expect to take three years to make a difference, but we cannot continue to see nine and 12 per cent increases, because there is no way we can find homes for these animals, and it is very costly. So we are trying to reverse that trend. We need long-term planning and funding to be able to do that.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Good morning, Ms Ven Dange and Ms Douglas. Good to see you.

**Ms Ven Dange:** Good morning.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Is the current funding that you get through TAMS all project related?

**Ms Ven Dange:** Right now it is a legacy contract that has been extended for multiple years, one year at a time. It is a long—

**MR DOSZPOT:** Always for the same amount?

**Ms Ven Dange:** No, the funding has changed over time as we provided cases to say that for us basically to look after all the stray cats for the seven days that are required by the legislation, we need to be paid appropriately to do so. That has gone up and we

do think that we are being paid appropriately right now to look after the cats and we do have a contribution towards the inspectorate.

But the way the contract is actually written, it is a lump sum that covers a lot of services. We have provided pricing over the past two years to show as much transparency as we could, down to how much it costs per minute to do something.

But the agreement that we have in place right now was probably written six years ago. It continues to be a lump bunch of services. We believe that the funding, based on what are our needs are, should be actually based on our proposal. The proposal said that it is costing us X amount to look after stray cats for seven days, because we have to hold them for seven days before we are allowed to do anything to them. That is what that includes. Then we have asked for some contribution towards our inspectorate services.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Is the lump sum you mentioned all delivered in one amount or is it staggered?

**Ms Ven Dange:** It is split over six-month periods.

**MR DOSZPOT:** You say that you are having discussions with TAMS regarding ongoing funding. Have you put a request in for a specific amount of funding that you would require?

**Ms Ven Dange:** Yes.

**MR DOSZPOT:** And what is that amount?

**Ms Ven Dange:** This year we have asked for nearly \$800,000 to do the work that we are doing. We met with them just yesterday and we found that there are still some negotiations that need to be done. We understand that there is \$743,000 available for the basic services that we provide on behalf of the government. I want to emphasise the fact that we are actually an outsource provider for the government. We are not actually asking for grant money or free money. We are doing this specifically for work that would have to be done because of legislation requirements. If we were not doing it, you would have to.

**MR DOSZPOT:** You are employing people to do the work?

**Ms Ven Dange:** That is right. We have a staff of close to 60 people now that do the work, including over 300 volunteers that help us with basic shelter duties as well as fostering these animals. We care for thousands of animals every year; so it is quite expensive to do that. It is not something you can automate or use machines to do.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Is the amount that you mentioned that you are requesting an annual figure?

**Ms Ven Dange:** We asked for a two-year funding agreement with a CPI increase. So we still need to decide with TAMS what we are actually doing with that figure, since it is less than we had asked for. We understand that government has set aside also an

additional \$50,000 to help us with boarding cost for long-term court-hold animals.

An interesting statistic right now is that our animal cruelty numbers are still going up. At this time, as of end May, we have about 100 more animals than we did this time last year come through our shelter, through the inspectors. But the interesting thing is that we also have a new lot of animals that are coming in because people that we have already prosecuted that have been given animal ownership bans, we are now prosecuting them a second time for breaking those bans. That would be the first time we have tested that. What that means is that we have an awful lot of animals in our shelter right now that are in court-hold situations for the owners a second time.

**Ms Douglas:** Could I follow up on one of your previous questions? We have had very good discussions with our colleagues at TAMS just in the past week or so about the prospect of having a much longer-term funding arrangement. I do want to acknowledge that. But anything you can do to help make that work for us would be of great assistance.

**MR SMYTH:** In the few seconds left, what should happen in respect of the issue of greyhounds?

**Ms Ven Dange:** We believe that you should cut funding for greyhound racing. It is over \$1 million a year. We have shown in our statistics, and we are happy to provide you with more reference documents around this, that there are only 12 active ACT-based trainers right now. That is an awful lot of money to be going to just 12 people. That is considered a not-for-profit, no less.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Have you received any indication from the government as to what their plans are for the \$1 million current funding there?

**Ms Ven Dange:** No, we have not. We have had discussions with Minister Gentleman. We have also spoken to Minister Fitzharris. But we have not received any word, despite information that we have provided to them.

**THE CHAIR:** The time is up. Thank you for your attendance here today.

**Ms Ven Dange:** Can I table some information for you?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Ms Ven Dange:** Thank you.

**POLLARD, MR DAVID**, President, Crace Community Association

**THE CHAIR:** Good morning, David. Would you make a brief introductory statement and we will ask some questions.

**Mr Pollard:** You might notice a slightly different tone from my talk today, because we do not actually receive, and do not seek, any funding directly from the budget. We are a volunteer group from the community. The Crace Community Association represents the extended community of the Gungahlin suburb of Crace. While Crace residents and businesses are the core of our community demographic, we are inclusive of anyone wishing to participate. We often have residents from neighbouring suburbs, such as Palmerston, Nicholls and beyond attend our events and participate in online discussions.

Our purpose is to foster the sense of community that is already strong within Crace. In addition, we have unintentionally become a community voice on issues local to our suburb. We also participate in the Gungahlin Community Council so as to be represented in our wider region.

The priority areas for the Crace Community Association in this budget were environment and active lifestyle opportunities; waste management, particularly green waste; and the general responsible and efficient spending of government funds.

Within our suburb, the biggest concerns regarding making active lifestyle choices revolve around keeping our public spaces clean and tidy. The new solar-powered smart bins being trialled will be a welcome addition to neighbourhoods. Public consultation as to the placement of bins is sought before simply replacing existing bins. Bins should be placed to encourage use of public spaces, rather than centrally located at the shops.

New public transport initiatives and spending on public playgrounds, especially shade sails in our local parks, are welcome additions to the budget. In a recent survey conducted within Crace regarding our parks and roads, shade sails on our playgrounds came in surprisingly high.

We still also have a strong preference for a dog park near Crace, and again recommend considering a space near the potential Nudurr Drive extension, if and when that goes ahead.

The introduction of a green waste scheme, with a pilot to begin next year, goes beyond our request for a feasibility study. It is hoped that this pilot is carefully considered for initial and ongoing expense, impact on local business and viability. While there is a community call for green waste bins, there is also a voice against spending government funds on this activity, given local businesses already address this requirement. The introduction of such schemes is welcome, though all previous reports from the Labor government have stated that a green waste scheme would not be feasible. If there is new evidence that the scheme is indeed feasible, this has not been transparently and effectively communicated to the community. This is exactly the type of spending highlighted as worrying in our submission.

Another major concern for Crace residents—indeed, this was the No 1 concern on our recent survey—is the unsupported public spaces that we have. These were put in place by the land developers, CIC Australia, with the agreement of government, though nobody is prepared to maintain them moving forwards. Responses from government indicate that they are not prepared or funded to maintain the public spaces that we currently have.

While the upgrades to playgrounds and parks are welcome, ongoing support for these upgrades must be provided. The government has stated a physical strategy of seeking efficient long-term benefits, rather than short-term election sweeteners, but without a commitment to maintain our existing public spaces before new ones are added or upgraded, this does not appear to be entirely the case.

A significant focus of our submission surrounded waste management, both residential green waste and litter in public spaces, especially along walking paths. The pilot green waste bins address that issue directly, while the trial of solar-powered smart bins we hope will go towards addressing the issue of litter in public spaces.

We have been advised that a major barrier to having more suburban bins is the ongoing cost of collection, rather than the actual implementation. We hope that smart bins reduce that barrier to the point that the community can have bins where they are needed the most.

The budget also includes spending on public transport initiatives, playground and public space spending, and healthy choices in schools that all go towards making it easier for families to make healthy lifestyle choices.

**THE CHAIR:** David, thank you for that. I have had correspondence over time about bus routes through Crace to the rest of the city. Are there adequate bus services for Crace now?

**Mr Pollard:** Any direct bus service?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr Pollard:** No, not yet. The word “direct” is somewhat misleading. It is more “continuous”. It will still go from Crace all the way back to Gungahlin marketplace before travelling into the city. I understand that that is still planned to arrive later this year. It was held up in order to come in alongside other new bus routes around Canberra.

**THE CHAIR:** So we are waiting?

**Mr Pollard:** Waiting.

**THE CHAIR:** It has often been said to me that egress in the morning out of Crace to Gundaroo and the Barton Highway is difficult.

**Mr Pollard:** Difficult is an understatement.



**THE CHAIR:** How would you describe it? What needs to be done?

**Mr Pollard:** Yes, traffic in the morning from the edge of Crace will back up literally halfway into the suburb down to our shopping centre. As to what needs to be done, personally I believe that would be a dedicated left-turn exit lane at the roundabout at Abena Avenue. What I am hopeful for is that the current works on the roundabout at Barton Highway will reduce the traffic backing up to that point, which will let traffic flow more readily from Crace. The duplication of Gundaroo Drive, phase 2, would also address this.

**MS BURCH:** Just going to amenity within the suburb, it is one of our fairly new suburbs.

**Mr Pollard:** Yes, quite new.

**MS BURCH:** How many years old would you describe Crace?

**Mr Pollard:** I have been living there for two years, and I think the first building went up three or four years before that.

**MS BURCH:** So the public space that you have there, it is probably coming to the end of it being part of the original estate development, so to speak, and now needs to be managed through TAMS services. When you say that it is not being managed, something must be mown, rubbish must be collected.

**Mr Pollard:** Rubbish is collected—by us. Yes, we have a once-a-month Landcare group that collects rubbish. We do have some success in getting government assistance to collect that rubbish; it has come and gone over time.

**MS BURCH:** And when you approached TAMS to say, “There’s a public meeting place”—there must be a green square of some sort in Crace; I am from the deep south, so forgive me, please—“the rubbish must be collected from there,” what happens when you talk to TAMS about this?

**Mr Pollard:** We generate a trailer load of rubbish every time we got out once a month to a specific area in Crace, and we tend to target the problem areas.

**THE CHAIR:** So is that a little box trailer, or is it a—

**Mr Pollard:** Yes. It tends to be six to eight large rubbish bags full of rubbish. And weeding is the other big problem. Our areas are mown; they are mown regularly to schedule. Reasonably happy with that.

**MS BURCH:** I think in the budget, there were additional mowing services and weeding services, so you may see the difference with that. With the public bins—it is a matter that is raised, whether it is north, south, east or west of the city—some of the concerns are that we have seen the dumping around charity bins. If you have bins, people will dump around them. Is there a happy point between the two, do you think?

**Mr Pollard:** The bins, for us in Crace, where we are finding the deficiency at the

moment is particularly along our walking tracks, and it is particularly to do with dogs.

**MS BURCH:** Okay. And you have a request for a dog park as well?

**Mr Pollard:** We believe a dog park will help go towards keeping our paths clean as well. In terms of a happy medium about the bins, we are certainly open to a conversation about our problem areas, and what we can do to address that.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Good morning, Mr Pollard, and thank you for your presentation. You raised concerns about the traffic conditions and issues that concern you. What sort of opportunity have you had to present your views to the government? Has there been any consultation sought by the government on your views?

**Mr Pollard:** Yes, there has, indeed. The Crace Community Association conducted a survey recently on parks and roads in Crace, and we got excellent community engagement. As a result of that, I was invited to talk to the director of Roads ACT. So I took my findings and presented them there and had a discussion about the processes about raising our concerns with government, and we have got good feedback there. Mostly, that has been about understanding the processes that we can choose to follow.

With roads, our major concern is getting out in the morning and with the works on the Barton Highway roundabout. We are waiting to see what happens there. There is not a lot of point in us pushing for any other solution when that may very well solve it.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Sure. Having had some consultation, do you feel you are actually getting some recognition of the concerns that you have raised?

**Mr Pollard:** I believe so; it is why I am here today. I believe what we have got in the Crace community is a very strong sense of community and a desire to be heard, and I feel that we are being heard.

**MR DOSZPOT:** So what do you want this committee to do?

**MS BURCH:** Fix the traffic in the mornings.

**Mr Pollard:** Yes. Our budget submission revolved around waste management. While our submission did not have a lot to do with traffic—because we feel there are some things happening at the moment—I would ask the committee to consider the views of smaller community associations where they may not have the resources of previous speakers and those you will hear from shortly to represent themselves.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Sure. One final question from me: did you mention that you are also part of Gungahlin Community Council?

**Mr Pollard:** Personally, with a different hat. I am actually the Treasurer of the Gungahlin Community Council as well. However, I also participate on behalf of the Crace Community Association. I am also encouraging other suburban associations—the Forde Community Association and an upcoming group in Bonner and one in Casey—to participate in the Gungahlin Community Council to have a unified voice that way. It was never our intention when we started our suburban association to be

speaking to government committees. However, it is clear there is an appetite for that, so here we are.

**THE CHAIR:** And just for the record, the population of Crace at the moment is how many people?

**Mr Pollard:** I do not have any population numbers. I believe we are at about 1,600 homes and, at last estimate, I think we were at about 2.3 people per home, so in the ballpark of 2,500.

**THE CHAIR:** Do the maths. Thanks for your time today, and we look forward to talking to the government about your issues.

**Mr Pollard:** Sounds good. Thank you very much.

**KING, MS GILLIAN**, Member, Living Streets Canberra  
**COX, MR KEVIN**, Treasurer, Living Streets Canberra

**THE CHAIR:** We welcome Living Streets Canberra to the estimates committee this morning. Please be aware that the proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed, as well as being broadcast and webstreamed. On the table in front of you is a pink privilege card. Could you please confirm for the committee that you have read the card and understand the implications of privilege?

**Mr Cox:** Yes, I confirm that.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Would you like to make an opening statement?

**Ms King:** Living Streets has been around in some form since 2008, and we aim to represent and promote our rights and interests as people who walk, in much the same way that NRMA and Pedal Power and the Motorcycle Riders Association represent us when we are driving or riding.

We have a vision that by 2020 Canberra will be a safe, accessible, sustainable community with a supportive and vibrant walking environment where all Canberrans and everyone who visits us can enjoy walking. We would like to increase the proportion of people who are walking, and that is also a government goal.

Some of our aims and objectives are to have urban infrastructure and planning that enables an increased walkability, particularly a safe, continuous, attractive and accessible network of footpaths and crossings that covers the whole of the urban area and that also minimises walking distances. We are also interested in educating and encouraging the community to walk, amongst some of our other goals.

Our top priority areas for the ACT budget are, first of all, good quality, convenient and safe walking infrastructure, including routes to and from public transport; secondly, meaningful targets and indicators to guide and measure progress towards achieving walking, cycling and public transport targets.

The four main points we would like to make are as follows: first, we welcome the moderately good news in this year's budget, particularly some increased spending both in dollar terms and as a percentage of infrastructure capital on infrastructure and programs to increase safe walking; the path indicator of increasing kilometres of lengths of community paths, which is in output 2.1; and delivering the target for building paths last year. I think that is the first time that the target has actually been delivered. We note they will help deliver targets for walking and public transport, but it is going to be slow because at the current rate of construction it will be about another 30 years before every street in Canberra has a footpath.

The second point we would like to make is that we note that the budget still contains a focus on roads and shows no vision or strategy for active transport, particularly walking. This is despite everyone needing to use active transport at some point of their journey and despite the ACT having goals for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and for increasing active transport and the "vibrancy" of the city. We keep hearing that word, but we need to see it by getting people on the streets safely.

Our third point is that there is an inextricable link between walking infrastructure and public transport. Public transport users have to travel to the stops and wait there, and they want to be able to do so conveniently, safely and comfortably.

Our fourth point is that we call for much more meaningful and useful effort, targets and indicators for active transport. For example, spending targets and indicators for active transport need to be focused on their usefulness and on their use. We need spending targets and indicators for public transport to include accessibility—in terms of being able to actually get there—and comfort of stops.

We need indicators to measure progress towards achieving targets for walking, cycling and public transport, and we also need a new target for travelling by car as a passenger, because that is actually going down. In particular, there needs to be a focus on completeness of walking links and convenience and safety for people walking. We note here that inconvenience often leads people to take risks, sometimes with very tragic outcomes. We also ask how the indicators that are currently proposed are going to be measured.

**THE CHAIR:** Let us start with the indicators. Would you like those included in the budget? The budget papers often have indicators for various targets. Is this something you would prefer in the budget papers or are you just happy with it as an internal that the department maintains?

**Ms King:** I think they actually need to be in the budget papers and they need to be prominent. For example, the indicators for non-motorised transport infrastructure are buried down on about pages 18 to 20 of the budget statement for transport Canberra and city services directorate, whereas there are some very clearly motorised transport priorities right up the front. Non-motorised transport infrastructure and use indicators need to be brought up to the front rather than buried down at the back.

The accountability indicators need to reflect the government's published priorities and goals. They can be developed in consultation with the community but, for example, just the transport Canberra and roads and infrastructure accountability indicators do not reflect the goals in transport for Canberra, so they need to be matched up.

Some additional transport accountability indicators should be able to show more meaningful progress towards facilitating that modal shift that we are seeing. They could include things like percentage of territorial roads with a footpath on one side or on both sides, or the percentage of community paths that are in good condition or the percentage of community paths that have a dead end—there are an awful lot of those—or those that meet the standard for pram ramps and so on. For example, just this morning I came by bus pulling a trolley. As a result of the last round of public transport changes I now have to walk more than twice as far uphill. The paths do not have any pram ramps. I had to cross a busy road, and then stand in the rain. I am dedicated.

**THE CHAIR:** You are dedicated, indeed. I went for my walk last night in Chisholm, and I came to one of those dead-end footpaths that stopped near the roundabout at the end of Heagney Crescent. You turn around and you walk back, that is right.

**Ms King:** If you have got anything wheeled, you really notice those things.

**Mr Cox:** On the accountability, we need to be thinking a lot more about measures, and not only measures of what it is we have got but also measures of use, and we can do that now. There is absolutely no reason at all why we cannot have something similar to what you have with the people who watch television. There is no reason at all why some people cannot have their mobile phones attached to them and have those things measured so these things can be put into the whole system.

If you get measures that you are trying to achieve that are non-financial measures—a lot of these things are non-financial—and if you put them up front and you have goals as to what you are going to need, you will tend to meet the goals. It is not going to be very costly to do any of this as well. We think that this is really important as a way of being able to know that we are actually making progress and that Canberra really is becoming a walkable city.

**MS BURCH:** I too live in Chisholm. I live on a crescent off a crescent off a crescent, so the roads infrastructure is actually quite narrow. This goes to the comment about every street having a footpath by 2045. You also pose the question as to whether there is a footpath on one side or two sides. Some of our existing built form makes this very difficult. Is it a matter of having a triage system? If we get better accountability data, can we target those areas where you can put a path in readily and easily, whether it is based on demographics or just on the built form?

**Mr Cox:** That is right. You might have seen a little thing called the walkability index. Simply having a good walkability index in Canberra and for every person in the ACT to be able to see how walkable their place is, and then suggestions on how that could be improved, would go a long way towards thinking of solutions to those particular problems. There is not one solution. You have to look at all of the different situations and choose the best one. At the moment we are going in blind. We do not know what to do.

**Ms King:** It is important to consult the community. The community will know what it wants in its particular area. Also, just asking people how they get around by walking helps to focus them on walking. That actually needs to be built into the budget papers as well. For example, under city services priorities, one of them is continuing to support infrastructure development through industry consultation. But there is no mention of community consultation. There is a small bit further down, at the back, around local shopping centre upgrades. But if you are asking the community what it wants in its area, rather than just consulting with industry in terms of staging its work, there needs to be a flip so that you are asking the community what it wants and needs or how it uses things, where it is not using them and where you want to change that.

**MS BURCH:** I would say that my crescent off the crescent off the crescent is very walkable. There is the occasional game of cricket outside as well.

**Mr Cox:** At the moment TAMS have responsibility for this. Their method of allocation is to count the number of complaints they get, and when they get complaints then that—

**MS BURCH:** That triggers an investigation and a review.

**Ms King:** If we want to move people out of cars and into more active transport, part of doing that is finding out why people are not walking, riding and using public transport now. I bet a fair bit of it has to do with how hard it is to walk, ride or get to the public transport stop.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Thank you for your very detailed presentation and submission. It covers a lot of areas of concern, some of which I am involved in through various portfolios. I have two questions. I am shadow minister for the ageing, and I get a lot of complaints and concerns from elderly people who are having problems with cracked footpaths and with the lack of courtesy on footpaths from cyclists, where people have escaped getting hit by the merest of margins. Have you raised any seniors' issues? I have looked through it but I have not seen too much reference to that. Do you get any feedback on it?

**Ms King:** We certainly talk with COTA, the Council on the Ageing.

**MR DOSZPOT:** By way of an observation, I think it would be good to consider some of their needs as well. The other area is that you have made some interesting comments on the transit lane on Northbourne Avenue. Have you considered the problem that is caused by cyclists on Northbourne Avenue? That is causing an issue of safety to the cyclists, basically, because of the buses operating there—cars and cyclists alongside the buses. Is there an option for cyclists to be moved to the central area?

**Mr Cox:** We have discussed it. We have not put it in the submission. The discussion is around the whole business of separating the different modes of transport. Where there are a lot of cyclists, they really should be on their own bit of—

**MR DOSZPOT:** Yes.

**Mr Cox:** You really should separate out the different parts. The problem that arises with the separation is that pedestrians tend to be left out, as it were. They tend to get what is left over. You find that, for example, with crossing roads, we are always left last, whereas we think we should be first. Cars can wait.

**Ms King:** A lot depends on the type of road and the sort of use it has. If you have a high-volume road like Northbourne Avenue, you really need to separate the roads, to keep everybody safe, whereas if you are on a crescent off a crescent off a crescent with a dead end at the end of it, it is more like what is called a “woonerf”, where everybody is sharing the road together, and people who are driving cars know that there are likely to be kids, dogs and bikes, and people strolling. You can make that a lot more obvious by how the road is designed.

**Mr Cox:** This also means that, with pedestrians, as far as the law is concerned, we should be first. If there is an accident, we are not at fault.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Have you considered the terminology applied to pedestrian

crossings where cyclists are now allowed to ride across that? Does that have an impact on pedestrians, from your point of view?

**Mr Cox:** No, I do not see that as a problem.

**MR DOSZPOT:** We are getting a lot of complaints from seniors who, again, are finding it difficult.

**Ms King:** It is helpful for us to know where that is happening, because I see it mainly around Civic and in Kingston-Manuka; they are the areas where I have seen it.

**MR DOSZPOT:** In the busier areas; that is for sure.

**Ms King:** Most people riding bikes seem to be pretty good. You get the occasional one who will zoom ahead, but in my experience it is pretty rare.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Thank you. It is a very detailed submission.

**THE CHAIR:** That is a conversation you can continue out of the committee. Unfortunately, we have run out of time. Thank you for your attendance here today.



**HUBBARD, MS NICOLE**, Centre Manager, headspace Canberra and headspace Queanbeyan

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Hubbard, for your attendance here today. Please be aware that the proceedings today are being recorded and will be transcribed by Hansard, and then will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed, even as we speak.

Before you on the table is the pink card with the privilege statement on it. Could you please confirm for the committee that you have read the card and understand the implications of privilege?

**Ms Hubbard:** Yes, I have read it and I understand it.

**THE CHAIR:** Would you like to make an opening statement?

**Ms Hubbard:** Yes. I am here today to highlight the priorities around mental health and young people. The statistic is that one in four people will experience mental health issues, and 75 per cent of those will emerge before the age of 25; hence the need for early intervention services.

The University of South Australia recently conducted some research that had more concerning figures, which was that more than half of infants have multiple risk factors which would predispose them to adult mental health issues. Those risks include genetic influences, hyperactivity, bullying, poor school performance, physical abuse, sexual abuse, neglect, witnessing domestic violence, harsh discipline, divorce and separation. Knowing that lots of children and young people experience a number of those things, I anticipate the need for mental health support will only increase.

In terms of the headspace service, we opened in 2008 and we have had 8,263 young people use the service in that time. In 2012 we had 1,061 referrals. We are still working on the same budget level. This year we are expecting 1,900 referrals, so the capacity to meet our demand is very compromised. Whilst we are grateful for our federal funding, trying to meet demand is definitely our biggest challenge.

Since we opened we have had growth of approximately 10 per cent each year. Currently we receive between 160 and 200 referrals each month. The current wait time at headspace for an initial assessment is four weeks. If a young person requires ongoing therapeutic services, they would be waiting for at least six to eight weeks subsequent to that.

One of the biggest challenges for us is the fact that headspace provides services for young people with mild to moderate issues, and, with respect to the services that cater to issues for moderate to severe symptoms, there is a gap in the middle. There are lots of young people who are really risky to maintain at headspace because we do not offer after-hours services or crisis services, but they are not necessarily eligible for CAMHS or for adult mental health services, so we do carry quite significant risk. In the past year 38 of our young people attempted suicide or engaged in very serious self-harm. Trying to get them the support they need is a constant challenge for us.

The relationship with CAMHS is really strong, and we are really appreciative of some in-kind support from them. We have a great working relationship. For young people that deteriorate or have increased need, the current wait for a CAMHS initial assessment is six weeks; for an ongoing service it is three months. So all the mental health services experience the same challenges.

I want to highlight some of the recommendations included in the Youth Coalition's submission to the inquiry into youth suicide, which included recommendation 3, to increase investment in programs and services that address stigma and promote help-seeking behaviour for young people around their mental health and wellbeing. Recommendation 4 was to reduce barriers to help-seeking by reducing wait times to access services and supports. Recommendation 6 was to ensure there is no reduction in youth mental health services and support capacity as a result of changes to commonwealth government funding arrangements. Recommendation 7 was to increase the resources and capacity of headspace Canberra. Recommendation 14 was to ensure young people are not discharged from health services into homelessness. Recommendation 17 was to address the gap between early intervention and crisis services to ensure there is a continuum of care to address the mental health needs of young people with self-harm and suicidal ideation.

I also highlight that we have a significant number of young people who are disengaged from education. Trying to provide the support that they need is a challenge. We noticed, with the withdrawal of funding from Youth Connections, that the capacity of services to work with those particular young people is reduced. A common scenario for us would be a young person who is bullied at school; they understandably feel quite uncomfortable to keep attending. Their attendance reduces, they start to worry about what is being talked about them in school and they feel really reluctant to get out of bed and get themselves to school. Anxiety develops, and that can escalate to the point where their functioning is compromised generally, and they then start to access mental health services.

It may be that we see young people who are so highly anxious that they do not even feel able to leave the house. The capacity to maintain an education and go on to have the education and employment opportunities that they would have if they had been able to have support to stay engaged in education—whether that is mainstream or alternative education—is a challenge for us in supporting those particular young people.

**THE CHAIR:** Could we go to the funding? Where is your funding derived from? Is it federal or—

**Ms Hubbard:** From the Department of Health.

**THE CHAIR:** Federal?

**Ms Hubbard:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** You said there has been no increase in funding since 2012?

**Ms Hubbard:** That is right.

**THE CHAIR:** You mentioned a gap in service provision. Could you define what that gap is and what the solution would be?

**Ms Hubbard:** The gap would be for the young people who might be attempting suicide. For example, they go to hospital, they are assessed and they are deemed to not be a risk at that point in time, so they are not accepted into a more acute service. But their ongoing suicidality means that supporting them in a service that works with mild to moderate issues can be problematic, because they can continue to be suicidal after hours and not receive the support that they need.

In terms of solutions, headspace could have the capacity to work with young people who needed support in crisis or out of hours. I am not necessarily advocating for that, but that is one potential solution. With the mental health reform nationally and with the primary health networks, there is funding for complex care. That is the gap—around the young people who need complex care support. The gap for young people up to 18 is far less than the gap for young people aged over 18 with adult mental health services. Adult mental health services accept only very unwell young people. The gap between whom we would service and whom they would service is far reaching. For adults between 18 and 25, in our experience, or for any adult over 18, if they are very unwell they might have psychiatric consultation, medication reviews and a case manager, but they would not be receiving any sort of psychological therapy. That is where the gaps are.

**THE CHAIR:** Are there adequate facilities for young people, if that is required?

**Ms Hubbard:** As in services?

**THE CHAIR:** No, as in the equivalent of an adult mental health unit.

**Ms Hubbard:** We have services that are more able to respond to young people under 18, but there is still the need that I talked about in terms of those wait times. There are youth step-up, step-down programs which also contribute in terms of young people who might be moving to the point where they are unwell and they might need to be hospitalised, or they are being discharged from hospital and need increased support. Those sorts of services are really valuable. It is just that there are not enough of them.

**MS BURCH:** On the recent suicide and self-harm review, we heard that, for wait times, it did not matter who was funding it, there were not enough. I heard that there are bits everywhere, and it is probably a question of gaps. You identified a gap regarding the 18 to 25 year olds. How do we improve coordination between existing services so that you get a better buy out of what is in the system?

**Ms Hubbard:** The model between headspace and CAMHS is a good example of that, because a CAMHS worker will come and assess young people at headspace. We have joint clinical consultation; we have a shared care model. It might be that the young person is under the care of a psychiatrist at CAMHS but is receiving psychological therapy at headspace. That shared care model works well in terms of services being able to integrate.

What headspace advocates for is a seamless service for a client. I know that with the primary health network one thing they are looking at is a streamlined service. For example, at headspace Queanbeyan a young person can come in and receive psychological support, alcohol and other drug support, employment support and family support. They can attend a group. They can receive a range of services, and we have six in-kind partners and we all integrate well together.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Doszpot.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Good morning, Ms Hubbard. Did you say that you only have federal government funding at this point?

**Ms Hubbard:** Yes.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Have you sought any ACT government funding for some of the services, like the after-hours services? It seems fairly logical to look at that. Have you sought any ACT government funding?

**Ms Hubbard:** I did put in an application a couple of years ago that was unsuccessful. But yes, that is my intention, to reapply for some ACT government funding, yes. We have had other advocacy, through YouthCo and the Mental Health Community Coalition, but yes.

**MR DOSZPOT:** From the point of view of what this committee can do, are you seeking a recommendation from us to support anything along those lines, or have you got a current submission for funding that you want to make us aware of or—

**Ms Hubbard:** Receiving ACT government funding is part of the strategy. There has not been a specific application for this year's budget, but that is something that we would pursue going forward. Given the lack of a funding increase since 2012, and given that we know we will not have one at least for another two years and after that we will probably be competing with other agencies for the federal funding—

**MS BURCH:** The landscape is changing.

**Ms Hubbard:** The landscape is really changing, yes. So needing to start applying for other funding is definitely our requirement.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Thank you.

**MS BURCH:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** I do apologise, but we are going to have to finish there. We have lots of people to see. Thanks very much for coming, and thanks for your words.

**GILBERT, MR TRAVIS**, Executive Officer, ACT Shelter

**THE CHAIR:** Good morning, Mr Gilbert. Thank you for your attendance here today. Could you acknowledge for the Assembly that you have read the pink card there on the table, the privilege statement, and that you understand the importance of privilege and its conditions.

**Mr Gilbert:** Yes, I do understand.

**THE CHAIR:** Thanks very much. Would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr Gilbert:** Yes. Firstly, I would like to thank the estimates committee for the opportunity to provide evidence this morning. You may be aware that ACT Shelter is the peak body representing the interests of affordable housing consumers here in the ACT and by extension we believe this includes people who are at risk of or experiencing homelessness. Our organisation is primarily concerned with the needs and aspirations of people on low to moderate incomes. For the ACT, I think the top of the second quintile, which I put a moderate income at, is about \$79,000 a year before tax.

In my statement, firstly I will briefly talk a bit about the rent market, both public and private in the ACT, and a bit about some of the challenges around home ownership. Then I will move to budget measures that address these things, like the public housing and urban renewal commitment, housing tax reform, land release and the family safety levy and package. Then, if I get time, I will talk a about justice reform and out of home care.

**THE CHAIR:** We have 15 minutes, so be very quick.

**Mr Gilbert:** The Canberra private rental market is characterised by falling vacancy rates. They increased above what is considered a healthy market for a while there in 2015. A healthy market has a three per cent vacancy rate, but the rates are trending downwards again towards 1½ per cent, I believe, according to the Real Estate Institute.

We know that the ACT private market is also quite expensive for tenants on low to moderate incomes. The primary form of demand-based subsidy that is used in Australia is commonwealth rent assistance. Of the 31,000-odd private rental households in the ACT, our understanding is that just over 11,500 receive CRA, which is a lower proportion than the national average, but I think reflects a higher make-up of single-person households, who may not receive family payments and therefore may not be eligible for CRA as opposed to not needing it.

We also acknowledge that the ACT has the highest proportion of mainstream public housing in Australia relative to total stock. In the context of the private market that I just described, that is both critical economic infrastructure and a vital social good. We know that more than 90 per cent of Housing ACT tenants are wholly or primarily reliant on income support payments from Centrelink. And even with the so-called gold standard payments—your age pension, your DVA payments or your DSP—they are probably looking at spending about 70 per cent of their income on rent alone to

rent a medium-priced one-bedroom home in the ACT.

It is little wonder, I suppose, then, that there is some evidence that homelessness and falling into marginal housing among older Australians and older Canberrans appear to be increasing. But we do not really have hard evidence on that. There are reports from services. I suppose if you spoke to COTA's housing option service, they would be able to give you case studies of older tenants who are in a bit of trouble. There is also anecdotal evidence that the strong competition for private rental properties means that Canberrans on good incomes might be renting down so that they can boost their savings towards a home deposit. That in turn might be squeezing out lower and moderate income Canberrans from properties that they might otherwise be able to afford.

With the committee's indulgence, I will repeat our unpopular, but in our view necessary, call for the government to remain a supplier and a full funder of public housing for people we believe are failed by the private housing market.

We would also note that in our view commonwealth rent assistance is a largely ineffective, if necessary, subsidy, given that its intent is to genuinely assist people to meet the costs of housing. I think the DHS federal website says that. The maximum rate of CRA equates to less than 20 per cent of the median weekly asking price for a one-bedroom unit in the ACT.

We know that there is also the changing nature of the private rental market. I am loath to put my parents into *Hansard*, but when they were younger and they were renting, it was probably quite a short-term option on the transition to home ownership. We know now that about 40 per cent of renters have been renting privately in particular for more than 10 years; probably in various properties, but for more than 10 years. It is now a medium or a long-term destination, particularly for low to moderate income households.

So there may well be a need for the ACT to consider additional private rental assistance products. I say this because we know that funding for social housing growth is limited. We also know that the per capita funding model for public housing really disadvantages the ACT. We believe we need about \$70 million to fully fund our current public housing stock and our homelessness services. We get about \$23½ million from the commonwealth, so there is a big deficit there.

**MS BURCH:** So a call for more commonwealth funds?

**Mr Gilbert:** Yes. We are quite willing to go to the commonwealth cap in hand and ask for that per dwelling funding model. We will probably lose, because it tends to advantage bigger population states.

The only other thing I would say is that we are really positive about the family safety package in the budget and the \$800,000 commitment to out of home care funding, because we know that domestic and family violence and kids in out of home care are key drivers of homelessness.

I will leave my statement there in the interests of time. If people have questions, that

would be great.

**THE CHAIR:** Thanks, Mr Gilbert. I am sure there are a lot of questions. I will defer to Ms Lawder.

**MS LAWDER:** I want to start off by asking about reports like the rental affordability snapshot. Do they count the ACT out separately or are we too small to be counted?

**Mr Gilbert:** We have not yet provided data to the national rental affordability index. I am currently in discussions with Allhomes, who may be able to assist us with that data. Also, the ACT bonds office may be able to assist us. To date I have not been able to apply that data, but we will provide it to SGS economics when we get it.

**MS LAWDER:** Good. You mentioned that housing can be quite unaffordable for people up to the second quintile.

**Mr Gilbert:** Yes.

**MS LAWDER:** About \$75,000 a year or something—79.

**Mr Gilbert:** It is 79 now, yes.

**MS LAWDER:** I think you mentioned single people specifically. I am also interested, with respect to your comment about COTA, in older women and the risk of homelessness. Have you got any sort of emerging data or research in that area?

**Mr Gilbert:** ACT Shelter did a report on older women and marginal housing outcomes, housing stress and risk of homelessness before I started. Focus groups were conducted with older women in the ACT and also, I think, groups like the Women's Centre for Health Matters and COTA. I am not sure about hard data at an ACT level. Certainly the older women's housing network in New South Wales has some reports which provide data showing an increase in older women presenting to specialist homelessness services and in boarding house accommodation, but I am not aware of similarly strong data for the ACT.

**MS LAWDER:** So it is qualitative information rather than reporting?

**Mr Gilbert:** Yes, sort of ground up information from housing providers like CHC and homelessness services.

**MS LAWDER:** There is the OWL group as well, I guess.

**Mr Gilbert:** Yes. Penny is on our board, and Penny is quite active in that space, as you may be aware.

**MS LAWDER:** Yes, I am.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Burch, in the interests of time.

**MS BURCH:** Thank you. Just a question on social housing. I think we all agree that

public housing in and of itself just has not got the wherewithal to solve every problem of homelessness, public housing and access to affordable housing. On social housing, I think there is a group in here where you have made mention about providing growth or incentives to develop social housing as a strong alternative or in addition to public housing. How would one go about that?

**Mr Gilbert:** I think the primary mechanism that has been used in other states and territories has been stock transfer, but the ACT, to its credit, did provide a loan facility to CHC, which has enabled them—I think there will be well over 1,000 properties when CHC at Downer is fully developed. In our discussions with housing providers, one of the key barriers that they see is land; also, and I am loath to say this because I cannot be sure and I do not want to breach the privilege statement that I read, that faith-based organisations may get an additional tax concession around land use.

**MS BURCH:** I was wondering. You have got a point here in the submission about stamp duty or other concessions for non-faith-based providers.

**Mr Gilbert:** Yes. My understanding is that there is a specific provision in that legislation that enables faith-based providers to receive a stamp duty exemption that may not be available to providers of housing that are not faith-based.

**MS BURCH:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Doszpot.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I will defer to Ms Lawder.

**MS LAWDER:** Thank you. I will follow up on the social housing. Do you mean stock transfers and the barriers, including the cost of land?

**Mr Gilbert:** Yes. That is my understanding. For some of the smaller community housing providers, the cost of land is a significant barrier in terms of being able to access finance for that. That might be where a federal instrument like an affordable housing supply bond, given the interest rates that are historically low at the moment, may come in handy.

I have not done any modelling or asked anybody to do any modelling on the capacity of a jurisdiction of this size to operate something like this ourselves. But there are examples of, I suppose, medium sized cities in the United States that have facilitated something to grow low cost housing, but the low income housing tax credit arrangement in the US is different from ours.

**MS LAWDER:** Do you think that the small size of the ACT means some community housing providers are more reluctant to enter the market?

**Mr Gilbert:** It is possible but the national regulatory system that has been in place since 2013 should make it more feasible for them to operate across jurisdictions. That was the intent. The New South Wales government, I think, is the government that had a primary role in developing that framework. So I think there would be opportunities. Certainly, Wendy, the CEO of Argyle Community Housing, is on our board. They



operate in New South Wales and the ACT, particularly in south-east New South Wales. So it is certainly possible for providers to enter the ACT.

**THE CHAIR:** We have time for one final question and then, unfortunately, we will have to close.

**MS LAWDER:** On homelessness services, with the census coming up, for example, do you have any feel on whether there is going to be increase or a decrease in the ACT? Is there any local data that you are aware of?

**Mr Gilbert:** I think it will be difficult to tell because we have seen over the past couple of years that the number of people supported by specialist homelessness services fell by two or three per cent. But, in saying that, there were cuts to homelessness service funding that may have meant that there were no extra beds to accommodate people; so that could explain it. I am hopeful that we will not see an increase. I am hopeful that eventually I will be done out of a job because homelessness will be ended. No, I cannot give you a definitive answer on that but it will be interesting to see.

**THE CHAIR:** Unfortunately, time is limited and we have to close. Thank you, Mr Gilbert, for putting your presentation and the submission. We look forward to seeing you out of a job.

**ELFORD, MR PETER**, President, Gungahlin Community Council

**THE CHAIR:** Good morning, Mr Elford. Welcome to the estimates committee 2016-17. Please be aware that we are recording this morning's proceedings. They will be transcribed by Hansard and then published. Proceedings are also being broadcast as well as webstreamed. On the table in front of you is a privilege statement. Please confirm for the committee that you understand the implications of privilege?

**Mr Elford:** Yes, I understand.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr Elford:** Good morning and thank you for your time. I will make a very short statement. The Gungahlin Community Council is, as I am sure you are well aware, one of the community councils in Canberra. We believe that the community council structure is absolutely crucial in the fabric of Canberra, and certainly in Gungahlin, as a vehicle to communicate the overall needs and desires of the community in Gungahlin to the ACT government and for the ACT government to use us as a vehicle to communicate with its communities.

More broadly, the role of community and contributing to planning and the evolution of Canberra are things that the Gungahlin Community Council and other community councils have some concerns about. We are very keen to remain engaged in the process. Specifically in relation to our budget submission, we had quite a narrow focus on a couple of specific items and then some more generic statements.

I would like to comment that we are very pleased that the specific items we were seeking commitment on in the budget process, namely, funding of additional road infrastructure, have largely been addressed. While they have not been entirely addressed, we are very grateful for that and we acknowledge in particular the ongoing engagement we have had with individual government portfolios, particularly ACT Roads, in communicating their intentions and constraints.

That takes us to, I guess, the bigger issue. We do feel that a lot of the operations of the government are very disparate. So the LDA, ACT Roads and the planning process seem to operate somewhat independently of each other so that roads will get built and within 18 to 24 months they are being duplicated either because they were inadequate when they were first built or because they had been remodelled to meet the needs of the LDA and the construction of a suburb.

We are seeking a much more joined up approach to the overall planning and delivery of infrastructure in Gungahlin. Specifically in relation to the town centre, we have some concerns about the ability of the town centre to attract employment and the implications that may have for the town centre. Then, more broadly, we are concerned about how the town centre will evolve, given that there is a lot of change underway with the community itself and, of course, with the introduction of new infrastructure like light rail.

**THE CHAIR:** Perhaps I will start where you finished: the town centre and its need to

be able to attract more employment. You have called for a master plan. Have you put that to the government and what has the response been?

**Mr Elford:** Obviously, we have formally put that to the government through the budget process. There has been an informal response. I will draw the committee's attention to the "better Gungahlin town centre" brochure. It has indicated an intention to do a joined up planning process. I am certainly not aware of anything that has yet arisen out of this initiative but certainly I have been invited to participate in other projects conducted by the ACT government, like the city to gateway project around Northbourne Avenue.

In my mind, something of that level of expansiveness would be highly desirable, because that has a very broad range of stakeholders from a large number of community and government representatives. That is the sort of thing I would hope to see in the town planning.

But, more specifically, the challenge we have in Canberra at the moment of ensuring a good balance of employment centres across all the town centres, including Civic, is quite acute. The challenges in retaining the department of immigration in Belconnen I am sure will be familiar to all of you. We also have had the campaigns that were run to retain the Department of Human Services in Tuggeranong. Gungahlin looks at those longingly thinking, "Gosh, it would be tremendous if we had 3,000 or 4,000 seats worth of employment in our town centre."

**MS BURCH:** You made reference to planning and to the budget paper. The other point you have made here is around your interest in a nurse walk-in clinic. I can tell you that the one in Tuggeranong is well-regarded and serves our community well. You also mentioned youth services. It makes sense to consider them in a joined-up whole-of-government approach in respect of the Gungahlin town centre but also the increasing feeder suburbs. Just about every time I go north there is another suburb up there.

**Mr Elford:** Of course, they are not strictly feeder suburbs. They are all part of the Gungahlin build-up. Yes, we are under an enormously steep growth curve. This is part of the challenge. How do you invest ahead of time, rather than waiting until there is a crisis in roads, a crisis in health care or a crisis in schooling, all of which, based on some definition of the word "crisis", we have gone through in the last few months?

**MS BURCH:** Are the calls for a nurse-led clinic and youth services based on everyone needing good access to health? Are youth services required because it is a younger area; because this is the current demographic?

**Mr Elford:** There are two drivers: one is to try to make the community somewhat self-contained so you do not have to spend time travelling out of community. The second is a growth problem. We simply have a lot of people being attracted to Gungahlin. We are trying to ensure that we have a balanced set of services to meet that demand. Then of course there is the demographic; 20 or 30 years ago Tuggeranong was "nappy valley". That honour is now well and truly held by Gungahlin.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Good morning, Mr Elford. Thank you for coming this morning. In the interests of time, I will cut straight to what you consider is the urgent area. I would like to ask you a couple of questions on that.

**Mr Elford:** Certainly.

**MR DOSZPOT:** In your executive summary, you state the three urgent areas. I will not go through them. I think you know what they are. Have you had adequate opportunity to have government consultation on your concerns?

**Mr Elford:** We have found ACT Roads to be extraordinarily forthcoming in attending our meetings and providing us with information on the projects they have been funded to undertake. They have also been able to present to us their perceived list of priorities for a series of projects. They operate, like all agencies, under a fixed budget. They say, “Well, we cannot do all seven projects we have identified, but we think these are the most important. Do you agree?” We are very grateful for that.

The challenge we have, as I mentioned before, is that it is not just about ACT Roads. I recall a specific instance when the LDA came to describe the building of the new suburb of Taylor, which involves the reconstruction of several roundabouts on Horse Park Drive. I made the comment, “You are putting hundreds more homes in Horse Park Drive. That needs to be duplicated. What are your plans for that?” The response was, “You need to speak to ACT Roads about that.”

That is a very disappointing outcome. It clearly is a joined-up piece of infrastructure. The immediate priorities have been the three major roads in and out of Gungahlin. They are all under construction at the moment, although I went through the Gungahlin Drive duplication in Mitchell today and it looks like the signs are coming down; so we are done there.

That is terrific but, again, we have seen those upgrades occur in piecemeal chunks when it is quite obvious that if you duplicate a piece in the middle, then you have achieved very little. But again, that was an LDA investment to build Throsby and we have left all these other bits that are getting filled in. So it is getting there, but it is a very tortuous and painful process.

**MR DOSZPOT:** In terms of looking at other community needs and requirements, where do you rate issues with regard to schools, sporting facilities and health?

**Mr Elford:** A lot of the positions we have are based on the survey we conducted in late 2014. A lot of that had to do with facilities in the town centre, shopping and retail. In general, good progress has been made in that area, noting that that is largely commercially driven. There is not a lot the government can do with, for example, the cinema and so on.

We are certainly getting anecdotal evidence that there is a lot of frustration with the capacities of the schools, both private and public. It is certainly on our agenda to try to get some clarity around what capacity is in place in Gungahlin—whether it is over capacity—and what the plans are to address it. We have seen some announcements from the government on that.

We have waged campaigns in my years at the community council to secure better healthcare facilities, with strong support from the community, initially for the low-impact, low-key—what is the right term? I am referring to the hospital that ended up at University of Canberra—

**THE CHAIR:** Subacute.

**Mr Elford:** Thank you, the subacute hospital that ended up at the University of Canberra. We campaigned to have that located in Gungahlin, for all the reasons I have already articulated. But we do have the health clinic. It seems appropriate, given the success of the Tuggeranong and Belconnen facilities, to upgrade that from a standard health centre to a walk-in nurse health clinic. That would be appropriate, given the size and scale of Gungahlin.

**THE CHAIR:** You said that two of the road projects were funded but the third that is not funded was the linking of Horse Park Drive to the Federal Highway. Is there any indication from the government of whether or not they will do that project?

**Mr Elford:** The announcement from the government has been that the funding will be allocated, not just for the design work, to complete the duplication of Horse Park Drive from the Mulligans Flat Road through to the Federal Highway. That, in our view, is now completed. But, of course, Horse Park Drive continues on from Mulligans Flat Road through to Clarrie Hermes if you go far enough around. That is where the suburbs Moncrieff, Taylor and the remainder of Jacka will all be constructed. So it is reasonable to assume that these roads will become very congested very quickly. Of course, as I mentioned before, when the suburb of Taylor is being constructed, it will involve rebuilding some roundabouts that will be less than two years old.

It just seems to us logical. This is important not just to get in and out of Gungahlin. These are major trunk roads within Gungahlin. If you spend some time even on a weekend in Gungahlin, you will notice that traffic just trying to move around in Gungahlin is severely congested, particularly on Gundaroo Drive.

**THE CHAIR:** In respect of other facilities, I see you mentioned skate parks for youth recreation. What is required there and in what locations?

**Mr Elford:** In many cases, it is an identification of a site. If I step back a little more broadly to youth services and include, say, sport, we are very unrepresented for tennis facilities. There are no significant netball facilities in Gungahlin. There was meant to be a large sporting complex on the outer edge of Horse Park Drive near Throsby. That seems to be deferred indefinitely. Those sorts of facilities are significantly lacking in, again, a community that is very young and in, again, a community that is large and growing very quickly.

**THE CHAIR:** Are there any ovals?

**Mr Elford:** In terms of ovals, it is actually not too bad. Again, because they are generally collocated with schools, the construction of schools involves the

construction of ovals. The enclosed ground near the town centre is being very well utilised. Those facilities are quite well supported. It tends to be the more specialised sports that are lacking.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I have a supplementary on that. I am shadow minister for sport. I have been getting a few concerns about the rapid growth of some of the junior sport out there, especially the football codes. The concerns are that they are running out of ovals. I guess that would be a good thing to hear from you as a community.

**Mr Elford:** Again, I need to be cautious in my responses based on what we have heard from the community and what we get, rather than my own personal experience. But that is absolutely something that we hear anecdotally and we see anecdotally. Again, we have not conducted a survey in recent times. We hope to do something in the period up to the election. But it is definitely something that keeps coming up and often it is the representatives from clubs. The Gungahlin Jets certainly spoken to us in the past two years. I mentioned tennis and the netball community. They are ones that I am aware of personally.

**MS BURCH:** I have one final question. You made mention of the cinema. How did the movie marathon go?

**Mr Elford:** It is happening this weekend. In fact, my colleague, David, is chief cook and bottle washer. Maybe he will have to give us a head-count update. Based on the number of people seeking some tickets that we, the community council, sponsored, it looks like it is going gangbusters. We are looking forward to it.

**THE CHAIR:** With that, we might call a halt. Thank you for your attendance this morning and thank you for all your good deeds supporting the community of Gungahlin.

We will suspend and resume at 11.15 with the Mental Health Community Coalition of the ACT.

**Sitting suspended from 11.00 to 11.14 am.**

**VIERECK, MR SIMON**, Executive Officer, Mental Health Community Coalition of the ACT Inc.

**THE CHAIR:** Good morning and welcome back to the public hearings of the Select Committee on Estimates 2016-2017. We will continue with a presentation from the Mental Health Community Coalition of the ACT, and we welcome its CEO, Simon Viereck, who will speak with us.

Before you on the table on the pink card is the privilege statement. Could you please confirm for the committee that you have read and understood the implications of privilege?

**Mr Viereck:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** All right. Would you like to make an opening statement to the committee?

**Mr Viereck:** Yes, I would like to, thank you. The Mental Health Community Coalition is the peak body for the community-managed mental health sector in the ACT. This sector consists of organisations providing a range of psychosocial rehabilitation and recovery support services—anything from health promotion and prevention, early intervention, suicide prevention and post-vention programs, daily living and capacity-building supports, subacute care, and more and more.

This is also a sector that is heavily impacted by the national disability insurance scheme, for which there is still a great deal of uncertainty about how that will look. We are also impacted now by reform of commonwealth mental health services, in other words, that means this sector is in a fairly unstable and uncertain environment.

To turn to the budget, I can say that MHCC welcomes this very significant investment in mental health in the 2016-17 budget. We also acknowledge that mental health continues to be an area that is underfunded as a proportion of the health budget relative to the burden of disease attributable to mental health, which is about 15 per cent in the ACT as reported by the Chief Health Officer. So, again, we welcome the commitment and the investment. We particularly welcome the funding for another step-up, step-down facility and the investment in a mental health recovery college.

If we turn to our concerns with the budget, we are disappointed that this investment is so heavily focused on hospital based and clinical services rather than community managed and recovery-focused services. We are not opposed to the initiatives—they are certainly good and important services—but we would have liked to see that they were matched by more significant investment in community-management of mental health services as well.

The National Mental Health Commission's review of services and programs is the most comprehensive review of the sector in recent years. Its analysis and recommendations are broadly supported by the mental health sector. One of the key pillars of its recommendations, and one that reflects the recommendations of just

about every other strategic document over the past decade, is to shift the focus of funding growth to mental health services and supports in the community. That is because recovery happens in the community. People with lived experience of mental health issues tell us that their preference is to stay in the community and to be supported there and to stay well there.

It is also clear that providing support early, keeping people well in the community and keeping them out of hospital, provides much better outcomes for the individual and is less expensive for the society as a whole.

So we are particularly disappointed in this budget that the funding for the recovery college as well as the expansion of the detention exit community outreach program and the way back suicide prevention program has funding for only one year. The detention exit program and the way back program are, in fact, already recurrently funded programs and this funding was intended to expand those services. So, in reality, those services will need to be re-funded in next year's budget, and in the meantime it just adds another level of uncertainty for the sector.

We are also a bit disappointed that the budget does not include measures to ensure psychosocial rehabilitation and recovery support services continue to be accessible for people who need them but are not eligible for the NDIS. Our conversations with our members suggest there are literally scores of people each year who have been accessing existing programs but who would not be eligible for the NDIS. We expect, of course, that that will continue into the future.

This includes people who need those services on a non-ongoing basis and for whom access to those services can mean the difference between the path to recovery, self-management and a productive life in the community or decline into enduring illness, acute needs, and a permanent disability.

We know clinical services and hospital beds are very expensive. We know community support is relatively inexpensive in comparison from both a human and an economic point of view. So the smart money is on supporting people to stay well in the community.

**THE CHAIR:** Well, why do we not start where you finished—the smart money is on supporting people in the community. You mentioned halfway through your presentation that mental health is underfunded relative to the burden of the disease, and you mentioned the number of 15 per cent. What is the 15 per cent?

**Mr Viereck:** Mental health accounts for 15 per cent of the burden of disease, and that number comes from the Chief Health Officer's report 2014.

**THE CHAIR:** And what percentage of the health budget does mental health receive?

**Mr Viereck:** It is about 12. I would not have the exact numbers after this budget, but—

**THE CHAIR:** And what percentage of the mental health budget goes to the community?



**Mr Viereck:** Again, there are changes with the NDIS et cetera, but we think it is about nine per cent.

**THE CHAIR:** And what should we be aiming for?

**Mr Viereck:** In terms of the health budget as a whole, we should be aiming for 15 per cent.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**Mr Viereck:** And as a proportion of what goes to the community, we can argue about that. In New Zealand their target is 30 per cent, and one that they reached some years ago. Certainly here we would have to say the ACT by Australian standards is doing fairly well, but we would certainly like to see that increase to the 15 or, indeed, the 30 per cent.

**THE CHAIR:** If New Zealand is at 30 per cent, is their experience saying they are reaping a dividend of better health and wellbeing in the community?

**Mr Viereck:** They are certainly seeing that, yes. They are seeing people being able to stay well, being better supported in the community. Certainly some of those supports are clinical in nature and others are more directly community and recovery-focused supports. Of course, the outcome is that people can stay in the community and they can live meaningful lives. Those people whom we can divert from a course of serious and acute presentations and more permanent disability are, of course, also able to lead more productive lives and engage in the community. Very importantly, their carers, who are also their families, are often able then to go back to the workforce as well.

**THE CHAIR:** So the knock-on effect, yes.

**MS BURCH:** Just with the percentages, is that funding within the Health Directorate in mental health or is that across both government services and community services?

**Mr Viereck:** We are talking about the ACT health budget.

**MS BURCH:** Yes. If we were to add in the funding into community sector, would that change it significantly? Would we get a little bit closer to where you would like us to be?

**Mr Viereck:** Yes, there is another \$3 million or \$4 million worth of commonwealth funding going into the sector as well. One of the reasons why percentages and numbers are a little bit challenging at the moment is, of course, because of the investment into the NDIS.

**MS BURCH:** And on that, you mentioned there would be a number of people who are currently supported through the community that would not be eligible under the NDIS.

**Mr Viereck:** Yes.

**MS BURCH:** But they are still accessing mainstream services, or community-based services, because not everyone with mental health issues will be NDIS eligible.

**Mr Viereck:** It is very clear that the expectation around the NDIS is that it will be the 10 to 12 per cent of people with severe and enduring mental illness with the most complex needs who will be eligible for an NDIS package. That then means we still have somewhere close to 90 per cent of those people with severe and enduring mental illness who will not be accessing the NDIS. Of those people, a proportion of those have been accessing other services. We also know a lot of people do not have access to services. The actual numbers of people who are currently receiving a service who will not be eligible for an NDIS package is uncertain until we have completed the transition fully.

**MS BURCH:** Community services remain, though. They are not closing.

**Mr Viereck:** No, they are not closing, that is right. In our situation the challenge is that those particular types of services that people have been accessing, such as the personal helpers and mentor services and also other rehabilitation and recovery services, are no longer accessible for people other than through the NDIS because there is no funding to run them for other people.

**MS BURCH:** Finally, with the transition to the NDIS, do you think the line of sight to people in our community with mental health issues is visible enough in the transition process or is there work we can do to raise that awareness a little bit more?

**Mr Viereck:** Absolutely. There are some very significant challenges with implementing the NDIS for people with psychosocial disability. I could talk to you all day about it. Let me say also that we certainly support the NDIS. Our members support the NDIS; we want it to work, but there are some significant challenges around the way it is structured and particularly the way the supports and prices are structured in the NDIS that mean the level of support people can access and the quality of that support may not be what it used to be.

**MS BURCH:** Do mental health peaks or mental health orgs have a place around that transitional task force table, to bring these matters—

**Mr Viereck:** We have certainly worked very closely with the government and with the NDIA over this transition period, and we have been able to address some of the practical issues. What we have not been able to resolve are some of those fundamental issues around the workforce. The Productivity Commission recognised, in a report that formed the basis of the NDIS, the workforce in the community mental health sector is significantly higher qualified than the general disability sector. We would say, of course, it is because they are qualified and skilled to deliver sophisticated psychosocial interventions, which is a different ball game to simply helping someone get out of bed and into their wheelchair.

That is not to say by any means that we discount the work that is done in the general disability sector; and some of those I know are also struggling with the prices—many of them indeed—but we think the skill level that is required to work in the

psychosocial disability sector is higher and the prices do not support that. We really fear the quality of the workforce will drop and the quality of services will drop.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Good morning, Mr Viereck, and thank you for your very detailed budget submission. I think it explains a lot of the issues that you have to contend with and face. You mention your disappointment at the level of funding for three of the projects, I think you mentioned.

**Mr Viereck:** Yes, there are three that I have mentioned that only have one year funding. To be frank, it does not really make much sense. Admittedly the mental health recovery college is a new program and it is fair to talk about it as a pilot. While the sector had suggested a three-year project plan perhaps you can argue that there is some reason not to fund that recurrently.

The other two programs that have recurrent funding at the moment, with the detention exit program, the intention was to expand that program alongside the opening of the secure mental health facility. With the way back suicide prevention program, that also has received recurrent funding in the last budget and the intention was that it would be expanded in this budget. So there does not seem to be a rational reason not to fund those on a recurrent basis.

In fact, I should perhaps mention in the same budget line there is also some funding for expansion of the older persons mental health team in the government mental health service and, again, only a one-year allocation.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Just focusing on the first project you mentioned, I presume that is only a pilot project in that sense, is it?

**Mr Viereck:** The mental health recovery college is an exciting new initiative. Indeed, it is something that exists both in other Australian jurisdictions—New South Wales and Victoria—and internationally, and they have been very successful. The project here, we put forward a three-year plan. It is very challenging to establish a new service and produce outcomes in what is effectively a six to nine-month period. While it is something we could consider a pilot, it is very challenging to do it in those time frames.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I have read your details on it, and the involvement of Rachel Perkins amongst others. If you do not get to go ahead on the project, that is a substantial amount of money that would be, well, “wasted” is too strong a word to use, I guess, but it is not far off it, is it?

**Mr Viereck:** Yes, to put a substantial amount of money into something for one year, to build something up, establish partnerships and relationships and then just see it fall over is, well, close to a waste of money, yes.

**MR DOSZPOT:** And the other two projects you mentioned in a similar vein, you have had three-year funding for those?

**Mr Viereck:** Those have recurrent funding, yes.

**MR DOSZPOT:** But the final part has not been approved, is that what you are saying, or—

**Mr Viereck:** What I am saying is in this budget there was an intention to expand those programs.

**MS BURCH:** So to build on the existing funding?

**Mr Viereck:** Build on the existing funding. With the detention exit program, that aligns with the opening of the secure mental health facility. The intention was always as that secure facility opens for the detention exit program to be one of the avenues for people coming out of that facility for them to have some more intensive support to be making that transition back into the community. Of course, that facility was not opened and is not open yet, so the intention was to expand the service in line with the opening of the facility.

Again, to expand it for one year hardly makes sense in any way. For a service to try to recruit new staff and build up their capacity only to shut it down again after effectively six to nine months—

**MR DOSZPOT:** Thank you. I cannot speak on behalf of all my colleagues, but I think we will give it a very good assessment and see what we can do towards a recommendation of some sort.

**THE CHAIR:** You mentioned there were no psychosocial services in the ACT. What do they actually do, and what sort of services are required?

**Mr Viereck:** Those services have existed and the funding for them is about to wind up, essentially, in most cases, certainly for the ACT government funded services as they transition into the NDIS. That funding will go into the NDIS and there will be services available for those people who are eligible for an NDIS funding package, and they can decide how they would like those services delivered and what they would like to have delivered.

With respect to the services that have been delivered so far in that space, there are a number of different services. They focus on supporting people with their life skills, with mentoring, with strategies to manage symptoms, and support to get back into study, employment, volunteering—all those sorts of things. They are supporting people with a focus on recovery, supporting people with a focus on managing life with symptoms rather than the absence of symptoms, and returning to what is for them a meaningful and contributing life.

**THE CHAIR:** If the NDIS has the potential to provide those services but the individuals with their packages do not all pick it up or there is not enough critical mass, do we run the risk of losing the ability to deliver those, and particularly the people who deliver those services?

**Mr Viereck:** We are certainly seeing at the moment that, although the workforce issues are really important, organisations are having to reclassify their positions in these programs simply because the pricing level from the NDIS corresponds to

roughly half of what the average per hour price was under block funding. We accept that there are surely some efficiencies to be made, but to go from \$75 an hour to \$42 an hour is not just about being more efficient; that is in fact reclassifying your workforce to a lower grade. We are seeing skilled and qualified workers leave their jobs for that reason.

**THE CHAIR:** With respect to the importance of the college, you say it would function only for six to nine months; the assumption is that once the funding comes through, it could be up and running in about three months?

**Mr Viereck:** My understanding is that first of all it will take some time to finalise those contracts. On a separate matter, we have just been informed that service funding agreements which were about to start from 1 July cannot be finalised in time, so everyone is getting a three-month extension of their current contract. That is a separate matter.

My understanding is that it will take some time; therefore effectively the funding is only provided for nine months of the first year of any project. We would be looking to begin the establishment of partnerships and other important things earlier, but we would not have the funding to support the program until at least nine months out, if we start from 1 July.

**THE CHAIR:** Does the uncertainty of having just one year's funding affect people's decisions on whether they will apply?

**Mr Viereck:** It certainly does. It will affect all aspects of the program. This college would require buy-in from the sector. It would require a number of organisations to be close partners, to be delivering training through that college, et cetera. For them, if they do not have certainty that this will continue beyond this financial year then it certainly would lower their interest in becoming a key partner and putting resources into that.

**MS BURCH:** Following on from that before going back to the NDIS, have you raised with the health department what their view or vision is, beyond what is expressed in the budget papers and beyond 12 months? Do you get a sense of where they are heading?

**Mr Viereck:** I have had a conversation with the mental health policy unit, which is the main funder in this area. My understanding is that certainly they were unsure as to what the reasons were.

**MS BURCH:** You are a coalition, so do you have many providers that are members or part of your group?

**Mr Viereck:** Yes.

**MS BURCH:** The NDIS has seen a lot of newcomers to town, new organisations. Has that been replicated within the mental health community—new and different providers coming in?

**Mr Viereck:** We have not seen it happening in the psychosocial space yet. Part of that is that the majority of those people have not yet transitioned into the NDIS. That will only happen in the ninth quarter of transition or on 1 July, simply because of the way the transition was organised. We would not expect a great many new providers, in the short term at least. As I said, for existing providers, it is not an attractive proposition. Certainly, down the track, we might imagine that other providers might come in with a willingness to deliver services of a different quality and at a different price.

**MS BURCH:** The pricing here is consistent with the pricing in New South Wales, so if someone is providing a service in Queanbeyan at that price, they may in time seek to come over the border, so to speak?

**Mr Viereck:** Indeed, there are minimal differences in the prices. The ACT is in the same pricing scheme as Victoria and WA. There are very minimal differences in the pricing. The NDIA's expectation is that these prices will decrease even further over time.

**MS BURCH:** There is a vigorous conversation across states about pricing.

**Mr Viereck:** There certainly is. We think the challenge here is that there is the same price for two quite different types of support, simply because they fit under the same item.

**MS BURCH:** With the new providers coming into town, how will the sector respond to that? Do you see lumps and bumps in service provisions and types of services? Can this committee in any way provide guidance as to how you might flatten it out so that there are services for everybody across all needs?

**Mr Viereck:** It is quite difficult to make predictions about what is going to happen with the NDIS. We certainly expect that a larger number of people than have currently been able to access community mental health services will be able to get support through the NDIS. There is scope for expansion, and there is certainly scope for other services to come in. That is not something we would be opposed to; it has happened before. There is potential for services to come in and deliver a good benchmark of quality service. In terms of variation in service, there are times of the year when there is more demand. Overall, services are working to capacity pretty much all year round.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Mr Viereck, with respect to your budget submission regarding increased funding for Mental Health Week, can you expand on the outcome of that?

**Mr Viereck:** Yes. We are very pleased to know that outside the budget process itself, there was the capacity to allocate some additional funding for Mental Health Week. That is a very good thing. We welcome that. Mental Health Week is about raising awareness, about to some degree celebrating the mental health sector, but more importantly raising awareness of mental health and services and supports in the community. This extra funding will allow us not only to support more events during Mental Health Week itself but to explore how we can, over the course of the year, perhaps have events or other ways of raising awareness in the community.

**THE CHAIR:** Our time has come to an end. We would like to thank you for coming

along and presenting to the committee this morning. We commend you on your good deeds and look forward to great outcomes into the future.

**HOPKINS, MR MICHAEL**, Deputy Executive Director, Master Builders ACT

**THE CHAIR:** Good morning, Mr Hopkins. You need to be aware that the proceedings are being recorded, they will be transcribed and published by Hansard, and the proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed.

Before you on the table is a pink card, the privilege statement. Could you please indicate to the committee that you have read and understand the implications of privilege?

**Mr Hopkins:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Would you like to make a brief opening statement?

**Mr Hopkins:** Yes. Thank you for considering our submission and inviting us to attend the committee hearing this morning. As you would know, the MBA made a pre-budget submission back in October last year and we made a submission again just recently. In a nutshell, our submission calls for the government to focus on growing the private sector component of the economy, to diversify the economy and therefore to reduce our reliance on commonwealth government employment.

The MBA ACT, as you would know, represents the local construction industry, residential, commercial and civil sectors, the subcontractors who work for those head contractors, and professionals and consultants who service those builders. We are also a group training organisation, so we train a lot of apprentices. In fact we are the largest group training organisation in the ACT. Ninety-three per cent of our members are small businesses or are locally based, and all make a significant contribution to the ACT economy.

Before we get into the detail of our submission, it is worth saying up-front that there are many elements of the budget that we support. We acknowledge that, on a number of indicators, the ACT economy is performing reasonably well. Our population is growing. We have higher than average incomes and lower than average unemployment. From a construction industry point of view, there are a number of major public and private projects on the drawing board or underway which will benefit our industry.

There are two significant parts of the budget, the capital works program and the land release program, which concern MBA members and local industry. Concern around particularly the delivery method of capital works has become an issue relatively recently, while concerns around the land release program have been ongoing for a number of years.

I will address the capital works program first of all. The budget includes a \$2.9 billion infrastructure program to be delivered over four years. That includes three major projects—light rail stage 1, the ACT law courts, and the UC hospital. Those three projects account for around a third of that capital works program. We can see a concerning trend in how the ACT government is delivering these major projects, particularly around those three, which we think needs to be addressed. More often



than not, major projects are being awarded to major contractors with union EBAs yet, overwhelmingly, ACT contractors have rejected union EBAs, instead electing to enter company-specific EBAs, while still offering flexible conditions, good wages and conditions, and productivity improvements.

It does not make sense to us that government would not engage more local contractors, essentially, because they can offer more competitive tender prices and better value for money. We say this: except for the influence of the MOU between ACT government and UnionsACT. There has been a lot of publicity recently about the MOU. I am sure you have all read it. In our view it gives unions a seat at the table when government makes procurement decisions. We believe it leads to higher tender prices and therefore lower value for money for the ACT taxpayer. In a nutshell, we believe it corrupts the procurement process. In our view, the MOU is unlawful and contravenes the commonwealth procurement code.

We have heard a lot of contradictory advice about the MOU from the Chief Minister, from the union and from our own members. We are currently seeking legal advice about the effect of the MOU and we are happy to share that advice with government when it is completed. But, regardless of the legal advice, we are calling on government to scrap the MOU. We raise this issue today because, as I said at the beginning, the budget contains a \$2.9 billion infrastructure program, and it is absolutely vital that ACT taxpayers get the best value for money when these capital works are being procured.

The second issue I would like to address briefly is the land release program. The ACT is unique in its method of land release. No other Australian state or territory has a single land developer that dominates the market. No other Australian state or territory has a government-owned land developer that is as actively involved in the direct delivery, sales and marketing of land. And no other Australian state or territory has no inventory of land currently available for purchase and construction.

Over a number of years, we believe the ACT market has been under-supplied, the housing market in particular, and in particular there has been an undersupply of single detached houses. An example of that is the rapid price increases we saw at Throsby, which was recently released by the LDA. We think this under-supply has forced many local developers and builders to now work outside the ACT borders, in areas such as Googong and Murrumbateman. This means that all the economic benefits from that construction are transferred from the ACT to New South Wales, while many of the services—schools, health care and the like—still have to be provided at a cost to the ACT government.

Our particular concern about the land release program this year is the supply of land for single detached housing. According to ABS figures, total dwelling approvals have been steadily declining since 2010-11. According to figure 1.3.5 in budget paper 3, the number of detached houses approved has been falling at faster rates. According to that table, in March 2016 approvals for houses represented around 1,000 out of a total of 5,000. So that 20 per cent is, in our view, at a historic low, and it is around 750 fewer detached houses than we had in 2013-14.

What do we say should be done to address this mismatch? Firstly, we do not think the

whole system should be scrapped but we do think it is time for a review of the system and method of land delivery. Secondly, we think government should complete a housing needs analysis in consultation with community and industry—not a theoretical or an economic analysis but a report on what forms of housing the ACT community wants, in what locations and at what prices. Thirdly, when future land release programs are released, they should demonstrate how the release program is matching that housing needs analysis. That would involve greater reporting, particularly around the types of land being released.

To address the need to create an inventory of land ready for purchase in the short term, we think future land releases should be undertaken by the private sector wherever possible. We think land development by the private sector will accelerate land release and boost supply to meet demand.

Finally, we think that failing to address this issue will lead to a continuation of rapid price increases and worsening housing affordability, and will continue to send local residential builders across the border for more of their work. I am happy to take questions on either of those two issues, or anything else in the budget.

**THE CHAIR:** Thanks for that, Mr Hopkins. I will defer my question to Mr Wall.

**MR WALL:** Mr Hopkins, there has been, as you mentioned in your opening statement, quite a bit of publicity and public discussion about the MOU between the Labor government and UnionsACT, particularly about whether or not it was a secret document. Did you, your members or anyone know of this document prior to its being released this year, given that it has supposedly been in action in the ACT since 2004?

**Mr Hopkins:** Certainly not. It was not something that was disclosed to us or that we were aware of during any of our discussions with government or with our members. We started to hear concern about it from our members relatively recently, in the fairly recent past, but we were very surprised to see it ultimately released, appear in the newspapers and its existence then confirmed by the Chief Minister. The existence of this MOU should not be underestimated. It is quite astonishing that such a document exists in the ACT. There is no other jurisdiction in Australia we can find where a similar document exists.

**MR WALL:** What effect, then, in real terms, do you and your members believe this document has on the procurement and tendering process for territory works?

**Mr Hopkins:** As I said in my submission, I think the ultimate focus, and the reason for us wishing to talk at budget estimates, is that it ultimately leads to a worse deal for ACT taxpayers. It does, in our view, corrupt, or at least distort, the tender process. On our reading of the document, it gives unions a seat at the table when making procurement decisions. All of that just leads to higher prices. When the infrastructure budget is as big as \$2.9 billion, every effort needs to be made to be getting the best possible value for money. This document will deliver higher prices and a worse outcome for not only our local members of businesses but the community more broadly.

**MR WALL:** Has either the local MBA or other branches across the country done any

work on trying to ascertain what is ultimately the cost to the ratepayer or the taxpayer of union involvement in particular construction projects?

**Mr Hopkins:** We certainly know that it is higher. In general terms across the country, we estimate that the labour component of construction projects will increase by 30 to 40 per cent. Our MBA Victorian office have recently done an analysis of the Victorian infrastructure budget, and they concluded that around \$621 million is the premium that Victorian taxpayers are paying because of similar agreements.

In terms of the ACT, unfortunately there were about three days between the release of the budget and the due date for these submissions so locally we have not had the opportunity to do an analysis except that we know, just from reports from our own members, reports in the paper and reports from the unions, that this will all lead to higher wages with no links to productivity improvements, which is a key part of this, which will lead to higher costs in tendering.

**MR WALL:** In your opening statement, you spoke about a different recruitment method being used for particularly the PPPs—the light rail, the UC hospital and the law courts projects. Is that an unusual way for major government works to be put together—the contracts and agreements for labour hire?

**Mr Hopkins:** Particularly around the light rail. We know from the head contractor that they have announced that they will directly employ 250 workers. The light rail project is essentially a civil construction project, so this affects our civil sector more than others. That method of directly employing such high numbers of people is not unheard of, but it is certainly very unusual. It would not be the typical way of delivering a large project like this. Local civil construction firms are now faced with a lose-lose situation. Either these 250 people will be recruited from local businesses, so the best and brightest foremen, project managers and leading hands that our local businesses have trained over a number of years will now go and work for the head contractor on high wages, or these 250 workers will come from interstate and over the border. Either way, for local businesses that is a lose-lose situation.

We are concerned not only about the short-term impact on the project but about the longer term impact on the industry and the price of construction in the ACT.

**MR WALL:** From my understanding, normally the benefit of working for a subcontractor is that that contractor seeks multiple projects, so as one finishes, there is a workflow for the employees there to go onto the next project. If the consortium building light rail is employing everyone directly, what happens to them at the end of the project?

**Mr Hopkins:** This is the crux of our concern. Assuming that at least some of these workers go and work for the light rail contract, what do they do at the end of the project? Will there still be local firms and local work for them to go back to? We are not sure about that. Your question highlights exactly the dilemma and the concern that our local civil sector is facing right at the moment.

**THE CHAIR:** We might move on. Ms Burch.

**MS BURCH:** Just to go to your point when you were referring to this as a secret document, your colleague Mr Smyth asked about an MOU in previous hearings, so it was hardly a secret document; it has been in play for a number of years. I think—

**MR WALL:** You never asked about it.

**THE CHAIR:** It is not for commentary. It is—

**MS BURCH:** You were allowed.

**MR DOSZPOT:** You are a committee member. You can ask questions.

**THE CHAIR:** Gentlemen. The question, please, Ms Burch.

**MS BURCH:** All right. What makes you think it was secret, given that a member, one of your colleagues, asked about it? There is a question.

**Mr Hopkins:** Quite recently—

**MS BURCH:** So it has been explored in these types of committees before.

**Mr Hopkins:** I accept that in the recent commentary, after it was reported in the paper, members of the government have said that this has been in place for a number of years, but it was never disclosed to us. It was certainly never disclosed—

**MS BURCH:** That does not make it a secret document, Mr Hopkins. Thank you.

**Mr Hopkins:** It was certainly never disclosed to our members.

**THE CHAIR:** It is not a commentary. Let him finish, please.

**MS BURCH:** The other question is this. How did you calculate this 30 or 40 per cent additional cost because of the union's involvement in seeking fair employment conditions for workers?

**Mr Hopkins:** Those figures relate to the national figures. They are not ACT specific. But they—

**MS BURCH:** So you cannot extrapolate?

**THE CHAIR:** Would you let him finish, please.

**Mr Hopkins:** Yes. They come from an analysis—

**MS BURCH:** This is extraordinary.

**THE CHAIR:** Interruptions are extraordinary, yes.

**Mr Hopkins:** EBA agreements are public documents after they are ratified, and they come from an analysis of those EBA agreements that exist that are on the public

record across the country.

**MS BURCH:** All right. How do they—

**Mr Hopkins:** In terms of the ACT, we would like to understand the impact specifically here. As I said, there were only three days between the budget and the submission closing period, but we think it would be very interesting to find out that figure for the ACT.

**MS BURCH:** You mentioned that a number of employees and employers have EBAs. What is the percentage of employer EBAs? For example, a larger construction firm will have their own employment arrangements that could be different from company B and company C. So it is those who pay at the high end to perhaps the smaller company that does not particularly pay well. What is the difference? Is that a significant difference?

**Mr Hopkins:** The current pattern CFMEU agreement expired in March this year, so EBA negotiations are happening as we speak. What we do know in our civil construction sector, which is the one most affected by light rail, is that zero local civil firms have signed a union agreement.

**MS BURCH:** No, I accept that. But you made the comment that a lot of companies have their own arrangements and conditions.

**Mr Hopkins:** That is right, yes.

**MS BURCH:** Are they consistent? Does every company in town apply the same hourly rate? There are inherently differences within the industry anyway.

**Mr Hopkins:** The purpose of a company-specific agreement is to have a specific agreement that applies between that company and its workers, yes.

**MS BURCH:** What is the variance of those across your members?

**Mr Hopkins:** I could not say.

**MS BURCH:** Would you do the work about the variance of employment conditions of some of your member companies and how that impacts on the costs of those companies delivering the product?

**Mr Hopkins:** The issue of a company's wages and conditions that it applies in the EBA is not a matter for the MBA and it is not a matter we seek to influence. We will give our members legal advice and advice about how to procedurally produce an EBA, but the wages and conditions are a matter between the company and the employees. What we clearly know, though, is that there is a trend, and there is a national trend, that where there is a union EBA in place wages are much higher—as I said, 30 to 40 per cent higher.

**MS BURCH:** Mr Hopkins, if you are looking to do some research on what would be the impact of what you are proposing of a trend of impact of costs from a union EBA,

would you not then have a look at the impact cost of different companies? The same applies. If you have a company that is prepared to pay \$10 an hour as opposed to a company with its own internal EBA arrangements, because it is a matter for them, paying \$25 an hour, the cost of that product is going to be more. Isn't that the end game about the cost of the product and how that cost is made up? Would you not consider doing that bit of research as well?

**Mr Hopkins:** Once all the documents about light rail, for example, are released, including the EBA, we would happily do an analysis of how we think the cost of that compares to the costs under companies' specific agreements, yes.

**MS BURCH:** You made mention of what happens at the end of a contract and perhaps a leakage of skills in and out of the ACT. Does that apply to the other, say, urban renewal program that is going to inject close on \$5 million over four years? Is that a similar concern or, because they are smaller little pieces of projects rather than one large one such as light rail—

**Mr Hopkins:** We know from feedback from our members and from local residential builders that local firms are in fact delivering a significant part, if not all, of the urban renewal program. The concern about economic impacts leaving the ACT or skills and experience leaving the ACT does not apply in the urban renewal program. In fact, the urban renewal program is a really successful program in how it does benefit local firms and keep those skills and experiences. It is a model that could have been applied to some of these major projects, and certainly major projects coming forward.

**MS BURCH:** The other part of the MBA's role is around quality of the product and making sure that we get a good product at the end across the city. How does the MBA factor in the cost of a product and the quality of the product? We here have heard, and other members must have heard, that constituents have problems with builders. I am getting off the union bit. How does the MBA internally with its members make sure that ratepayers of the territory, when they ask somebody to build something for them, get a good product?

**Mr Hopkins:** The MBA has been one of the leading campaigners in improving building quality in the ACT. The government's response to building quality, which we 100 per cent support, was led by the MBA's release of our policy paper on building quality. We are 100 per cent behind improving building quality standards in the ACT. Our role in that is to advocate to government directly to improve those standards. We are really impressed with the response we are seeing so far.

**MS BURCH:** You hear and see in the media that there are developments that are so poorly built that it is almost cost effective to rip them down and start again. Does a builder who is responsible for that get a chance through your organisation to keep on doing that sort of work? What are your internal mechanisms to make sure that the industry rids itself of that very poor performance?

**Mr Hopkins:** We deal with that on a number of different levels. If a builder is currently a members of ours, we offer advice, training, legal advice and help with the regulator to improve their standards overall. We also have a code of conduct which applies to our members, and we encourage consumers or other members of the

industry to actively use that code of conduct. We will rigorously enforce it against our members if they are not delivering up to the standard that we expect.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Doszpot, a quick question.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Mr Hopkins, thank you again for your detailed submission and for raising issues that are obviously of concern to your members. You raised some very serious issues. What discussions have you been able to have with the government directly about the very direct issues you have raised about the MOU?

**Mr Hopkins:** It is an issue that we have raised with government departments, the human and capital works program. As I mentioned in my opening statement, the advice we are getting is contradictory. The advice we hear from the department, which we have a very good relationship with, is that the MOU plays no part, has no influence in the procurement process. We accept that, but we hear different things from different other players. Certainly our members tell us that that is not their experience. They all also tell us that in EBA negotiations, with a union point of view, they alert members to the existence of the MOU as part of the EBA negotiation process.

It is this uncertainty. It is this on one hand hearing from the government that it plays no role and on another hand hearing that it plays an active role which puts our members and local businesses in the worst position. It is the uncertainty that is creating the problem. That is why we will seek legal advice to see what its actual effect is. But either way, whatever that legal advice is, the MOU just should not be in place. It is outrageous that this MOU exists. It does not exist anywhere else in Australia. It should be scrapped immediately. If we are to believe what government tells us in that it has no influence, there should be no issue with it just being scrapped.

**MR DOSZPOT:** With the seriousness of the issue that you raise, with the Chief Minister, in his capacity as Chief Minister and as Treasurer, has there been any attempt made to get a direct discussion with him on this, to get a formal response from him?

**Mr Hopkins:** Directly from the MBA? We have not been able to meet directly with the Chief Minister specifically on the MOU. We would be happy to do that. Again, our message would be exactly the same as it is for this committee: the MOU should just be scrapped.

**MR WALL:** The role of the estimates committee is to assist the budget and the direction the government is heading in and then make recommendations accordingly. What would you, on behalf of the MBA, be calling for besides the scrapping of the MOU? What other action needs to be taken to address the union involvement in procurement in the ACT?

**Mr Hopkins:** We have not come here today to talk about the union involvement necessarily. We have not come here to talk about union versus MBA issues. We will deal with those things between the MBA and the union, quite frankly. We are here to talk about how this impacts the ACT budget and what role government can play. I think the simple step for government is to scrap the MOU. There is a whole range of

other detail issues in terms of government procurement that we will work through the relevant department with, such as the method of advertising tenders, trying to give a long-term program for upcoming tenders. With those detail issues, we are working very cooperatively with the department. But the big thing from a whole-of-government point of view is the MOU. That is what we have come here to talk about.

**MR WALL:** I guess what I am asking is this: hypothetically, if the Chief Minister walked out tomorrow and tore up the agreement publicly what else would need to happen for your organisation and your members to have faith that actually that agreement had ended and the practices of the past were no longer going to continue?

**Mr Hopkins:** I think if the MOU were scrapped that would deal with a big part of our issues. As I said, there is a range of other detail issues which we will work through with the department, but that really is our single biggest issue at the moment.

**THE CHAIR:** In your submission you talked about continued investment in skills. Is there adequate investment in skills, and was this addressed in the budget?

**Mr Hopkins:** It is something that we addressed in our submission. It was not something that we have found any specific response to. The majority of ACT construction industry training is funded through the Training Fund Authority, which comes from a levy on industry. That process works very well. In the budget, we cannot see any changes to those arrangements. There would be in the budget from time to time a request for funding around some specific programs. One of the things on the building quality issue we have been talking to government about at the moment is the commencement of a continuing professional development program for the construction industry, which we think would be very valuable.

**MS BURCH:** Testing or something after a couple of years to maintain the licence? Is that—

**Mr Hopkins:** That is a separate issue, which is also part of it. A training program which continually trains builders through their career in the industry would be of benefit. And then maybe some funding associated with that to commence that program. We will continue to deal with the relevant department on that issue.

**MS BURCH:** As a group trainer, what sort of skills do you focus on as group trainer? Is that up to apprentice level?

**Mr Hopkins:** We are a group training organisation, which means that we are the employer for, at the moment, 56 apprentices. We train them, and then we find host employers for the apprentices to do experience. They are predominantly carpentry apprentices; they are mostly learning how to be a carpenter.

**MS BURCH:** So it is mainly carpentry that you focus on? You need more to build even a single dwelling, let alone a high rise. How do you make sure that those other skill sets from an industry—do you work with HIA or CIT?

**Mr Hopkins:** We do. There are other training providers and group training providers



which cover other parts of the industry. We would certainly like to grow the training of civil contractors in the MBA. It is a role which is shared amongst a number of training organisations.

**MS BURCH:** You made mention that you are a group employer as well as a group trainer. They are employed by you—these 56 apprentices?

**Mr Hopkins:** Yes.

**MS BURCH:** When they go out, they are still employed by you under your terms and conditions and obligations.

**Mr Hopkins:** They are, yes. Being a group training organisation means that we employ them and then find host employers for them. At the same time, we provide their training in classrooms in our Fyshwick office.

**MS BURCH:** What is your EBA for your apprentices?

**Mr Hopkins:** We do not have an EBA for our apprentices. We pay them according to the laws and the rates that apply to apprentices.

**MS BURCH:** The base apprentice rates?

**Mr Hopkins:** Yes, that is right.

**MR WALL:** One of the benefits of the group training, from my experience, is that—on a day like today when it is raining, what does the MBA do with the apprentices? Do they get paid?

**Mr Hopkins:** Yes. Exactly; they do. One of the biggest benefits in being an MBA training employee is that we pay you every day of the year regardless of whether it is wet, whether there is no work, whether you are in training or whether you are actually doing work. That is a massive benefit for the student, the apprentice, which they would not get if they were being directly employed by another employer.

**MS BURCH:** So you are saying that other apprentices on wet days do not get paid? Is that what you are referring to?

**Mr Hopkins:** In some other group training organisations and for other employers, if there was no work the employer would not have to pay them, whereas if they are at the MBA we pay them every day of the year regardless. That is, in fact, one of the biggest benefits of it.

**MS BURCH:** I have had two boys go through an apprenticeship and that has not been the case. But the same would apply—permanent paid on wet days would be the 250 workers getting paid well through the light rail self-employment group.

**THE CHAIR:** We will see. We might end it there. Mr Hopkins, thank you for your attendance. A transcript will be provided when it is available for you to review it. If there are any suggestions or corrections you would like to make, we would like to

hear from you. Thank you for presenting to the committee today.

**Mr Hopkins:** Thank you.

**LLOYD, MR JACK**, Childers Group  
**WHITE, MR MICHAEL**, Childers Group

**THE CHAIR:** We welcome you here this afternoon to present to the estimates committee for 2016-17. Could you, for the sake of the record, confirm that you have read the pink privilege card on the table and you understand the implications of privilege.

**Mr White:** We certainly do.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Please be aware that the proceedings today are being recorded; they will be transcribed by Hansard, and that the transcription will be published. And you are being broadcast as well as webstreamed even as we speak. Would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr White:** Yes. We would like to start off today by acknowledging that today is the National Day of Arts Action. It is being held across the country as we speak.

The Childers Group stands for the arts, and we believe that art changes lives. The ACT arts policy has a vision for the future of Canberra to remain the most livable city and one of Australia's most vibrant artistic centres. It recognises that the arts are an integral part for Canberrans and their lives, and for the economic fabric of Canberra, and that the arts help to define our community's identity and give expression to community values. Creativity is acknowledged as fundamental to innovation and business growth.

I notice that in the forum we had earlier in the year, when we had representatives from the three major parties, everyone made a commitment and recognised the importance of the arts along those sorts of lines. I would now like to hand over to Jack, who has a more formal presentation in relation to what we would like to say today.

**Mr Lloyd:** Thank you. I would like to provide you, on the record, with an analysis of the history of ACT arts funding that we have put together. We have collated information from around 1,500 grants distributed between 2003 and 2015. These have been drawn from ACT government annual reports. We are here today because we believe that the measures that are used to identify appropriate allocations to arts activity in the ACT are inappropriate and are leading to declining funding in real terms, in conflict with the principles of the ACT arts policy that Michael has read out.

When you take into account population and inflation growth, and therefore viewing the funding on a service delivery, capacity or opportunity basis, we are going backwards. The decline does not appear to have been addressed in any way in the 2016-17 budget.

You have some graphs in front of you. Referring to figure No 1, we have artsACT grants to individuals and organisations. We will refer to that as the arts fund. On a per capita inflation-adjusted basis, it has decreased from \$24.79 in 2004-05 to a total of \$22.30 in 2015-16. We are concerned that, on all indications from the present budget, this trend will continue. This is a decrease over 12 years of about 10 per cent.

In today's terms, this equates to a shortfall of around \$1 million in arts grant funding compared to 12 years ago. By another measure, as a percentage of total government revenue the proportion allocated to arts funding has decreased from 0.233 per cent in 2004-05 to 0.189 per cent in 2015-16. This is a proportional decrease of 18 per cent. In today's terms, this equates to a shortfall of around \$2 million in arts grant funding compared to 12 years ago.

There is one area where this is particularly evident, and that is the project grant category of the ACT arts fund. There is around a 50 per cent drop in the total number of project grants distributed each year compared to 12 years ago, and the average size of these grants, when adjusted for inflation, has declined around 20 per cent. This is a concern for us for a number of reasons. The availability of grants is how artists have the resources to innovate and develop work that represents Canberra and Australia. The artsACT strategic plan has an accountability measure for the number of artists, arts organisations and arts workers funded by the Australia Council and Minister for the Arts.

It is our experience that projects develop over a number of years. Where excellent applications are rejected solely due to the lack of available funding, this interrupts the potential for work and can in fact invalidate the development investment already made. Likewise, where a project does not receive initial support from artsACT funding, we would argue that this makes it less competitive when seeking funding on a national level.

Grant writing is a skill, like any other, and by reducing the available opportunities for success, this again undermines the capacity of those in this sector to develop their skill. We believe that the continued lack of resourcing for project grants will be a serious impediment to the success of ACT artists on a national level and to the achievement of this accountability with the artsACT strategic plan.

Within the diminishing overall funding picture, key arts organisation and program funding has increased. This is predominantly due to organisations previously funded competitively within the project round now receiving program funding and, over the past 12 years, to the establishment of the Canberra Glassworks and Belconnen Arts Centre. We do absolutely support the strategy of providing these excellent organisations with a pathway to sustainable long-term operations through the program funding and key arts organisation model. However, in most cases year on year funding increases to individual key arts organisations remain on a CPI only basis which does not take into account the growing participant and audience base for these organisations. For our key arts organisations to flourish, we need a vibrant arts ecosystem overall, and the long-term health of these organisations requires experienced artists and arts managers who have found opportunities that they require through the artsACT project funding.

We are also concerned that the resources are not available to accomplish some of the other goals of the artsACT strategic plan for 2015-16. We recognise and applaud the inclusion of \$100,000 towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander initiatives in the budget. In our budget submission we requested similar resourcing for sector development and a research and data plan, both of which were similarly identified in the artsACT strategic plan and we believe should remain priorities.

In line with our budget submission, we request that current and future rounds of project funding be increased by \$500,000 to address some of the decline since 2004 in that area and that a commitment be made to restoring the arts fund as a whole to its previous level of funding prioritisation over the coming four years. Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Thanks for the chart. Is it possible to get each of the charts on a separate page?

**Mr Lloyd:** Absolutely; we can provide that to you.

**THE CHAIR:** Some of the numbers are bit tiny.

**Mr Lloyd:** Yes, absolutely.

**THE CHAIR:** That would be useful.

**Mr Lloyd:** The entire analysis and all of the lists of grants and so on will be made available on the Childers Group website in coming days.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. You touched on it briefly, but how important is it that these funds grow relative to the budget?

**Mr Lloyd:** I think that is an appropriate way to measure it. If you are looking at the proportion of the population who are contributing to the economy as artists—and certainly another one of the measures nominated in the policy is the number of artists who are working in the ACT—the size of the fund growing relative to population seems to be an appropriate measure. In regard to the number of opportunities that decline over time, our concern would be that, with a growing population and a growing number of people with skill and talent in the arts, with the same number of opportunities available, you are going to see positions that are being filled by those people remaining at around the same scope. You will probably see people overqualified for the positions that they are in and a limited number of opportunities for people to enter the sector.

**THE CHAIR:** Do we know how many artists there are in the ACT, and has that number grown? How is that measured, or—

**Mr Lloyd:** I do not believe we have information about whether the number has grown. I am aware that the ACT government produced an economic impact statement of the arts last year, and I believe that figure is in there, but I do not have that available.

**THE CHAIR:** I think the figure in the report is 3.1 per cent of the population.

**Mr Lloyd:** I do not know if there is a trend with that.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, it just seems to be about that.

**Mr White:** I think it is really important to get the concept that the project grant block of money is really like the hub of development of the arts and arts projects. That is

where they all start—new work, work for new artists, the beginning of a theatre project where money is given maybe to a writer. That is where that lot of money comes from, and then that slowly builds after the time.

As a result of that fund not growing, the competition in that area is extreme. When the Cultural Council was around I sat in on grant rounds over a period of seven or eight years, and we would do the evaluation of grants in the project round and rank them according to what they were and you would go down. Then at some point you would be seeing where the line is because of the amount of money in that project grant round. It was often really heart rending and heart destroying to realise really good projects that we would have liked to have funded were not able to be.

If that particular section of the program grant does not increase, then more and more of those projects will fall to one side. That has an impact on people making application to the Australia Council. I did some research into it over what appears to be the 10 years. The number of ACT artists making application to the Australia Council and being successful seems to have been dropping off. I know the theatre area is an area where people have almost given up on making applications.

That project grant is really important, and that is why that quite small increase that we would be seeking in that \$500,000 on an ongoing basis would make so many more projects available to be developed to their full potential.

I

**THE CHAIR:** Is there a link between not getting a grant from the ACT and not getting a grant from the Australia Council?

**Mr White:** I think often there is, because sometimes you are getting funding from both. So you might fund some aspects of your project in relation to some money you are expecting from the Australia Council and some money you are expecting to get from ACT government, and you balance that out. If one happens and one does not, you immediately have to go back and re-look at your project again and say, “Right, we didn’t get the \$25,000 for the designer we were hoping to get from the Australia Council, so where does that leave us in relation to this project? What compromises might we need to make?”

**Mr Lloyd:** The Australia Council would assess projects based on their financial viability. As they ask for information based on the existing support for a project, if they see that it has been supported by the ACT arts fund then absolutely that will go some way towards making it more competitive.

On top of that it is, I would say, a practice—certainly in my own experience—that artsACT grants are seen as being very much the instigator at the very early stages of a project, whereas a project might be left to become a bit more mature before looking at applying for funding through the Australia Council and through something even like catalyst.

**MS BURCH:** I think you answered the question: I was looking at what could be described as a downward trend and then the programs and key arts organisations going up. I wondered if one was compensating for the other, but you are saying it is quite a separate—

**Mr Lloyd:** The overall funding component for arts grants for individuals and organisations as a whole when viewed as either a proportion of total government revenues or on a per capita basis is contracting. Applying those same bases, the key arts and program funding is increasing. Part of that is explained by organisations, such as M16 and ArtSound, applying on a competitive year-by-year basis. Now they have some more security in their funding base, which we believe is appropriate.

**MS BURCH:** It is.

**Mr Lloyd:** But it is really about having a larger slice of a smaller pie.

**MS BURCH:** And I do not think many in the community would argue about that. I would be interested to see where you get the funding from. This is just an artsACT stream of funding. I think it has been raised by Childers Group and elsewhere about other arts-based activities that might come from other directorates. I think TAMS has a graffiti artist at the moment to manage. So how do we get smarter about joining the dots for the artist community that this may not be the only source of support, but accepting it should be the major plank of supporting our artistic community?

**Mr Lloyd:** Film is certainly another area which generally seems to sit outside of this and more amongst industry. We would be delighted to see a broadening of the scope. But looking at it at this level for grants which are administered by artsACT, this is how the government has been accounting for this type of expenditure for 12-plus years, so we think it is an appropriate way of looking at a component of that.

**MS BURCH:** Just looking at the measure as a trend over time.

**Mr Lloyd:** Yes, we have made no analysis of the arts sector as a whole. We have not looked at the Cultural Facilities Corporation, for instance, or some of the other directorates' engagement with the arts. We would be delighted to see those kinds of analyses be part of artsACT's research plan going forward.

**MS BURCH:** Is this an opportunity for groups such as yours to—I will use the words—join the dots around the various components that may be available? Can you think of an easy way of making that a little bit smarter for the arts community?

**Mr White:** In our submission we suggested it would be useful for those other departments—TAMS and health and education—to actually have an officer at a fairly significant level who could be the one who would be responsible for breaking down the walls between various departments and all that sort of stuff. If there were someone that had that kind of role they could be saying, “We understand the arts is a really strong and important path for the building of this city. What is our directorate doing in relation to that? In relation to TAMS, what sort of work are we doing in relation to arts projects? We should be talking to artsACT.”

I think that would be a really good and strong move. Childers has been around and spoken to various members—I think Brendan was spoken to as well—to say that that would be a really important way of collating it. Then that brings that strong advocacy

for the arts through the bureaucracy and into the ministry where people can then say, “Well, arts is not just over there in arts; it has a role in health, it has a role in education, it has a role in policing, drug reform, all of that sort of stuff.” If we could get some of that started—

**Mr Lloyd:** There is certainly within the policy indications that arts and health will be the first interaction of that sort, and we very much look forward to seeing how that progresses.

**Mr White:** I think some of that happens, but it is not coordinated and you think, “Oh, there was that really good graffiti project announced. That’s fantastic, but who was coordinating that? Where does that link into the overall arts strategy and all that sort of stuff?”

**MS BURCH:** Do you think we have got the mix right between one-off, spontaneous funding for emerging artists, new artists, new thought bubbles and then supporting the higher end our disciplines? Do you think we have got the mix right? Because you cannot just concentrate on the high end; you have got to have all.

**Mr Lloyd:** I think it is a really devilish question. I think that the key arts orgs and the program orgs have demonstrated over the past 10 years a really significant growth in the quality of their engagement with the ACT community, certainly in the governance that those organisations are able to attract. There is amazing talent sitting on boards of ACT arts organisations and they do their jobs incredibly well.

What that means is that pressure in one area is causing it to bubble out in other areas, so we are seeing, unfortunately, the decline across the project grants, which may well be the component of the arts funding landscape which is least capable of having a collective voice on what its own needs are. I do not believe there has been a policy driven reason for the decline in project funding; I simply believe we have got the measures wrong, and we need to look at how we can get back to a balance that recognises the importance of all of the funding sources within the ACT.

**MR DOSZPOT:** My question is probably to both of you. I was actually going to raise the issue that you just mentioned about the way that art can cut across a whole range of areas in the community, specifically education. I think there is quite an opportunity, and there are things being done already. I think one of you stated that it is not coordinated, but I think there is scope to really make a bigger impact. I am not making a recommendation to you, but I am just trying to say my perception of the way arts has an opportunity to expand is through education and also through seniors. You have got very rapidly ageing—

**MS BURCH:** You asked me before when I was making comment if there was a question, sorry, Steve.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Excuse the interaction there. My question is: given the additional thoughts you have in different directions and the budget requests you have made, what sort of response or feeling have you got from the government in terms of your budget requests and the reality of what can be given or what has been promised by the government?



**Mr Lloyd:** The impression we get from this budget is that at least there is no bad news. I guess that is the response that we have had.

**THE CHAIR:** The best news is there is no bad news?

**Mr Lloyd:** Yes. So it is something that we would certainly appreciate any more information on about the long-term intentions of developing some of what we see to be some very good recommendations within strategic planning. When it comes to linking with other government departments, priorities for us have been in areas like tourism where we see there is a huge opportunity to profile as a collective the ACT arts scene as a real drawcard for people to visit the ACT or to stay longer in the ACT.

On top of that, though, as you say, the arts is really something which has the capacity to enrich the quality of people's engagement with their community and with their government across every level, from education, mental health, seniors, organisations being able to engage with particular community groups, and the list really goes on. It is hard to imagine a sector of government which would not be enriched by having an arts component added to it, and I think it would be a pretty cost effective way of doing so.

**Mr White:** In our submission our request for a fairly modest \$500,000 to be added particularly into that program category was something that is a disappointment that that has been able to be done, because that again holds back that real creative sort of hub where a lot of that work happens. We have seen that slow decline over the years. I think maybe the last person who had a fairly significant increase was Bill Wood. There was one particular year with that sort of money. We understand all the pressures that are on the budget, but I think in the scheme of the ACT budget, \$500,000 into that particular section was probably only a fairly small amount.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Sure, in comparison.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Burch, a final question?

**MS BURCH:** No, just keep on doing the good work.

**THE CHAIR:** Gentlemen, thank you for your attendance today. If you could perhaps give us a larger version of that, that would be much appreciated.

**Mr Lloyd:** Yes, absolutely.

**THE CHAIR:** A transcript will be available in a couple of days and will be forwarded to you. If you have any alterations or additions you would like to make, the committee would receive them gratefully. We thank you for your endeavours and what you do.

**Sitting suspended from 12.39 to 1.45 pm.**

**MAY, MS FIONA**, Chief Executive Officer, Disability, Aged and Care Advocacy Service

**THE CHAIR:** Good afternoon and welcome to the afternoon session of the first day of the estimates committee hearing for the ACT budget 2016-17. Could you confirm that you have read the pink card on the table, the privilege statement, and that you understand the implications of privilege?

**Ms May:** Yes, I do, thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Please be aware that today's proceedings are being recorded and will be transcribed by Hansard and published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed. Would you like to make an opening statement to the committee?

**Ms May:** I would, thank you. Thank you very much for the chance to take part in today's hearings. As an independent advocacy service, ADACAS provides individual advocacy to people with disability, frail older people and their carers. We also raise issues systemically which are informed by the themes that emerge from our individual work.

Today I wish to raise three issues that we are concerned about and that we did not see addressed in the recent budget. The first of these is elder abuse. There are currently no specific elder abuse activities taking place in Canberra, apart from an unfunded helpline which is not advertised and receives very few calls. The line is answered by staff in the Office for Ageing in the Community Services Directorate. They can do little more than refer people to the police or to legal services.

A number of community organisations who are concerned about the lack of response to elder abuse, including us, Legal Aid, Relationships Australia and COTA, are seeking to find ways to collaborate to respond to complex elder abuse cases, without being resourced to do so.

The new safer families initiative is designed to respond to violence against women and children. However, most often elder abuse also occurs within families. There are some differences between elder abuse and domestic violence within intimate relationships, but there are also some commonalities.

Like DV, elder abuse is often about power and control. Typically, this is an adult child taking control of the finances, assets, movements and choices of a frail parent. Parts of the safer families initiative then might also be able to respond well to elder abuse. But how will the government ensure that this is the case? How will services that are focused on women and children domestic violence be supported and encouraged to widen their focus to include cases of elder abuse? And how will the gaps be filled?

Wednesday just past was Elder Abuse Awareness Day. The minister announced a screening of some community service announcement ads and a small project for elder abuse training. However, this is far from sufficient to adequately address and respond

to elder abuse. I urge the government not to wait until a high-profile tragedy occurs, resulting in loss of life or significant harm to a frail older person before taking action to prevent and respond to elder abuse. The ACT trails behind many other jurisdictions in its response to elder abuse. It is time for a proactive response that raises awareness and puts in place responses that meet the needs of vulnerable, frail older people in Canberra.

My second issue of concern is the ongoing role of the ACT government in meeting the needs of people with disability, aside from the national disability insurance scheme. The budget includes some measures that aim to complete the orderly transition to the NDIS for service delivery for these people.

There are also a few other elements in the budget which we welcome and which will benefit people with a disability, such as a greater number of accessible homes through social housing renewal and more disability-accessible buses. However, other elements disregard disability issues. One element of the safer families project, for instance, is access to justice through interpreters for people who do not speak English. But it appears to disregard those who might need AUSLAN or some other disability-specific translation.

Similarly, the safer families initiative does not address the additional vulnerability to abuse that people with disability experience, including those who live in group home settings and are specifically excluded from the family violence legislation which was introduced alongside the budget.

The budget's social inclusion statement included no new activities beyond NDIS for people with disability. I have seen no evidence that the involve initiative has gained any momentum or achieved any outcomes with people with disability in its first year.

The ACT government continues to have a role in ensuring that the national disability strategy is implemented. Transport, housing, health, education and justice all raise issues of disability. How is the government going to ensure that policy in these areas adequately addresses disability without a skilled policy area to drive that?

We understand that four jobs will move from Disability ACT into the community participation group. We understand that these will be around the ASO6 level and will not necessarily be filled by people who have any experience in, or expertise about, disability issues. There has been no commitment to fill any of the positions with a person who themselves has disability. This is very concerning.

The government should continue to play a role in driving social change to address issues of discrimination, marginalisation and vulnerability for people with disability. As an example, ADACAS is currently doing work on supported decision-making, an initiative which seeks to ensure that people with disability are active decision-makers and not subject to guardianship when they could be supported to decide instead. This is not something that can be delivered only through individual support packages, and it is something that affects all other mainstream sectors in our community. The ACT government needs to recognise that it continues to have a responsibility to fund activities such as this for the Canberra community at large.

Finally, I was disappointed that there were no employment initiatives in the budget that seek to enable older people and people with disability to find and attain work. While some budget measures recognise that we are living longer and therefore will need to work longer, there is nothing that addresses jobs for older people. People with disability are also under-represented in employment.

The Human Rights Commission's report *Willing to work* provides a good analysis of the barriers to work for these groups and suggests some strategies that are applicable to the ACT. The ACT government can improve employment outcomes for these groups through its own actions. It can become a model employer for these two groups of workers.

ADACAS would welcome evidence from the government regarding its track record with these workers. Could the government provide data on the numbers of older workers and workers with disability that it employs? As a measure of diversity of its recruitment practices, could it also be asked to provide evidence of how many employees have been recruited in the past year, two years, five years? And are there people in these two groups? Setting targets has been shown to be an effective way of driving action. Perhaps it is time to reopen the conversation about employment targets for people with disability and older people in the public service.

The government can also influence the employment strategies of other ACT employers. It can do this through its buying power, seeking to procure goods and services from employers who have a diverse workforce and who are committed to diversity principles. It could also do this through working with the Business Chamber and others to drive attitude change to older workers and people with disability.

Earlier this year National Disability Services released a report about the economic benefits of the NDIS to the ACT. That report identifies that there will be up to 1,500 people with disability and their carers who are looking for work as a result of the NDIS in Canberra. But where are the jobs? What is the government doing to ensure that the economic benefits that this group represents can be realised by ensuring that suitable jobs are available for them? Research has shown that people with disability are loyal workers, but they need jobs that meet their needs. There is more that could be done in this area.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today, and I welcome the chance to have this conversation with you.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. We will start with Mr Doszpot.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Good afternoon, Ms May, and thank you very much for that quite passionate presentation of your concerns. I am shadow minister for ageing and I do share some of the concerns that you talked about already. But I also have some questions to ask of you.

**Ms May:** Great.

**MR DOSZPOT:** You posed questions to the government, through the committee. Have you put those questions to the relevant minister in the government at all?

**Ms May:** I have not had an opportunity to do that so far, no.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Is that something you intend doing?

**Ms May:** I would be very happy to do so. I would also be interested to hear what they might let the committee know about them when you talk to them.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Yes, of course, and we will be taking this up when the appropriate ministers appear before us.

**Ms May:** Great.

**MR DOSZPOT:** The issues you raise are very relevant. I have had people making representations as well and we are also making moves in this regard. You talk about the figures relating to elder abuse and the potential for the power and control that people exert, and also taking a hold of people's finances. There is a lot of anecdotal evidence on a lot of this. Do you have case studies that relate to some of these? Do you have people who have come to you on these?

**Ms May:** Yes, we do. ADACAS has over a number of years had a number of cases each year that relate to elder abuse. Often, those have been financial abuse, usually by family members, sometimes by somebody else known to the person. Often, there is little we can do, apart from get the power of attorney or guardianship orders changed, which stops further harm but does not necessarily recoup for the person the money that has been lost because somebody has taken it.

**MR DOSZPOT:** What is the process? When you get somebody complaining about such a situation occurring, what is the next step? Whom can you go to, from a government point of view, to report your concerns about what is going on?

**Ms May:** There is not a systemic thing that we can do really but, for individual cases, there are some things we can do. If it is financial abuse by somebody who has power of attorney, we can go to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal and seek to have that power of attorney revoked and somebody else given the responsibility of looking after the financial matters for the person.

If, however, it is psychological abuse or neglect or those sorts of abuse situations, those are much harder to resolve, often because the older person themselves is very frightened to actually take action against a person who is a member of their family. The options that are before them right now are things like take out a personal protection order, which involves going to court, or reporting your family member to the police. These are not things that a frail older person is usually willing to do.

Then we find ourselves quite stuck, because there really are not very many more options available right now to respond to elder abuse, other than those legal mechanisms that really are a bit of a blunt instrument when it comes to family relationships.

**MR DOSZPOT:** In terms of health-related issues—I guess when you have a look at

the potential for these situations to be exploited when people have got dementia and so forth—is there a health-related authority that you can go to on those issues?

**Ms May:** We raise complaints with the complaints processes through ACT Health. We also raise complaints through complaints mechanisms with the aged care sector where those things are related to the quality of service that the person is receiving. Often, elder abuse does not involve the service provider. It involves other people in the life of a person. Then there is really not somewhere that we can go.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Within the family situation, you have also got people who may be already authorised to act as carer or as legal guardian and so forth. I guess that would make things a bit more difficult to look into as well, from your point of view as an advocate?

**Ms May:** Yes, if the guardian is the person who is committing the abuse, it can be very difficult, other than going to ACAT and getting that overturned. The other thing we find is that there can be real tensions between different members of family. We might hear from one sibling who says, “My sibling is doing these terrible things to mum,” but it is very hard sometimes to sort that out, particularly if mum is living with dementia and cannot tell us herself or is too afraid to tell us herself what is really going on.

A lot of the problem with elder abuse is quite hidden. It is hidden because people are ashamed to talk about it, because people do not know that older people have rights, and that it is actually not okay to get early access to your inheritance or some of the other things that people think that they can do. So there is a broad community awareness and cultural change agenda that needs to sit alongside any other responses to elder abuse that we might put in place.

**MR DOSZPOT:** With your experience in this, and I am specifically speaking to the elder abuse situation that you have raised as a very important issue, apart from COTA, which other organisations are active in this field in association with you?

**Ms May:** Legal Aid and the community legal centres also do see cases of people who are bringing issues of concern around elderly people and abuse. Relationships Australia is offering a mediation service for older people. Mediation only works if all parties are willing to come to the table. It has a place, but it is not a full solution. Of course, there is the advocacy service that we are providing.

**MR DOSZPOT:** But there is no overall government attention paid to this at the moment?

**Ms May:** No, there is not. There is no actual funding for elder abuse initiatives themselves from the ACT government.

**MS BURCH:** There is an information hotline or something?

**Ms May:** It is not funded. The information hotline sits within the Community Services Directorate. It is a phone sitting somewhere upstairs in the building across the way here, answered by the staff of the government who also have lots of other

jobs to do. There is not a person who is dedicated to answering that phone number. They only receive between of five and 10 calls a month to that line, generally. And it is not advertised or promoted in any way, really. It is a resource that could be grown, but it is not really very active at the moment.

**MR DOSZPOT:** So what happens? Does the phone get answered?

**Ms May:** It does get answered. Sometimes they just refer the person to ADACAS, to a legal aid service or to the police. But there is really not a very good sort of foundation of responses sitting behind that phone service that people can try.

**MS BURCH:** Just to finish off on that, with power of attorney, you mention that power of attorney can be a safeguard but that it can be a hindrance. Have you and your various counterparts across the states thought of any changes that can be built into power of attorney—whether there are safeguards that can be built in? For example, you can have two people with power of attorney that can act severally or jointly. If you have two and they have to work jointly, there is an inbuilt safeguard. But not every older person has two people that they can—

**Ms May:** That is right.

**MS BURCH:** So the question is whether the national brains trust on this sort of thing has thought about it.

**Ms May:** The national brains trust on this is going further than that and saying that, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, we should not be making substitute decisions unless all attempts to provide support to the person to make their own decisions have been tried and have not worked. We have participated in the review of guardianship law which is currently being undertaken by the Law Reform Council. It was due to be handed back to the government last September. It is obviously way overdue now. But we have hopes that that will make a difference to guardianship law and to power of attorney, and change the dynamic around who is making decisions for people.

**MS BURCH:** I was just curious about how you could follow that through. Moving to employment for older people and for people with a disability, within the government's employment strategies there are targets. It would be interesting to see where we are up to with those. If you move out of the government sector into the private sector, there are diverse large organisations and service organisations. What do we need to do to bring them along on this journey? COTA will put out pamphlets about the benefits of older people being employed but we cannot impose targets. We can impose targets on ourselves as a government employer, but we cannot do that in the non-government area. How do we increase that leverage?

**Ms May:** There are potentially other sorts of incentives that could be explored around employment. Various incentives for employment have been used in organisations in the past. The other thing is about changing the culture regarding how we value older people. At the moment, if an older person turns up for a job interview and they are, say, getting close to 60, somebody says, "They're not going to stay very long." In fact if you look at the turnover rates, gen Y do not stay in a position for very long, either.

So why is an older person being discriminated against when a gen Y person, who is very mobile in their employment, is not being discriminated against? I think it is an attitude change that we need. We need to have a conversation about how people who are older bring wisdom and experience. It is not a threat to an employer who is younger than them, and they have a lot to offer in the remaining amount of time that they are working. It is absolutely a hard problem to solve.

**MS BURCH:** The same principles would apply for people with a disability?

**Ms May:** The other thing with people with a disability is about job design. A person with disability might be able to do some aspects of a receptionist job, for instance, but they might not be able to do all the aspects of a receptionist job. So how about we rethink how we design the job of a receptionist to enable it to perhaps be done by two people who both work part time or split a job in different ways, so that there are people with disability who can do the parts of the jobs that work well for them, and have other people who do the parts of the job that do not? There is a job design question that really has not been explored very well, and I think it offers exciting possibilities.

**MS BURCH:** There is a group that has won a national award. Having talked to them, it is about people who want to take the step to employment but are a little hesitant because they do not think they can do it. Do short-term contracts have a place in that education and cultural change in organisations?

**Ms May:** I think they do. There is certainly an opportunity to demonstrate, through short-term employment opportunities, the benefits that a person with disability brings, and that will hopefully change the culture of the organisations around whom they might employ in the future.

**THE CHAIR:** Going back to elder abuse, is there any jurisdiction that is doing it right? Is there a jurisdiction that has, for instance, an elder abuse reduction strategy and is implementing it?

**Ms May:** There are advocacy organisations like ours in some of the other jurisdictions who are funded to provide some specific elder abuse training and awareness raising, and also more advocacy around elder abuse. Advocare in WA would be one, and ARAS in South Australia is another. So there are states that are investing quite heavily in elder abuse strategies and elder abuse cultural change information. The ads that have been airing on television this week were actually developed as material for publication in South Australia. The ACT managed to use some little bits of that for free, or almost for free. So that is great. There is some leadership being shown that we could be able to follow, and use their experience.

Some of the reports that come to things like the elder abuse conferences that happen around the country show that changing cultural awareness of elder abuse is one of the biggest things that contribute to change in elder abuse experiences, or a reduction in them.

**MS BURCH:** Is that cultural generally? Is it nationality et cetera?



**Ms May:** It is not nationality; it is the culture of our communities: the way that we think about older people, the way we think about and understand older people's rights and the way that we understand what our obligations are as powers of attorney, guardians or family members, in looking after our older people.

**THE CHAIR:** In regard to funding and some programs in WA and South Australia, does either of those states have an elder abuse strategy?

**Ms May:** They do. South Australia has an elder abuse strategy.

**THE CHAIR:** Is it is a good strategy? Is it reasonable? It is the only one; therefore it is great?

**Ms May:** It is reasonable. It is very wordy. If I wrote one, I do not know that I would write something as lengthy as that. But it is good.

**THE CHAIR:** A good starting point would be at least a strategy to say, "Here are the things that we need to address, and here are some programs to address those," and then get the funding to carry it out?

**Ms May:** That is right.

**THE CHAIR:** Is there any detail on the amount of elder abuse? I take it from what you said earlier that nobody has been able to really collate those statistics.

**Ms May:** This report, which I am happy to leave with you, is the national elder abuse annual report for 2014-15, which Advocare in Western Australia have put together by drawing what they can from the other jurisdictions. It shows the amount of elder abuse across an amalgamation of the national data. I am very happy to leave that with you.

**THE CHAIR:** That is fine. If the committee can take up something with the government in elder abuse, it would be to have some sort of strategy to address it, along with proper funding, and advertising of the program to make it work?

**Ms May:** That would be a great step.

**THE CHAIR:** With the issue of disability beyond the NDIS, you mentioned Auslan. Is the provision of Auslan an issue, as far as you are aware?

**Ms May:** When I was looking through the budget papers, I noticed the interpreter service, as part of the safer families strategy. I thought, "Terrific." I then looked at the detail and I thought, "It's only for community languages. It does not include disability." That means a person who is deaf, for instance, still has a barrier to accessing justice because they cannot have Auslan in a court setting—those kinds of things. We already know that people with disability experience lots of barriers around access to justice. That one struck me as being a simple opportunity to include disability languages, not just cultural languages, in that initiative to make it more accessible for people.

**MS BURCH:** Do you think it could be hidden in there and just not expressed?

**Ms May:** I did check with officials who were at the budget lock-up last week, and they told me it was cultural languages.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you for the Advocare Inc national elder abuse report. It says 4.6 per cent of older people may experience elder abuse, and that seems to be from a Western Australian study. It has a list of cases, and it says there were 101 cases in the ACT for whatever the reporting period was—2014-15. Do you think that is an accurate figure? That is for the reported cases.

**Ms May:** I think that is the tip of the iceberg. I think there is a lot of elder abuse that goes unreported. We certainly have people who call our office and inquire about elder abuse issues and then decide they will not take it further, often because of that issue of frail old mum not wanting to put Johnny in prison for having taken her money or for growing drugs in her back bedroom, or whatever it is that he is doing.

**THE CHAIR:** You talked about guardianship and orders for people to be under the care of their loved ones or other people who are appointed. How is the recent merger of the Public Trustee and the Public Advocate's office working? Is that a satisfactory arrangement?

**Ms May:** We had mixed views about that. We did put in some opinions when the attorney called for views around that change. Our experience at the moment is that the public guardianship team has undergone an enormous amount of turnover. There has been a great deal of uncertainty for a while. It now has essentially a new team in there, and we have been working very well with a lot of those guardians. We have not yet had a lot of cases where there has been tension between the guardian and the trustee. That is a risk that we identified that could come up; it is a question of how that will be managed. But it is early days yet to see how the response happens.

**THE CHAIR:** It is good that you are working well with the people there. Does ADACAS have a view about the loss of experience with the three senior guardians now effectively gone?

**Ms May:** The new team seems to be very good. They have brought in some good people with good experience. Someone, for instance, who used to work in the Human Rights Commission is now across in that team, and I think that brings a good perspective to guardianship issues that they might not have had before. There were potentially some transition problems but it is probably a good team.

**THE CHAIR:** Final questions, members?

**MR DOSZPOT:** Yes. You make this statement in answer to a survey question:

There is no articulation of how disability issues will be progressed with the closing of Disability ACT.

That is a pretty telling statement, and thank you for bringing it to us. What I am about to say is not a reflection on you. You are getting all of this information in. If you were

not providing this to us at the moment, what else would you do with that information? Is that something that you would normally raise with the relevant government ministers?

**Ms May:** We have been raising it with the officials of CSD. I have had a long engagement with them over many years, of course, and have been aware of the changes that have been going on. They have let us know that this is what is happening, and they do know that we are concerned that this is not an ideal solution. It does appear that the ongoing role that the ACT government has in disability issues has not really been carefully thought through. And it is true nationally, I think. Everybody is focusing on the NDIS, and they are forgetting about everything else that is in the national disability strategy. There is a wide-ranging raft of things that were policy priorities for governments that right now are sitting there quietly being ignored, because the NDIS is consuming everyone's attention. That cannot last. We will need to address some of those other issues, and the ACT government needs to be able to play its part in that policy debate. I am concerned it will not have the resources to do that.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I repeat what I said before: thank you for bringing these matters to our attention. From a community point of view, we will have to discuss it. The issue about how disability issues will be progressed with the closing of Disability ACT certainly should be a high priority for us. The other one that you mention is:

There are no measures in the budget which will improve employment outcomes for older workers or people with disabilities.

That is also a very telling statement, along with the comments you made about elder abuse and so forth. Thank you for the information that you have presented to us, and we will see if we can give some support.

**Ms May:** You are welcome. Thank you very much for your time.

**THE CHAIR:** Fiona, thank you. Our time is over. The transcript will be provided for proofreading, correction or any additions that you would like to make. Thank you very much for the document.

**WRIGLEY, MR ANDREW**, Executive Director, Association of Independent Schools of the ACT

**McNEVIN, MR TIM**, Deputy Executive Director, Association of Independent Schools of the ACT

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome to the Association of Independent Schools of the ACT. Before you on the table on the pink card is a privilege statement. Could you please confirm to the committee that you have read the statement and understand the implications of privilege?

**Mr Wrigley:** Yes, thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Please be aware that proceedings are being recorded and will be transcribed and then published by Hansard and that proceedings are currently being broadcast as well as webstreamed. Would you like to make an opening statement to the committee?

**Mr Wrigley:** Thank you for the opportunity to address the committee in response to the ACT budget 2016-17. I am Executive Director of the Association of Independent Schools, and joining me today is the deputy executive director, Tim McNevin.

The association has a mission of the advancement of educational excellence through the promotion of a strong, independent school sector in the ACT. Our values are independence, choice, diversity, collegiality, respect and fairness. The association represents 18 independent schools in Canberra. These 18 schools embody an incredibly diverse range of styles, pedagogical approaches, communities and sizes. They include community schools, Christian schools, Anglican schools, a Steiner school, a Montessori school, Islamic schools, a school for disadvantaged and at-risk students, and independent Catholic schools.

Each school is unique and varied in different ways, and each school works in partnership with the parents to get the best education outcomes for each student. Together they educate over 14,000 students, just under 20 per cent of the ACT student population. In the past 12 years enrolment growth in the independent school sector has been 28 per cent.

The association made a submission as part of the government's budget consultation process and in this submission there were four main focus areas: supporting students with disability; support for capital investment; support for independent school preschool students; and support for broadband infrastructure to independent schools.

The association notes that little attempt appears to have been made to respond to these areas of main focus. In the time line provided and noting the committee's desire to ask questions, I would now like to emphasise two of the focus areas and briefly comment on another two.

Firstly with regard to support for students with a disability, the submission requests that ACT government review the overall level of funding for students with disability in ACT independent schools. Our budget submission asked ACT government to

remove students with disability from the funding model. Fundamentally the association believes that a student's individual level of need should be the basis on which funding is provided, irrespective of the school they attend and which level of government provides that funding.

As previously stated, increasing numbers of parents are choosing to send their children to ACT independent schools, and this trend is also evident with parents of children with a disability. According to ACT government school census figures, over the past 10 years there has been a 397 per cent increase in the number of special education needs enrolments in ACT independent schools.

Along with the growth in numbers, schools are finding there has also been an increase in the complexity of the needs of these students, and this is presenting challenges as to how best to meet those needs, as, of course, it is in all schools. Resourcing of students with a disability according to their level of need no matter which school they attend is a fundamental proposition of the association.

A centrepiece of the ACT government's education package in this budget was \$21.5 million allocated to respond to the recommendations of the schools for all report. From its very genesis ACT independent schools were heavily involved in both the consultation and development of the report, are referenced in the recommendations from the report and are working towards appropriate implementation of those recommendations.

The budget announcement was presented as an allocation of new dollars to support the implementation of the report's 50 recommendations, and none of that \$21.5 million in funding was provided to independent schools to provide what the sector has always presumed would be a jurisdictional approach to responding to the recommendations.

Our members are stunned that there was such an approach to this funding. By not including independent schools in this allocation, the schools' communities will now bear the additional resourcing requirements that will inevitably flow as schools work to best respond to implementing the report's recommendations.

With regard to support for capital investment, much of the 28 per cent growth over the past 12 years has been steady growth but on a few occasions schools have made a decision to significantly increase their capacity, and this has resulted in sharp year-on-year increases. The lesson that is there is continuing strong demand for places in independent schools and when capacity is increased those spots are taken up.

I note there is currently considerable commentary about the stress on local school capacity in the ACT. The ACT government should recognise to a greater degree the contribution that ACT independent schools make to the education of young people. Nearly 20 per cent of the school population is educated in independent schools and it is primarily the parents of those school communities who fund the cost of capital infrastructure in those schools. The cost of financing this capital infrastructure is very high.

With its budget submission, the association presented a proposal to government to

support capital investment in independent schools. We note the support from ACT government to provide increased capacity to non-government preschools. This is funded by a redirection of the interest subsidy scheme, which ceased in 2003. However, this does nothing to address the very significant challenges that schools face in both maintaining their existing infrastructure as well as planning for future growth. The proposal put by the association enables non-government schools to access finance at a rate that is cheaper than commercially available. With such a large percentage of students in independent schools, strong growth and anecdotal evidence of continuing strong demand, schools need to be in a position to respond to these pressures.

Our third priority area is support for independent school and preschool students. Preschool students are now counted in the school census, and it is widely acknowledged that benefits accrue to a student through an excellent early learning program. The non-government sector in the ACT has been excluded from the universal access national partnership since its inception, and this has placed a burden on those school communities in supporting these important early years of learning.

The association asks the ACT government to include independent preschool enrolments as part of the per capita recurrent funding to ACT independent schools. This could be set at a rate of 50 per cent of the current ACT funding to students in independent schools.

Finally, the fourth focus area of the association is support for broadband infrastructure to independent schools. The ACT government has embraced the notion of Canberra as a smart city and celebrates the contribution that the education sector makes to our economy. With the commencement of NAPLAN online in the very near future and recognising the position of the ACT as the leading jurisdiction with respect to raw NAPLAN results, it would be prudent of government to ensure that all schools will be able to participate in this national assessment to the same degree.

The association believes an opportunity exists to provide high-quality, high-speed technology infrastructure to all sectors of education, which will enable greater levels of student engagement and achievement and more innovative teaching and learning practices.

I thank you again for the opportunity to address the committee. It is disappointing to note that none of the items in the association's budget submission have been supported through the budget, and it is difficult to understand, therefore, how the ACT government is supporting independent schools, which so many parents have clearly chosen. We would welcome your questions.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Wrigley. Ms Burch will commence with a question.

**MS BURCH:** Thank you, and welcome, gentlemen. I read your submission and recognise the choice of parents of sending their kids to an independent school. Just on capital and land, what are the current arrangements for you to plan ahead? In media recently, and I think Mr Doszpot's pot-stirring, there are stories about school capacity. Your schools are at capacity as well, so how do you go about being a collective rather than a system, but you still need to plan ahead on behalf of that collective? How does

it currently work, and what do you think a better way of working would be?

**Mr Wrigley:** I will take the answer in two parts, if I may. The first part is certainly the anecdotal evidence is that there are very strong demands in waiting lists for independent schools. The growth rate in school enrolments has flattened off a little bit in the past couple of years because schools are basically at capacity. This year there was a slight difference; one of our schools decided to triple-stream primary school—an increase of 200 kids straight away. So, as I said in our address just earlier, the idea is that if schools can respond to the community demand, then those places will be taken up. But it is a bit of a haphazard approach in the planning of it. Tim might have some thoughts about suggestions of how that might be approached in the future.

**Mr McNevin:** We are aware there is a conversation that occurs in the government sector about how they allocate land for government schools in greenfield sites, new development areas and the like. We believe there is an opportunity to extend that conversation to include not only the non-government school sector but also other sectors of education.

If we use Molonglo Valley as an example, there is going to be significant expansion of population there. We know the Coombs school has been planned for and there is another government school that has been planned for. However, there has been no what we would regard as a strategic level conversation about what are the other needs of the other sectors of school education and what are the other demands of the community in terms of choice of education in the Molonglo Valley. That would include early childhood education. That may include tertiary education, but we believe it definitely would include an option for non-government schooling and, from our perspective, independent schooling.

In the absence of that sort of strategic-level conversation, as Andrew rightly points out, it is haphazard. We think the notion of first in, best dressed is not the way to go. We think there is a better opportunity. We think it should be at a strategic level, and we think that all sectors of education should be included.

**MS BURCH:** Because some of your members are quite small schools and they have particular focus and may not have an interest in expanding.

**Mr Wrigley:** Absolutely.

**MS BURCH:** Yet others would absolutely have an interest in going to different geographical areas. So that goes to your point about how they do that. And probably similarly for the Catholic education system, they share a similar view to you about how you do that. Are you saying you are having those conversations or you are not?

**Mr McNevin:** We are putting the idea of a strategic conversation forward in whatever forums we can. It is being embraced as a solid and positive idea by some, and we are not getting engagement with others.

**MS BURCH:** Whilst I would always encourage growth in public education—I think the census data is slowly putting us ahead and there is consistent growth—the reality is there will always be a chunk of our kids in the non-government sector, and so that

is your point, is it not? How to be smart about forecasting that into the infrastructure build?

**Mr Wrigley:** Yes. What is traditional in the ACT is a 60-40 split—it fluctuates slightly from year to year—of government and non-government schools. And in the non-government schools it is about an even split, depending on the year, between the independents and the systemic Catholic schools. So in thinking about projecting forward, it think it is reasonable that there should be that similar sort of split.

The other thing is that while we talk about schools who may wish to expand or create second campuses, there is no capacity to be able to say to those education providers who are not in the ACT that there are opportunities should they wish to take them up.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Welcome to the committee hearings, gentlemen. With respect to the discussions we are having, I have listened to them quite intently for the past eight years. I must extend my sympathies to you for the efforts that you have had to make over the past eight years in talking to four separate education ministers. Maybe—just maybe—one of these days one of them will understand the crux of the issue we are talking about. There are a whole host of things that you have already spoken about. I would like to go back to the beginning of the discussion, regarding the Shaddock report findings. Your association was broadly supportive of its recommendations. Can I ask what your association and member schools have done to progress the recommendations?

**Mr Wrigley:** The 50 recommendations mention specifically individual independent schools or the association in 26 of them. Another four are what I would call whole of government, for example, the approach to restrictive practices or a review of SCAN. With respect to the 26 recommendations, in the response the association, on behalf of the member schools, noted the recommendations and provided some advice as to how they may be pursued in the implementation. We cannot take a systemic approach. Since that time the association has been a very active participant in the project board. We are also participating, where appropriate, in different project groups. We have, as a standing item at both executive committee and full board meetings, the response to the *Schools for all* report and the implementation of the recommendations as they pertain to independent schools.

The executive committee relatively recently, a month or so ago, approved and endorsed the formation of a subcommittee to draw the expertise from the schools themselves, to look more deeply and engagingly at the recommendations for independent schools and to draw information from the individual schools so that it could then be welded into the report to the oversight committee. More importantly, it is an opportunity for schools to be able to articulate what they are doing currently which falls within the auspices of the recommendations that have been put forward and to reflect on the ways in which some things can be done better.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Has your board made any assessment of what the financial implications are for your member schools to deliver any or all of the recommendations, or perhaps the ones you are looking at specifically, and how your association or individual schools might address that in a financial sense?



**Mr Wrigley:** As a board of the association they have not. As individual schools they probably have. I have information and comment from individual schools that when they are looking at particular recommendations—let us take, for example, calming or sensory spaces—they are wondering how they can be resourced in their school. While the recommendation for increasing the number of school psychologists was specifically to the Education Directorate, independent schools are definitely looking at that and looking at the provision. In fact, in a way to respond to that recommendation, the association has entered into a contract to provide counselling services to member schools, and particularly for those schools that do not necessarily have those capacities at the moment.

Schools from the very start have wondered about the resourcing implications. It is not simply about the raw dollar; it is actually about personnel implications. One school told me very recently that they employ 14 staff members to provide the particular supports for the students identified as students with disability in their school. Their cost to do that, just for personnel costs, is over \$800,000 per year. The only way that they can get that is to make that a portion of the student fees, and it is not an insignificant portion. The costs for that are taken across the school community. The short answer is that I do not have the precise figures.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Is that something you will be looking at?

**Mr Wrigley:** I do not know that the association would ask that from an association perspective, but we would ask individual schools to provide some suggestion as to what that resourcing would be in their context.

**MR DOSZPOT:** You mentioned that the increase in the number of children with disability coming into the independent sector increased by 397 per cent. What number of students would that involve?

**Mr Wrigley:** Currently, the number of students, according to the February census this year, is 378. That is nearly 13 per cent of the student enrolment in independent schools.

**MR DOSZPOT:** How does that relate to government figures?

**Mr Wrigley:** Government schools have 2,148 identified students with a disability. That is 72 per cent of all those students who were identified. Independent schools have nearly 13 per cent.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Going back to your expectations when you originally met to discuss the Shaddock review and the implementation of the recommendations, were you under the impression that you would be working to a budget-related exercise here as well? \$21.5 million has been allocated, but, as you point out, not \$1 has gone to independent or Catholic schools. Was there any expectation that there would be a budget allocation to them?

**Mr Wrigley:** From the start there was an expectation that everybody, every school, had skin in the game in this. That was a stated requirement and understanding from the previous minister that was accepted wholeheartedly by the board, which is all of

our schools. I would suggest that the conversation about resourcing was fairly early in how the schools or the association would respond. But in the field of the question as to how this is going to be resourced and whether resourcing would be available, the rhetoric was certainly about a response that it was for all schools, and all schools would be included in the response. But there was no engagement in pre-budget conversations about what level of resourcing would be provided.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Have you taken this up directly with the fourth education minister of this government?

**Mr Wrigley:** We have certainly taken this up directly with Minister Rattenbury.

**MR DOSZPOT:** What was the response?

**Mr Wrigley:** We were advised that this in fact was not new money and that the \$21½ million comes out of the NERA funding for government schools.

**THE CHAIR:** The issue of broadband to independent schools: has there been a costing of how much that would cost to bring them all up to the standard of ACT government schools?

**Mr McNevin:** Not at this stage. There is a fairly broad ranging conversation that we are starting to have with stakeholders such as the Canberra Business Council, the CBR Innovation Network and other members of the Canberra Business Council's education task force that was set up under their Canberra 2030 conversation. We know that the government system has a 100 megabit per second fibre optic network that connects all of those schools. We know that there is a private organisation in the ACT that has a high capacity network that connects most of Canberra's tertiary institutions and a number of our cultural institutions. We know that the Catholic systemic schools have a network that connects their schools. So the question we are asking is: what would it take to connect those networks and extend those networks to include not only the independent sector but other members of the education community in the ACT? As to cost, that could be a fairly rubbery figure, depending on who you ask. Without knowing a precise figure, the indication is that it is not as expensive as one would expect.

**THE CHAIR:** Because the existing infrastructure probably goes quite close to most of the schools.

**Mr McNevin:** That is exactly right. You may have noticed in the press recently the mayor of Adelaide has announced a project very similar to the one that we are suggesting, in trying to position Adelaide as a smart city by connecting all of their education institutions by a similar network. So it is not unprecedented that this sort of idea has been advanced.

**THE CHAIR:** For the independent preschools, have you costed what level of support would be required or is desired?

**Mr Wrigley:** The budget submission suggests a starting point might be 50 per cent of what the allocation to an independent school primary student is. That is based on

15 hours as being what is required under the universal access agreement. Thirty hours is a usual school week. That is generally where it is. We would like to have a conversation about that in the future.

**MS BURCH:** Going back to broadband, there is a universal agreement that 18 individual schools would buy into this smarter network of broadband. You have some very small—

**Mr Wrigley:** Yes, very small.

**MS BURCH:** ones down in the hollows of Gordon, and in Lanyon valley. There are small schools, going right up to Burgmann college. Some of them will have better capacity to do this.

**Mr McNevin:** Absolutely. I think your question is premised on the fact that it is an expense model. We believe that there is a revenue stream that could be generated through such infrastructure. The business case is being developed that would demonstrate that revenue opportunity, and that would then mitigate the sort of expense that you are suggesting. Obviously, that would be a barrier, and in order to make this as accessible as possible you would want to keep those barriers as low as possible.

**MS BURCH:** In your budget submission did you have that business case? How far has that progressed?

**Mr Wrigley:** No, the submission was in October last year and this work has been moving—

**MS BURCH:** Is there any more information you could provide to the committee on that?

**Mr McNevin:** We hoped to have it for today. We do not have it at the moment.

**MS BURCH:** We have two more weeks of estimates, Mr McNevin, so perhaps—

**Mr McNevin:** We will do what we can.

**MS BURCH:** Yes. It would be useful.

**Mr McNevin:** I agree.

**MR DOSZPOT:** That is a good point. We can take additional information on board. It would be quite interesting to have that. With respect to capital investment support, you have already spoken about that in some detail. Is there anything else you want to add to that? I understand where you are coming from and I think you have been quite clear on it. Is there any other point you want to make on capital investment and what it can do to assist?

**Mr Wrigley:** The realisation is that some significant pressures will be placed on school enrolments across the country. Yesterday the NCEC put out a media release

quoting the increase in birth rates which will hit primary schools and then flow into high schools in the very near future. The ACT will not be immune from that. Providing support for capital to increase capacity in independent schools, irrespective of what people think about independent schools, is a sound economic decision to be made by government because the dollars spent there are efficient having regard to the overall cost of educating students either in non-government schools or in government schools.

**MR DOSZPOT:** There are a number of other questions I would like to ask. I will put them on notice and it would be interesting to get your feedback on those.

**Mr Wrigley:** Sure.

**THE CHAIR:** We might leave it there. Thank you very much for your attendance today. A transcript of the hearing will be provided for correction or clarification. We would welcome that. And we look forward to receiving some additional work on a possible broadband network.

**ROBERTSON, MS EMMA**, Director, Youth Coalition of the ACT  
**WATTS, MS HANNAH**, Project and Development Officer, Youth Coalition of the ACT

**THE CHAIR:** We welcome the Youth Coalition of the ACT to this afternoon's hearing. Could you, for the information of the committee, confirm that you have read and understand the implications of the privilege statement there on the pink card in front of you.

**Ms Robertson:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Please be aware that today's proceedings are being recorded. They will be transcribed and then published by Hansard. And the proceedings are apparently being broadcast as well as webstreamed. Would you like to make an opening statement?

**Ms Robertson:** Yes. I would like to start by acknowledging the Ngunnawal people as the traditional owners and continuing custodians of the lands of the ACT and thanking the estimates committee for inviting us to appear again.

To sum up how we feel about this year's ACT budget, it is a mixed bag for us. One of the important things that we need to say is that we really recognise that government are looking to make a significant investment across a range of initiatives in this year's budget that address social determinants of health and some of the social support needs of the Canberra community. We were particularly pleased to see initiatives such as the safer families package. One of the things we are really pleased about in that safer families package is that it demonstrates that different areas of government can come together and actually work out how they can all contribute to addressing issues of concern in our community. The safer families package is a good recognition of the evolution that government and community services have been doing together over the past couple of years, particularly with things like the human services blueprint and the better services initiatives—really looking at how we can mobilise and distribute the resources that we have in the community and government more effectively.

That said, we were also really pleased to see the schools for all package. As you guys will be aware, we have been working quite closely with education for a number of years now and we are really pleased to see some investment in implementing the recommendations of the Shaddock review. The thing we are concerned about with the safer schools package is that we really believe that there are a lot of issues that we can address in our community by doing early investment and early intervention preventative work and that schools are a really important ground for that to happen. This investment is coming out of education, but where are the other parts of government and community services in terms of mobilising the resources? We are concerned that our members, community-based services, do not have the capacity to really partner effectively with schools and genuinely respond. There is a bit of a gap, I guess, in that capacity.

The reason we are raising it now is that there is actually willingness across the board. I have been to a couple of meetings with education, even in the past two days. I think

there is a real willingness to work together. We want to make sure that the community-based services and other human services have the capacity to work really solidly with schools and we do not just put that pressure on education.

Overall, other things that we raised in our response to the budget that are of particular concern to us include that we think there could be more done around youth unemployment. We recognise that the youth unemployment rate in the ACT is about three times that of the general unemployment rate. Unemployment and not having solid employment pathways are obviously a significant barrier to young people achieving housing and a range of other things that are the social determinants of health.

We want to flag a concern about our capacity to do early intervention prevention work around youth mental health. We have been doing a lot of work with our sector, with education. We appeared at the inquiry into youth suicide and self-harm recently. We are concerned that we are in an environment where we are going to see a reduction of dollars, an equivalent reduction of dollars and resources to do the early intervention—the support for mild to moderate mental health issues, the work that can be done in community settings to support families and communities to respond to this issue so that it does not become a larger health burden further down the track.

They are my introductory comments. We would be really keen to hear your questions as well. Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** And there is the capacity of your voice.

**Ms Robertson:** Yes; that is right. I have water and I have Hannah.

**THE CHAIR:** I have some general questions to start with. I am intrigued that the Youth Coalition is attempting to extend its range of coverage to older younger people by backing up COTA. How is it that there is a recommendation in your submission on the budget that there be an increase of funding for COTA's ACT Housing Options Advice Service? Do they assist with—

**Ms Robertson:** That is very easy to answer. The reason we have that in our submission is that we have seen a really big change in the way that the community-based peak bodies are working together. We recognise that there is a number of us and we all want to engage with you. Starting about two years ago, led by ACTCOSS, we have been doing a piece of work together to come together to have common housing asks. That is a piece of work we are very proud of. Rather than all trying to clamour for your time, we are doing some of that work before we engage with government around clarifying our asks. We, like many of the other peaks, agreed that what we would put in our submission is the joint asks that we developed with the broader sector.

**THE CHAIR:** Because both groups are competing in the same pond.

**Ms Robertson:** Yes. And we have some alignment with COTA on other issues. Public transport is a really good example.

**THE CHAIR:** You need it when you are younger and you often need it when you are older.

Could we go to mental health. The committee, over the past couple of years, has had quite long dialogues with the coalition about mental health, particularly its appearance now in our schools and the effect it has on education and then on the other members in the class. I notice that in your summary on mental health, most of the recommendations were only partially met or not met at all. What is the effect of that? And is there one thing the government could do to address mental health? I also notice that in the key priorities section, under education, you referred to focusing investment in early intervention in schools on emotional and social needs, which was also not met. How do we get this message through—as to what the effect of not addressing this need is?

**Ms Robertson:** One of the things that we have been talking about is that for a number of years now we have been saying that 25 per cent of people in the age group 12 to 25 will experience a mental health issue in any given year. That has been a very conservative estimate. We recently did a survey of just over 2,000 young Canberrans, and 40 per cent identified that they were experiencing mental health issues. Overwhelmingly, the young people who get in contact with our organisation and get involved in youth advocacy continually draw our attention to mental health.

One of the things that is difficult in this space is that if we look at the broader mental health sector there is a lot of transition happening to NDIS and things like that. The response for young people around mental health looks a bit different. We are not looking to diagnose people with permanent disability and have NDIS packages. The sorts of things that young people talk to us about are wanting to be able to get help within their family, their friends network and their school community.

So answering that difficult question, if there is one thing that we could do I think it is the joined up approach to working with schools and community-based services.

That said, we are concerned that there is a change happening. I note that the inquiry into youth suicide and self-harm acknowledged that there is a lot of information we do not know yet about the impact of changes to the federal funding arrangements. We do know that headspace are getting no indexation and they only have guaranteed funding for another two years. We hear from people that what happens in that environment is that the wait lists blow out. There is a good body of evidence that says that that can be one of the most detrimental things. If people get to the point of reaching out for help—if they finally talk to family or friends, if people look for help—and are not able to get some initial relief or contact in that first couple of days, that can lead to things escalating and it being much more difficult to support people later, and much more costly.

**MS BURCH:** I want to turn to youth unemployment. Canberra traditionally prides itself on having a high employment rate, yet there is this little subset within that which is youth unemployment. Do you get a sense that that is vulnerable youth? Is that because we are a younger community? Do you get a sense of what that group is and why they have that level of unemployment?

**Ms Watts:** One of the things is just that, overall, nationally, youth unemployment tends to be higher, and we see that reflected in the ACT. Also, looking at the high unemployment in the ACT, there is also an issue of underemployment which that does not factor in as well. Emma mentioned the rate Canberra survey that was recently done on young people. When our findings for that come out, when we have looked at the data properly, I think we will see that there are certainly vulnerable young people in the community where unemployment is a really big issue for them. But is it not just them; it is the whole range of young people. Unemployment and underemployment are there.

**MS BURCH:** If you look at the education directorate's *Where are they now?* you see that they try to pitch at first and second year out of school. It traditionally shows high levels of further education or employment. Does that fit into the mix or is there a discrete group that we can identify and pay attention to in that youth unemployment? If you are a university student, you could fall into that underemployed category, but your projections for life are quite positive, as opposed to others that have no skill, have no education and are struggling.

**Ms Robertson:** We would not disagree with that. I suppose the other thing is to recognise that the nature of work has changed. One of the difficulties we hear about is this. We talk to lots of young people who are talking about applying for upwards of 100 jobs and not receiving a response or even an acknowledgement of their application. It can be a very difficult market out there. And while that is across the board, we also know that these days if you disengage from school, if you are an early school leaver, even if you have a year 10 certificate, there is no guarantee that that will gain you employment. You are much more likely to be unemployed. That is one of the reasons that we included in our submission to the budget a specific recommendation around children and young people who have out of home care experiences. You would know, having been for many years the minister responsible for that area, that the trajectory is not great.

We really made that recommendation because we think ACT government is a large employer in the territory and we are really keen to see what levers government can pull to make a difference in that space. We know that if we can support people to get an employment experience early on—that might be to bring wraparound services in and give them that foundation, help them through those first experiences where they might not be coping—we give them that start.

There are some really promising projects that government are starting to engage in. We mentioned in our response the project that has been in the media around the mattress recycling business that has come out of the waste feasibility study. We have inquired a bit more about that, and it sounds like a really good example of a project that combines wraparound services, through care, et cetera with employment experience.

**MS BURCH:** Finally, on employment, oftentimes youth do not get paid a lot. We heard this morning about different EBAs and apprenticeship wages. You will not retire as a billionaire on an apprentice wage. Does that factor into youth unemployment and a discussion on penalty hours and all that as well?



**Ms Watts:** Yes. The reality is that a lot of young people who do have jobs are employed in jobs where they are on the minimum wage, and the penalty rates make a big difference to what they are able to do.

**Ms Robertson:** Particularly for those young people in the middle who might be students. If they are studying full time and they are relying on working as well, weekend work and penalty rates can be how they can afford rent. In an environment where the cost of living has gone up more quickly than wages have increased, it is definitely a factor in housing affordability for young people, for example.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Ms Robertson, nice to see you once again as usual and, Ms Watts, thank you for coming as well. I note in the survey that you alluded to there being a clear level of frustration, particularly from the community sector workers, with the inconsistency and inequity in funding arrangements. Can you elaborate on that?

**Ms Robertson:** I guess it is an ongoing discussion that we have had with government over many years. We are really pleased that the children, youth and family services program has been extended and has received funding for another two years with an opportunity to extend for a third year. But I think the challenging thing is that we are in an environment where we want to engage with, for example, schools to do joined up work but we sometimes do not have those streams matched in terms of their funding capacity or even the cycles of funding.

We would encourage government not to let go of the idea of longer-term funding in the relationship scene with community-based service providers. But we would also encourage that we work across government. We would like to see that the community services funding arrangements are flexible enough that we can do work with schools, for example, or that we can work with the ACT community around mobilising the resources to needs that the community are identifying.

**MR DOSZPOT:** How does inequity fit into it?

**Ms Robertson:** Again, I think we have a number of challenges in the ACT, not least of which is the small population size and a smart population. We can see need and we can see ways to address things but we do not necessarily have the dollars to do all of those things. I think one of the biggest issues in terms of inequity in funding for community-based services is that most agencies are funded from the commonwealth, funded from the ACT, and then many are engaged in local community fundraising themselves or looking to other kinds of commercial activities to generate revenue. That triangulation has an impact on each other. We have talked about this before.

I mentioned headspace before. That is an example of a program that has been funded federally. Now that is changing, we need to make sure we do not suddenly turn around and find that we do not even have what we did before, let alone have any capacity to address the fact that there is a greater need in the community for that service than there is capacity to deliver it.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Would the same sort of critique apply to priorities? Do you feel the priorities are correct in the way funding is being applied?

**Ms Robertson:** I suppose we have done a lot of thinking and a lot of talking with our membership over the past couple of years around this. Particularly, I think there has been a shift in what we are asked to provide in our budget submission. Hence, this is why we have an overarching statement in our submission to the budget that says we believe that government should be prioritising things that have a long-term impact. I know that is difficult with the way that funding cycles, election cycles and things like that work, but the evidence around early intervention and prevention work is pretty clear. In respect of the pressures for government to decide what the balance is between investing in early intervention and prevention and then addressing immediate needs now, we are probably not there yet.

That is why we talk about prioritising things that we think are going to reduce the cost to the ACT budget overall, although it may not do that for 10 years. That is why we have shifted to talking about early intervention and prevention work and also addressing social determinants of health. We know that the health budget is the larger chunk of the pie. I guess we are really keen to make sure that all of the other investments line up around making sure that we are trying to reduce that in the future rather than just wait and see.

**THE CHAIR:** In regard to services for young Indigenous people and support for Gugan Gulwan, there are references to them throughout your summary. What needs to happen to support Gugan and to support young Indigenous people?

**Ms Robertson:** We work quite closely with Gugan and often have a chat with them prior to our budget submission and so forth. I think it would be fair to say that one of things I think is really amazing about them as a service is that they are quite modest, which is why we raise some of these issues.

This time last year, for example, we were going out to visit them and there was an issue with heating in their building for a number of months. In the community and with government we have been in conversations for years now about the adequacy of that building. I know I was in a meeting today where I heard from a service in west Belconnen that they are doing some work with Gugan.

They have an amazing reach across the whole of the ACT from that little space down in Tuggeranong but they struggle around capacity. They deliver; they are a really good example of joined up services. They combine a little bit of mental health funding with some education funding with some disability funding and some family support funding. They provide a really holistic response to support the families they do support.

One of the things I guess we have been really advocating, particularly in the past couple of years, is that when areas of government are looking at how they better engage with the issues around supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and their families, we might see a new initiative. Of course, then the new initiative gets some funding and they go to work with Gugan but Gugan does not necessarily get an increase in capacity to respond to that.

I think they are a very good service. I think that they are very clear about what works with the community that they work with. I think that they are just totally stretched. I

guess, again, looking at how do we take the limited resources that we have and get most value out of them, we argue that they are an agency that have relationships with community already. If we are wanting to have an impact, then we need to work with them from the outset rather than continue to go to them to help address another thing that we have decided to do.

**THE CHAIR:** But is the priority for Gugan better accommodation so that they can better deliver the services? Is it additional funding for more services or—

**Ms Robertson:** To be honest, I think it would be difficult to say either is a priority because I think they are both very big issues for them. They could have funding to deliver more services and have some more workers but they do not have anywhere in the building to put them.

**MS BURCH:** The other matter was education and the opportunities for education here. You have made mention of kids who are disconnecting. That leads to poor employment outcomes and possibly reflects mental health concerns. Is there anything else that we could be doing in that space in education? There are different programs—Access 10 and the like.

**Ms Robertson:** In our budget submission we called for an evaluation of the flexible learning options program and so forth. I think we need to take the learnings from those programs and see whether they are really meeting the need. Probably one of the biggest challenges is that three to six-month programs are not going to get us there with those really difficult-to-engage young people or people who are experiencing multiple trauma or multiple disadvantage.

We need to balance the investment for the right amount of time. Again, I would come back to saying that schools are doing a whole range of amazing things but, as we know, children and young people do not just exist at school. I think that we do need to invest in community development and family support.

**MS BURCH:** Which goes to the point that whilst it is fairly early days really in the better services system, that could be a way of having that holistic look at families, individuals and the dots that need to be joined, firstly, to keep the young person at school, employed, engaged—all of that.

**Ms Robertson:** Yes.

**MS BURCH:** Do you think that is something we should really be looking at and taking learnings from?

**Ms Robertson:** Absolutely, and I think that, again, in the west Belconnen better services initiative trials we are learning lots about what it takes for us to be able to bring all of our resources together and decide collaboratively with community about how we distribute them. In our submission to the inquiry into youth suicide and self-harm, we called for a trial of that working with schools around mobilising or bringing together all of the resources around social and emotional support. That is not people giving up their money. That is about our coming to together and properly mapping out where the services are, what capacity we have got and how we can work

together to effectively resource that.

We think that it would be really worth doing a trial of that in a particular area of Canberra such as Lanyon—building on the strengths of some great things that are starting to happen there but really there has to be that coordination. We have talked about it for years: joined up services—whole of government, whole of community. I have to say that right now, today, I am much more hopeful about that than I might have been in other years because I think we are starting to see some good examples of where we have worked out how we can do that.

**MR DOSZPOT:** The other area that is quite interesting that you have included is the infrastructure options. You are talking about a youth centre or youth community space in Gungahlin, which makes a lot of sense. You talk about disability-friendly upgrades to youth spaces. What about the city itself? Is there anything at the moment in the city that is the equivalent to what you are talking about or is this an area you are not currently in?

**Ms Robertson:** One of the challenges around infrastructure planning is that—how can I think of an example to explain this? I know I keep banging on about headspace but if we look at headspace, they have been located at a building on the edge of the University of Canberra for the past couple of years and they are looking to move. We do not have spaces in the city that are affordable, well equipped and ready. Yet a service like that, where we have only got one for the whole of the ACT, has to be located close to public transport in a city centre so that it is accessible et cetera.

Again, I think one of the challenges is that, yes, there is a dedicated space in the city around a youth centre but there is no capacity for that to grow or for other services to come and collocate so that we can do some joined up work and so forth. Those infrastructure values often creep in when we are trying to do these other things.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I fully accept your assessment. I guess my question relates more to there seeming to be a lot of activity by young people at different times in the city, some of the issues that they contend with, problems and so forth. I know the impediments but are there sound reasons why perhaps it should be looked at outside the current way of addressing things?

**Ms Robertson:** Yes, I think so. The reality is that if a young person is employed or financially secure, then there is a lot on offer in the city for you. If that is not the case, then you probably are not going to be able to hang out in cafes or restaurants. I think we have seen a real evolution of the city centre in Canberra. But I think that has perhaps led to a situation for some of the people who gravitate towards the city because they need to come there to access services and so forth in terms of where they get to have space.

**THE CHAIR:** Final questions?

**MS BURCH:** No, keep up the good work, though.

**Ms Robertson:** Thanks, Joy.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I have one final question. It is on your membership. You talk about schools. Are you talking only about government schools or do you have a role in some of the independent sector as well?

**Ms Robertson:** The focus of our work over the past few years has really been on engaging with the education directorate and with public schools. That said, we have a relationship with the independent schools association and the Catholic education group as well. One of the things that we are planning at the moment is to do some work with all three sectors around student voice. That is a project under the schools for all initiative. So we are really excited that we are able to see that partnership between community-based services and the education sector. I guess the focus of our stuff has been around the public education system. That is about our capacity, not about the fact that we do not continue to have a dialogue with the independent and Catholic schools.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Thank you and keep up the great work.

**Ms Robertson:** Thank you very much.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you for that. A transcript of the proceedings will be available in a couple of days. Could you read it? Any suggestions or any additional information you would like to provide us with would be gratefully received. Well done, Ms Watts. You have followed in the tradition of the deputy executive officer by avoiding all but one question and throwing them back to your boss. You are obviously training them well, Ms Robertson. With that, we will now break for 15 minutes and resume at 3:30 with the YWCA.

**Sitting suspended from 3.14 pm to 3.30 pm.**

**CRIMMINS, MS FRANCES**, Executive Director, YWCA Canberra  
**PATEL, MS ZOYA**, Senior Manager, Corporate Relations and Communication,  
YWCA Canberra

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome to the final session of the community and industry groups hearing day for the Select Committee on Estimates 2016-2017. We would now like to welcome the YWCA to present to the committee.

In front of you on the table there is a pink card which has the privilege statement on it. Could you please confirm for the record that you have read the card and understand the implications of privilege.

**Ms Crimmins:** Yes, noted.

**THE CHAIR:** Would you like to make an opening statement?

**Ms Crimmins:** Yes. Good afternoon, and thank you for inviting YWCA Canberra to present its feedback on the 2016-17 budget.

I would like to start by acknowledging the Ngunnawal people as the traditional custodians of this land and pay my respects to the elders, past and present. YWCA Canberra is a feminist, not-for-profit organisation that has been providing community services and representing women's issues in Canberra since 1929.

Through our national association, YWCA Australia, we are connected with a global YWCA movement of 25 million women and girls across 125 countries. We are proud to have evolved to respond to the changing needs of the Canberra community over our 87-year history. We have built a strong reputation through the provision of quality and innovative services in children's services, training, community development, housing support, therapeutic counselling, youth engagement and women's leadership. We are a membership-based, non-religious organisation that welcomes participation of people of all cultures, beliefs and ages.

In March this year we released our election advocacy platform "Every woman, every child, every day", in which we identified the key issues that require action to address gender equality, social inclusion and support for children and young people in the ACT. In particular, we noted the need to educate young people in respectful relationships as a primary prevention initiative to end violence against women in the long term, support women and children fleeing domestic violence through a range of measures including access to affordable housing and gender-aware crisis accommodation, and provide appropriate support for at-risk young people. It is with these priorities in mind that we approached our analysis of the ACT budget.

First, we applaud the 2016 ACT budget focus on addressing the epidemic of domestic and family violence in our society. We congratulate the ACT government on the announcement of the landmark safer families package, which will see significant provision of funding for front-line services supporting survivors of domestic violence.

In particular, we welcome the investment in front-line services for the Domestic

Violence Crisis Service and the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre, which both perform invaluable work in our community. Long-term, secure funding for these vital services is crucial, and we hope that this is the first step towards that sustainability.

We are also pleased to see a commitment to fund translating and interpreter services. Women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are less likely to report violence and already face significant obstacles in seeking help, including a lack of social networks, social economic disadvantage, community pressure and a lack of knowledge about their rights. However, we are concerned that funding for translation and interpreter services does not extend to all services that are working with women escaping domestic violence, such as housing and mental health.

We also note that while funding provided to Legal Aid for improvement to services to families experiencing domestic violence is positive, the lack of recognition of the important role that women's legal centres play in providing targeted, gender-responsive legal services to women who have experienced violence is disappointing. The Women's Legal Centre in the ACT improves women's access to justice by providing legal information and advice, prioritising the most vulnerable women in our community. Due to the significant funding cuts from the federal government, their crucial work is at risk.

While the package is overall a very positive step, without an increase in affordable housing options for women experiencing homelessness more broadly we risk being unable to support survivors of domestic violence beyond crisis periods. We acknowledge that the ACT government has made a submission to the commonwealth-led affordable housing working group. However, much more urgent work is required.

Despite the intent of the ACT government's affordable rental scheme, the 74.9 per cent rental rate remains unaffordable to many on low incomes. Additionally, transitional housing support needs to be boosted to help families escaping domestic violence, acknowledging that gender-aware services are necessary to provide meaningful support to help break the cycle of violence.

Lastly, a dramatic increase in safe, affordable, single-unit housing for women in Canberra is crucial, acknowledging that not all women are in a position to share housing. Single older women are more likely to face housing vulnerability than any other demographic, demonstrating the need to provide appropriate support to this group.

We look forward to more detail on the role of the Coordinator-General for Family Safety and the accompanying dedicated safer families team. With regard to primary prevention, we are disappointed to note the lack of additional funding for these programs for children and young people in Canberra. These programs aim to stop violence before it occurs by changing attitudes among children and young people and educating them about respect, communication and gender equity. Crucially, research has shown that the key drivers for violence against women include gender inequality, an observance of strict gender roles and stereotypes. Primary prevention works to address these drivers.

Current evidence shows that young Australians hold alarming attitudes towards gender equality and violence in relationships, and schools are the ideal setting to challenge such beliefs. The recent inclusion of respectful relationships education in the Australian curriculum represents an unprecedented opportunity to shift underlying attitudes and norms and prevent gender-based violence in the long term. However, the funding allocated in the 2015-16 budget was a temporary measure and to see a sustainable change we need a consistent, long-term commitment to funding for primary prevention.

The lack of funding for primary prevention in the ACT budget was surprising given the ACT government last week joined other jurisdictions in signing up to Our Watch. Our Watch is a national organisation focused on driving population-level and behavioural change to address violence against women and children. Their work is underpinned by the need for primary prevention to change cultures, behaviours and attitudes. Therefore we are hopeful that the ACT government's membership is a sign of forthcoming commitment to primary prevention for young people in Canberra.

We are pleased to note the budget commitment to extend therapeutic support for young people through the mental health follow-up program and look forward to seeing more detail about how this policy will be implemented.

However, we noted the lack of investment in youth engagement activities, specifically to support at-risk young people and engage them in employment or education pathways. The closure of the nationally funded Youth Connections service at the end of 2014 has left a major gap in services available to assist young people to re-engage with education, training or employment. Youth Connections provided tailored case management to around 350 young people in the ACT each year, which proved highly successful. Six months after leaving the program, on average 93 per cent of all young people were still engaged in some kind of training, education or employment. After two years 89 per cent remained engaged. Given that youth unemployment is currently at 11.6 per cent, significantly higher than the general unemployment rate, this is an area that requires immediate attention.

A key part of our work is youth engagement in the Tuggeranong region through our Mura Lanyon youth and community centre and the YWCA clubhouse. The clubhouse is a free out-of-school learning space located at Richardson Primary School and open to all young people in Tuggeranong. The first of its kind in the ACT, the clubhouse provides the opportunity for young people to develop new skills and engage in science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics. It was founded out of a desire to ensure that young people in Tuggeranong were not left behind in the emerging digital economy. For many of our young clubhouse members, it is their first out-of-school learning experience where they have access to high-tech tools, leadership development and self-directed learning.

The jobs of the future will rely on digital and STEAM skills, and it is essential that all young people are given the opportunity to participate and learn. Our future prosperity and equality are dependent on digital inclusion.

I wish to thank the ACT government for their support of the clubhouse, and, in particular, for use of the space at Richardson Primary School and the funding received



through the Canberra innovation development fund. I invite members to visit the clubhouse and learn more about what we do in this area.

Finally, we would like to express our disappointment at the lack of gender analysis throughout the budget and the lack of recognition of gender equality in the budget documents. As we recommended in our election platform, for gender equality to be truly achieved, it is crucial that the gendered impacts of policies are taken into consideration at the point of development. In addition the government should be proactive in providing a gendered analysis of the budget to demonstrate a commitment to addressing this whole-of-community issue.

In the ACT a gendered analysis of the budget occurred until 2008, when it ceased to be published. Reintroducing this measure would promote transparency and strong policy and ensure that the relative impact of policies and programs on different groups of men and women are apparent. Thank you, and that ends our formal statement.

**THE CHAIR:** Thanks very much. On page 2 of your survey response you mention in priority area 1, in the second-last line, the Women's Legal Centre and the role they play. How many such centres do we have, what do they do and what are their capabilities?

**Ms Crimmins:** We have one gender-specific service, and their capabilities are very limited. They have just received a small amount of funding from the commonwealth government, but the demand outstrips what they are able to provide.

**THE CHAIR:** Is there any analysis of how far the demand outstrips provision?

**Ms Crimmins:** I can get that for you.

**THE CHAIR:** Thanks very much. I have a substantive question. Your priority area 2 is that children and young people are educated on respectful relationships through best practice primary prevention programs. You are disappointed to note the lack of additional funding. In your determination, what is the funding that is currently provided for that issue, and what is required to make it effective?

**Ms Crimmins:** From what we understand, it was \$200,000 over three years, but that was not all going to children; it was going to professional development.

**Ms Patel:** I acknowledge that I have also read the privilege statement. In the budget documents that were released the funding was divided up and it was stated that each school would get about \$2,000 per year for primary prevention activities. However, the wording in terms of how that funding is used has been changed to social and emotional learning programs. So we are concerned about the accountability that schools will be held to, to actually spend that funding on a respectful relationships program as underpinned by the Our Watch framework for primary prevention. We would also be concerned about the efficacy of that level of funding to provide consistent programming for all students going through the school.

**THE CHAIR:** Is that for all schools in the ACT or just the government sector?

**Ms Crimmins:** Just the government sector.

**THE CHAIR:** Should it be extended to cover all schools?

**Ms Crimmins:** Yes, we need a whole-of-community response.

**THE CHAIR:** You talk about having consistent, long-term primary prevention funding. Have you done any analysis or is there a figure that says we need this much a year for X years?

**Ms Crimmins:** Yes, there is. It forms part of the Our Watch research, and there has been a figure produced on what should be spent up-front on primary prevention versus tertiary and secondary. Again we can provide that report to the committee.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you for that. You talk about the funding allocated in the previous budget being a stopgap measure at best. What needs to be done in regard to the funding? We will look at the Our Watch research, but when we have more funding for it, what needs to be done? How is it best utilised?

**Ms Crimmins:** It needs to be a whole-school approach. We would recommend that that includes the education of teachers: a whole-school approach, even including administration staff and from the principal down. In that way it can be embedded across all curriculum. The inclusion under the national school curriculum provides key opportunities to deliver that throughout the school curriculum.

**MS BURCH:** I think I might be asking a question that Ms Lawder might be asking; it goes to accommodation, particularly the focus on older women. It has long been said that older women, for a whole range of reasons, through employment, super and all that, are at a financial disadvantage when it comes to housing. What does this look like to you—the increased provision of safe, affordable single-unit housing for single women in Canberra? What does that look like, and is there a particular demographic within the women?

**Ms Crimmins:** Yes. We have found, in our experience of having our own group house and a sublease on an ACT government Property Group house that, because of the experiences of the women who are facing homelessness due to trauma, domestic violence and drug and alcohol issues, often group housing is not suitable for all women. That is why, based on that recommendation and some of the surveys that ACT Shelter did on the needs of older women, we determined that single dwelling units were better suited to that demographic.

**MS BURCH:** Could that be factored into a social housing program, public housing? Can we go out to the developers and say that this is a product that would be useful around the community?

**Ms Crimmins:** The particular group of women that we support would not be able to afford market rent.

**MS BURCH:** So it is in the public housing and social housing forum.

**Ms Crimmins:** It is in social housing and public housing.

**MS BURCH:** Well done on Richardson clubhouse; I hope it is going strong.

**Ms Crimmins:** It is going exceptionally strongly. There have been some great outcomes from that.

**MS BURCH:** I remember going down some time ago when it opened. Is there a focus in that around supporting women in the area to get into STEM and get into that?

**Ms Crimmins:** Yes. We have had some target groups for opening the space for girls-only groups, particularly through some of the youth engagement. We have had regular visits from students from the Galilee School as well. We are really trying to engage with young people who have had not great educational experiences. That space is providing a free learning, creative space that seems to better suit.

**MS BURCH:** Is the pool of people that are coming to you broadening?

**Ms Crimmins:** It is increasing. We have now a regular 150 members. Eleven per cent of them identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and we are up to just under 30 per cent of young women coming regularly.

**MS BURCH:** Good.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Thank you for your submission, and thank you for coming along this afternoon. I want to go to your recommendation No 5, where you talk about reinstating to prior levels funding for gender services to provide transitional housing support for families escaping domestic violence, acknowledging that gender aware services are necessary to provide a means of support to help break the cycle of violence. What was the previous level of funding?

**Ms Crimmins:** The gendered services for homelessness housing support were cut by 40 per cent three years ago in ACT housing.

**MR DOSZPOT:** What did that amount to in dollars? Do you know?

**Ms Crimmins:** I would have to look at the consolidated. I know what it related to for our service. It was about half a million dollars.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Okay.

**Ms Crimmins:** So it was 40 per cent of gendered services.

**MR DOSZPOT:** What was the rationale used for cutting it? Money?

**Ms Crimmins:** It was money. It was through the flow-on of cuts from the commonwealth government.

**MS BURCH:** So that was commonwealth funding?

**Ms Crimmins:** No; it was ACT government funding. But it was with the cuts that were—

**MS BURCH:** The housing cuts?

**Ms Crimmins:** Through the housing cuts about three years ago.

**MS BURCH:** Yes.

**Ms Crimmins:** Our call, while it needs to be gendered services, is the specialty we bring in understanding trauma and domestic violence. The wraparound services that you require to provide to those women and children are significant.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Is there a level of duplication in the way it is being done at the moment?

**Ms Crimmins:** No.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Is that is why it is costing less?

**Ms Crimmins:** No; we have all cut our support services.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Without trying to put words in your mouth, you are saying you want it reinstated, so obviously you are dissatisfied with the current circumstance?

**Ms Crimmins:** Yes. Things that have been cut are some of the support services such as training and education programs to try to reconnect women back into the workforce, and children's specialist services to work with children reconnecting back to their schools. They are some of the services that we had to cut in our housing support unit.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Okay.

**MS BURCH:** Sorry, can I just be clear on that? That was commonwealth funding withdrawn?

**Ms Crimmins:** It was ACT government withdrawn.

**MS BURCH:** ACT. You were talking about commonwealth funding before.

**Ms Patel:** I think Fran was saying that the cuts from the ACT government were a flow-on effect of cuts made at a federal level.

**MS BURCH:** So we just did not backfill the commonwealth funding.

**Ms Patel:** It was part of the national affordable housing.

**MS BURCH:** Yes.

**Ms Crimmins:** It was part of the national affordable housing agreement three years ago, and the transition to the new funding arrangements. Across the sector, it was the

gendered services that had the largest cuts.

**MR DOSZPOT:** It would be useful from the committee's point of view if we can get a bit more information on the actual dollar value so that we can consider that in context.

**Ms Crimmins:** Yes.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Any other information you can give us on that would help us make recommendations.

**Ms Patel:** The dollar value is also included in our election platform. I have got here that annual funding to ACT homelessness services was eroded over the past three years with a \$3.7 million cut in 2013-14 and a further \$2.2 million in 2014-15. After that was when the ACT government developed a revised costing model, which included the cutting of some of those intensive support services.

**MS BURCH:** So there is a rolling effect about the commonwealth changes, and then our response, in many ways, of bedding in a new system following those other cuts. Is that it?

**Ms Patel:** Yes, that is it.

**Ms Crimmins:** And the result for our specialist services was cutting the things that I considered additional to providing a roof over somebody's head. We would say that you need more than just a roof over somebody's head.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Thank you very much.

**MS LAWDER:** We have talked a little about the Chisholm clubhouse, but I wanted to ask about your youth services at Lanyon. You have said in your submission that you are a bit disappointed at the lack of investment in youth engagement activities. What is the funding gap, do you think, between what you are spending at the Lanyon area and what you would like to do?

**Ms Crimmins:** At the moment the funding for the whole of Tuggeranong region for youth engagement is \$400,000. Since the cutting of youth connections, we have had to cut our intensive case support workers. To meet the need in Tuggeranong alone, which has the highest need for that intensive case support, ideally, an additional two full-time equivalent staff, youth specialist caseworkers, would help bring back the support that we were providing in that region of up to 350 young people in a year.

**MS LAWDER:** How many FTE are you talking?

**Ms Crimmins:** Two.

**MS LAWDER:** Two FTE.

**Ms Crimmins:** Two specialist case support workers, just for Tuggeranong alone, in addition to the existing staff.

**Ms Patel:** For context, our youth engagement officer who currently does case management says that her biggest challenge is that with the current funding she can provide only up to six weeks of support for some young people. Given the amount of time it takes to actually build trust with a young person who is disengaged from school or from employment opportunities, that just is not enough to have any kind of lasting change.

**THE CHAIR:** Zoya, you are very hard to hear.

**Ms Patel:** Do I need to lean forward?

**THE CHAIR:** The mics do not actually magnify; they are just for recording purposes, so you have to speak up a little, if you could.

**Ms Patel:** Okay.

**MS BURCH:** Strong voice, Zoya.

**MS LAWDER:** Down at Lanyon you also have a food hut.

**Ms Crimmins:** Yes.

**MS LAWDER:** What is the funding arrangement—

**Ms Crimmins:** The funding for the food hub comes from the commonwealth government under emergency relief; that is a total of \$40,000 per annum.

**MS LAWDER:** And you get donations through—

**Ms Crimmins:** We seek significant donations from the community. That is heavily subsidised by donations through the community.

**MS LAWDER:** What is the subscription to the food?

**Ms Crimmins:** Incredibly high. Every week we would support 200 families. Our system is that each family can come every fortnight. We are full every Thursday when we open. It is volunteer staff, so the money goes purely to food and other emergency relief, that \$40,000.

**MS LAWDER:** Are you aware if that is similar across the ACT, with the pantry programs?

**Ms Crimmins:** Yes.

**MS LAWDER:** High demand?

**Ms Crimmins:** All of the pantries have high demand.

**MS LAWDER:** Thanks.

**THE CHAIR:** You mentioned in your introduction the role of the coordinator-general. Is there a lack of clarity in what the coordinator-general is doing?

**Ms Crimmins:** That is what we are waiting for more information about. Yes. There has been a statement that the family coordinator will be a new position.

**THE CHAIR:** But the detail—

**Ms Crimmins:** The detail needs to come.

**THE CHAIR:** I think we could follow up. We are out of time.

**MS BURCH:** Just a very quick one around translation. It was raised this morning that it is good to see translation services, but perhaps there should be consideration of Auslan within that translation service in addition to community languages. Would you think that was a reasonable inclusion, given that it is a language?

**Ms Crimmins:** Yes.

**MS BURCH:** That is all.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Ms Crimmins, you made a comment in your introduction about your disappointment at the lack of support for young people at risk. Is that gendered? Does it include everyone?

**Ms Crimmins:** It includes everyone, and that would be primarily those really at risk—those young people whom we support through our intense therapeutic program that works with the whole family. We get referrals for children and young people aged eight to 14, and that has a wait list of six months. So we have \$300,000 a year to provide an ACT-wide service. And they are the family units that we would work with for a 12 to 18-month period before you start really seeing any—

**MR DOSZPOT:** Sure. So that is in the age group eight to 14?

**Ms Crimmins:** Eight to 14.

**MR DOSZPOT:** And beyond that age group, are they separated into sexes, for want of a—

**Ms Crimmins:** No, we do not provide that service. Our contract is for that—

**MR DOSZPOT:** It is just for that age group.

**Ms Crimmins:** It is just for that age group.

**MR DOSZPOT:** So who looks after the remainder?

**Ms Crimmins:** Relationships Australia have part of the therapeutic program, but it is fair to say that it is a very, very small amount. It is not sufficient. We have 16 families

that we work with at any one time. The funding amount can support three qualified counsellors/social workers.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I had better stop there, but I might have a couple of questions to put on notice.

**MS LAWDER:** The community sector reform levy has been applied again this year, continued on from last year. Presuming it is not applied again in the following year, what difference will that make to your organisation? What might you do with that money that you sort of get back?

**Ms Crimmins:** We would put it into our support services, particularly our largest contract that that comes out of: our housing support services. That funding would put on one of the programs we used to run for re-engaging women in educational pathways.

**MS LAWDER:** Front-line service delivery.

**Ms Crimmins:** Absolutely.

**THE CHAIR:** Our time is up. Thank you for sharing with us today and thank you for your submission. A transcript will be sent to you when it is available for correction or any additions you would like to make.



**HELYAR, MS SUSAN**, Director, ACT Council of Social Service

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome to the ACT Council of Social Service. Please be aware that proceedings today are being recorded, will be transcribed and then published by Hansard, and we are also being broadcast and webstreamed. In front of you is the privilege statement. Could you please confirm for the committee that you have read the statement and understand the notion of privilege?

**Ms Helyar:** I have, thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Would you like to make an opening statement?

**Ms Helyar:** Yes, I thought I would follow up on some of the questions you were asking YWCA, if that is useful, and then I would welcome any questions from you.

ACTCOSS put out a detailed snapshot of the budget, so I would like to tender that as a document for consideration by the committee. We noted that the ACT government had outlined five high-level objectives for the ACT over the coming forward estimates: sustainable economic growth, sound public finances, quality and efficient services, sustainable taxation revenue and a strong balance sheet. The budget also outlined four focus areas for investment to deliver on these high-level objectives: health and education, economic growth and diversification, suburban renewal and better transport, and enhancing livability and social inclusion.

ACTCOSS welcomes the incorporation in the budget of a narrative around social inclusion and equality. Mainstream economic analysis from the G20 inclusive growth framework to the United Nations sustainable development goals for 2016-30 have acknowledged that in advanced economies prosperity will not improve unless inequality is reduced. I think this is especially important in an economy like Canberra.

In practice, this means that government spending as well as market and community activity must improve the prospects and outcomes of the bottom 40 per cent income groups as a key priority. I guess we would also say that beyond income people who are in the bottom 40 per cent outcome levels as well on key measures like health or education or access to resources should also be considered the priority.

ACTCOSS would like to see more analysis of whether and how investments in all the focus areas across the budget deliver on reducing inequality and increasing inclusion. Substantial progress can be made on these only if the whole budget is contributing to this agenda. The ambition underlying this agenda means it cannot be achieved through piecemeal initiatives alone.

I want to bring to your attention when ACTCOSS looks at a budget what we see as our sort of assessment framework. The goals that have been identified by our membership for progress for Canberra are that all people in Canberra can meet minimum standards of living as defined by community norms; that our laws, institutions and systems enable people to exercise their human rights and they are free from discrimination; that everyone can access the right support at the right time at the right intensity and duration; that people can live a life that has meaning to them in which they have choice and control over the circumstances in which they live; that we

are a community in which all people can live with dignity and access the means and opportunity to participate and be included economically and socially; and that the prosperity of Canberra is shared fairly and inequality is reduced.

You asked a question about the community legal centres and the Women's Legal Centre, in particular. But I want to note that through the national partnership agreement on justice, as of the beginning of next financial year, there is a \$300,000 cut coming again to the ACT government around community legal centre funding. Whilst there is unmet demand now, there is a significant risk into the future, and our view would be that this community cannot cope with that level of cut with the level of unmet demand that is already there. It will be important for the ACT government either to renegotiate that with the commonwealth or fill that \$300,000 gap, which is an enormous gap for those services but small in the context of the ACT budget.

The other question I wanted to answer was around the gendered services cuts that happened flowing out of the national partnership agreement on housing cuts from the commonwealth. I would like to acknowledge that there was \$5.6 million, I think, in cuts from the commonwealth and the ACT government passed on \$3.9 million of those. So the ACT government did absorb some of that cut. The decision was made that there would be a set cost price for homelessness services. So the cuts were largely in the gendered services that provided more expensive services and provided more things. But also what we have found now with the domestic violence analysis that has happened and with the development of the better services work, the stronger families work and now the safer families work, all the kinds of things that those homelessness services were funding are the kinds of things we are trying to reinstate now.

So whilst they were seen as surplus activity, when you do a cost pricing and when you actually think about the issue more broadly, those kinds of services about doing trauma therapy for children and working with women to help them navigate complicated legal and other processes as they are setting up a different life are all essential services. Whilst they were being carried in the homelessness system they were seen as surplus, but then when you look more broadly, those are really critical to shifting people's trajectories post-domestic violence. So we are pleased to see that has been recognised, but we would acknowledge that there was that very disruptive process.

If you want to see some detail on what we thought back then—which I think has come to pass—we did write a submission in 2013 around the impacts of the funding cuts to national partnership agreement-funded services.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you for your attendance today and thank you for your submission. We are just checking, but I believe a link to your submission is on the web.

**Ms Helyar:** Yes, it should be up there.

**THE CHAIR:** No, no, on the estimates committee website, so anybody else who wants to see it can do. We might reverse the order and start at the far end, Ms Lawder.

**MS LAWDER:** The budget has \$800,000 for out of home care. With respect to the Glanfield inquiry, do you have a view of where the money should be spent from an ACTCOSS perspective?

**Ms Helyar:** I understand from the Glanfield inquiry that there was a significant issue identified around information sharing. I think you could spend \$800,000 on an IT system really quickly. I think probably what is more important is to be doing work with the workforce and across systems to make sure people understand in what ways safety and wellbeing trumps privacy and how to make sure that people really understand how to work with the Privacy Act but also an understanding of safety and risk and to be able to provide the right information at the right time to the right people to reduce risk to children and their families.

Whilst information flow is absolutely essential to a better outcome for children that are in those systems, we do not want to see it used up in endless investing in information systems. Building the capability of the people that work in those very difficult circumstances having to make very difficult judgment calls in complex environments is critical and that we resource those people well and make sure there is good, shared understanding across systems about how you can manage privacy concerns but not let privacy trump safety.

**MS LAWDER:** Because it is not just in the public sector; I imagine many of your member organisations would be very concerned about that privacy issue.

**Ms Helyar:** Yes. People take their responsibilities very seriously, but I think it is hard to navigate what their obligations are versus how do you make sure that you reduce risk.

**MS LAWDER:** So it might be a long bow, but, for example, would using some of the funding from the community sector reform levy that is left for that kind of training be a useful thing to do, or has all that money already been allocated to particular programs?

**Ms Helyar:** No, that money has not been allocated. We argued when it was first announced that that levy was continuing that there should be no spending of that levy unless it was agreed by the sector. But also that there was a need for a more strategic approach to understanding what development investment the sector needed. So that work has been done over this past 12 months, and there is still further work to do on that.

Most of that money should still be available for investing in things that the community sector—the contributors—have decided are most critical. Certainly there are a few themes emerging, and one of them is around workforce development. Certainly one of the challenges of that levy coming out is that it just eats into the capacity of organisations to resource workforce development individually. So workforce development is a key priority for spending those funds.

**MS LAWDER:** Following up from that: at this point in time, would your expectation be that the community sector levy would not be reimposed after next year?

**Ms Helyar:** Our view, which we stated in our budget submission both in October 2014 and again in 2015 is that government needs to see the sector as a critical industry in this economy as well as a critical piece of social infrastructure, and it needs to invest in it like it invests in all other industries. In this budget we have seen significant investment in the tourism and events industry: \$8 million over four years. We have seen substantial investment in developing education as an export industry. We think you do not need to levy the sector; you need to invest in the industry in ways that will help it to strengthen and deliver better for this community and potentially deliver more into the economy around the intellectual capital that the industry has to offer here and in other places.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Good afternoon, Ms Helyar; good to see you. I would like to clarify a point. I heard some news reports recently about, I think, your reaction to the potential cut to the seniors card. I think currently it is available for people once they have turned 60 years of age. The proposed government cuts will mean that it will be available only from 65 years of age. Did I hear correctly that you said you agreed with that cut?

**Ms Helyar:** We certainly agree with better targeting concessions. We had said through the 18 months of engagement with the government around the concessions review that your age is not the determinant of your need for concessions. It should be your circumstances and, particularly, your financial circumstances.

The issue with the seniors card is a bit more nuanced than that in that certainly what COTA have said is that the main value of the seniors card is the discounts and entitlements that are offered in the private sector to people over the age of 60, which, of course, do not get caught up in the government concessions costs. We would be guided by COTA about the way forward on that. I think they have had a view that potentially there is a way to balance out access to support for non-government entitlements and discounts from access to government-funded concessions and then to think about how you best target those government-funded concessions.

I know it is a challenge because it has been a longstanding thing that age is one criterion for concessions, but the view of ACTCOSS is that a person on a minimum wage job with two people that are dependent on them is in a worse financial circumstance than some people over the age of 60.

**MR DOSZPOT:** That is a pretty general statement to make.

**Ms Helyar:** It is a very general statement but it is also a very general statement to say that people over the age of 60 are universally in financially difficult circumstances and that they are entitled to government assistance. What we have asked for is that there be proper analysis of who is getting concessions, to what extent and how do we make sure there is equity of access to people according to their circumstances.

**MR DOSZPOT:** As I understand it, there is also an element of discount applying for people on the seniors card that relates to their rates, for instance, or other utilities. A lot of these people have been hit very hard by extreme rises in rates and utilities. I have had a lot of complaints about the point of view that I think you expressed. I wanted to check it for myself; I was not totally sure. You are speaking for the

disadvantaged. To make a general statement to say that all those over 60 are not necessarily disadvantaged is a pretty tough call.

**Ms Helyar:** No, can I clarify that?

**MR DOSZPOT:** That is what I want you to do.

**Ms Helyar:** Yes, because they are over 60 does not mean they are disadvantaged.

**MR DOSZPOT:** No, but how do you determine that?

**Ms Helyar:** At the moment the concessions largely are associated with access to commonwealth income support entitlements. That is a more standardised measure of people's financial circumstances. That is a more accurate measure of the comparison across age groups around whether people have access to support.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Have you discussed this with COTA before you made that statement?

**Ms Helyar:** Yes, and COTA and people like the combined superannuants association have a perspective that is from their members. But certainly, in speaking with COTA, they recognise the need to target concessions. What we saw in the tax review was an acknowledgement that there could be some issues for older people on fixed incomes with high costs associated with their housing. We have certainly noted that and recognised that in a number of our submissions around housing. We have said that that needs to be taken into account in terms of people's access to support. But a universal position that because you are over 60 that entitles you to something I do not think is either fair or sustainable long term. Equally, just because you are over 60 does not mean you would not be entitled to support. It needs to be based on your circumstances, not on your age.

**MR DOSZPOT:** At 60 women are entitled to the pension. Are you making that same comment, that they should not be entitled to the pension at 60?

**Ms Helyar:** No, because that is associated with their working life; so that is a change in circumstances.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I will have to take some closer look at what the complaints have been. I think you have explained part of it but I am not totally satisfied.

**Ms Helyar:** I would be happy to talk with you further around that and talk more to the specific complaints. If we need to be differently informed on our views, I would be happy to take that on.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Sure, and that is the reason I asked the question. Thank you.

**MS BURCH:** I think I can take from that that it is around a needs base, not an age base. That is the criterion. There are some retiring federal politicians that are over the age of 60 who really would not find a seniors concession card making a major difference in their lifestyle. This builds on the comment about the levy. I think you

partly answered this. As it is applied, what is it used for? It seems that it is around building capacity. I am just looking at page 24 of your document.

**Ms Helyar:** Yes.

**MS BURCH:** I think you have explained that it would be useful for that to be done to build capacity within the organisation. Then you go on to make the point that in an increasingly marketised human services environment, how do you have quality assurance? How do you ensure that service providers are skilled, able and competent? Then, how do you ensure that the services that are received are measured to have been an appropriate level of service? Can you talk more about how we would monitor that here?

**Ms Helyar:** It is monitored through a whole range of things like the disability quality standards, the aged-care standards. Are you talking about how we monitor quality?

**MS BURCH:** You talk about “supporting the development of the community services industry plan highlighted the critical need to support civil society and citizen engagement that guide community services to hold the sector to account”.

**Ms Helyar:** Yes. What we have been talking about with the sector is that there are two streams of accountability: one is accountability to funders and one is accountability to the community more broadly. Accountability to funders is often around inputs, outputs, activity and compliance with regulation and standards.

Accountability to the community is often around community dialogue, community development, community involvement on boards, on engagement with consumer organisations that want to be able to be part of research and development in service delivery. It is making sure that there is capacity for consumer organisations to fulfil that role, which sits alongside the government regulatory standards and funding agreement reporting compliance so that the community organisations can continue to fulfil that role. But it is also so that we can continue to have an investment in the kind of research and development engine room, which is community development, community dialogue, community partnership between consumer and provider organisations.

There is a risk in a more marketised environment that funding for those consumer voice organisations is not valued and is not adequate. We think that is a risk to the quality and development of services long term.

**MS BURCH:** With the community sector being small orgs to large orgs with a whole range of service focus, how do you have that research and development think tank that can be applied across all those services to make sure they are empowered to have that voice when they need to be heard?

**Ms Helyar:** A lot of people think we have got this kind of complicated and duplicating peaks environment. But actually a lot of what those organisations do is research, development and dialogue. They facilitate community development, particularly the consumer-owned, managed and formed peak bodies.

In the community sector our research and development methodology is community development. That is what has got us to the point where we are now. Certainly ACTCOSS facilitates a community development peer network where people come together and do shared projects and do shared learning. That is different from what happens in other industries but it is strong and it is effective. But it is only sustainable if the voice of community has got some infrastructure around it to enable it to be part of that.

**THE CHAIR:** In the summary that you filled out for the committee, you had a section C that dealt with the long-term approach to social infrastructure. I guess the question is: does the government have a 10 to 20-year infrastructure renewal plan for community-based services, including things like Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander controlled services, community organisations providing child care, community support services and civil society organisations. If they do not, what should they be doing?

**Ms Helyar:** Yes, this has come up as an issue because we have been going through—there is a kind of a review and a think around community facilities provision, pricing and development. It has also come up as part of our thinking around the industry plan. One of our core things we need is infrastructure: built infrastructure, digital infrastructure, as well as workforce. I cheekily say that the community sector gets the buildings that everyone else has decided they do not need anymore.

**THE CHAIR:** You are right.

**Ms Helyar:** They do get retrofitted and we do get them. I think it is considered E grade accommodation in the commercial system. So we get it at very low price, but we need something a little more deliberate than that and something that provides for a long-term plan. This involves two things: both that we have access to infrastructure so that we can know what we have got long term and we can plan financially for that. Also, it is about where the infrastructure needs to be over time: how do we make sure that as needs grow in new parts of Canberra that there is the right planning around access to infrastructure long term to grow in those settings but also what do we do about renewal of infrastructure in the older parts of Canberra?

**THE CHAIR:** I have a cheeky question: could you please define for me what a “snapshot” is?

**Ms Helyar:** A snapshot; well, from our perspective it is the bits that our membership will want to read without having to go through all the budget papers.

**THE CHAIR:** Because yours is the longest snapshot at 64 pages that I have ever seen.

**Ms Helyar:** Yes.

**MS BURCH:** But it is better than the pile of budget papers.

**Ms Helyar:** Yes, exactly. Compared to that, we figure it is a service and a resource.

**THE CHAIR:** So is *War and peace*, therefore, a light read or do you prefer

encyclopaedias? Time for a quick question from each of the members. We will go to Ms Lawder; one question, very quickly.

**MS LAWDER:** When you opened you talked about welcoming the focus on social inclusion and equality in the budget. To take it to its logical conclusion, what does reporting on that look like? How will you measure?

**Ms Helyar:** Sustainable development goals have been agreed by the UN. They are better than us at coming up with these kinds of measures. There is a very comprehensive list of 17 goals with, I think, a total of 140 measures. We have got some views on which of those might be most fruitful to track in the ACT, but they are all about reducing inequality and increasing access to the services and resources that make for a strong economy and a prosperous community. We would use those as our guide.

But the one that I think is a simple one is if you look at health, if you look at housing, if you look at employment: what is happening for the bottom 40 per cent? If their circumstances and opportunities are not changing more than the average, then there is a problem. That was a key thing that was found through the UN work on the sustainable development goals. It is all very well to lift the average, but if you lift the average and leave the bottom 40 per cent way behind, it is not a sustainable change.

**MS LAWDER:** Or if you improve the top 20 per cent; you have not achieved much.

**Ms Helyar:** Yes.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I want to go to the NDIS transition. You talk about ACT being the first jurisdiction to transition to the full rollout of NDIS. ACTCOSS is positive in support of the NDIS and the principles of control and choice that underpin it. We heard from the advocacy group that apparently there is nothing at the ACT level that has replaced Disability ACT.

**Ms Helyar:** Yes. One of the concerns, and it is one of the questions that we have tabled for broader consideration when you are doing your hearings, is around what is the long-term investment and capability within the ACT government bureaucracy around disability. Whilst the NDIS has led to a transfer of service delivery responsibility outside of ACT government, the national disability strategy, of which the NDIS was one component, actually has a whole lot of expectations about, beyond service delivery, how you make sure that communities are accessible and effective for people living with disability. There is a need, both in that space but also in the carer space, to think about what is the long-term strategy for people with disabilities and for people who are carers, and what is the mechanism within government to do the policy work and to hold internal government to account around delivering on those objectives.

**MR DOSZPOT:** So you have made recommendations on that or asked questions?

**Ms Helyar:** We have asked a question about what are the investment and the process for developing a disability strategy and a carer strategy long term.



**MR DOSZPOT:** The question that is being asked by advocacy is a very direct question about the gap that exists now, that there is nothing that has taken over from Disability ACT. I find it a bit difficult to understand how ACTCOSS is positive and supportive of that without highlighting that, because that is a fairly significant aspect of it.

**Ms Helyar:** I think it did get into it. Down at the bottom of the page, it says:

ACTCOSS welcomes the retention of Disability ACT and the NDIS Taskforce between now and 30 June 2017, noting that there remains considerable work to do within the NDIS transition implementation ...

There are some remarks about interim arrangements for Disability ACT. Then it says:

ACTCOSS also would have preferred a clearer commitment from Government to the future shape of disability policy rather than a plan for winding down the current policy capacity.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I am simply stating what has been stated by advocacy. I presume they would be talking to your group as well.

**Ms Helyar:** Yes. We put those words in our analysis to support the position of Advocacy for Inclusion and People with Disabilities ACT. And I think ADACAS will be speaking about that.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Thank you.

**MS BURCH:** I just have a very quick one. We have also heard about gender statements and about analysis of impact on women. We have a social inclusion statement, which you seem to be supportive of. Can the gender assessment/statement be embedded within that rather than being another layer of impact statements through? Is it fair and reasonable to hold it within a social inclusion statement?

**Ms Helyar:** No, because we think that with 50 per cent of the population that has significantly different outcomes in many ways, it is important that that is given its own statement. Certainly our membership has raised that again with us this year—the lack of—

**MS BURCH:** The Y has raised it.

**Ms Helyar:** Yes, and people other than the Y have raised it with us as well. It is a bigger issue around gender budgeting. I was part of some work at the ANU with an international delegation. There is quite a lot of work being done by governments in many places around the value of doing that, because it creates visibility of issues that are not otherwise visible if it is kind of buried somewhere else in the budget. I think that is important.

The other thing I would just like to say is that we did have a list of questions that we put to you that we thought may be useful for you in your questions for directorate staff.

**THE CHAIR:** I thought they were prompts for me to ask you.

**Ms Helyar:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** But we will take them up with the ministers.

**Ms Helyar:** We have a few more to table. We have had some more that have come in from the people whom we consult with. We might just send those through to the secretariat.

**THE CHAIR:** Send them to the secretariat. They will be gratefully received. With that, our time this afternoon is at an end, because we have a commissioner waiting to come and speak with us about his budget.

Thank you very much for your submission. The transcript will be provided in a couple of days when it is available. If you would like to review it and there are any suggestions or additional information that you would like to provide, that would be gratefully received.

The chair has the ability to make decisions. Every day in estimates I normally give an award. In the community and industry groups hearing, my award today goes to ACTCOSS for their 64-page snapshot. It is the largest snapshot I have ever seen in my life. Well done, you.

Appearances:

ACT Electoral Commission

Green, Mr Phillip, ACT Electoral Commissioner

Spence, Mr Rohan, Deputy Electoral Commissioner

Hickey, Mr Scott, Acting Chief Financial Officer

Camporeddo, Ms Reynaida, Finance Manager

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome to the public hearings of the Select Committee on Estimates 2016-2017. Please be aware that proceedings are being recorded, will be transcribed and will be published by Hansard. As well, you are now being broadcast and webstreamed. In front of you on the table is a pink card, the privilege statement. Could you please indicate to the committee that you have read the privilege statement and understand its implications.

**Mr Green:** Yes, we have.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. Mr Green, would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr Green:** Thank you. I thought I would dispense with an opening statement; I am very happy to go straight to questions.

**THE CHAIR:** All right. The decision to get rid of the tally room: why?

**Mr Green:** The Electoral Commission, the three-person body, had long and considered discussions around whether we should have a tally room at the 2016 election. We have taken note of the fact that every other jurisdiction in Australia has decided not to have a tally room, except for Tasmania, which still has not announced whether it will or will not have a tally room at its next election.

The thing that most gave us cause to decide that it would not be sensible to have a tally room was the security situation. With the fact that there are people in Western countries now who are targeted by people with guns and bombs, holding a public thing like the tally room we think is a very serious risk. That is something that we were very mindful of.

Beyond that, there is the fact that the election result system is now fully computerised; it is fully on the internet. The only purpose that the tally room really now serves is to put on a screen exactly the same information that is on the internet. We thought that was setting up something that was not really adding any value.

We had also had discussions with the ABC, who are the media organisation that typically have the biggest presence in our tally room. They had decided before we had made our mind up that they were not going to have a broadcast from the tally room in October. We thought that would take a lot of the life out of the tally room and would make it not the place that it has been in the past.

We also are aware that the tally room is quite a big project of itself for a very small Electoral Commission. It is something that takes quite a lot of energy on the part of

all—not only the project manager but senior management—in running the tally room, setting it up. It is a very high-risk thing. If something was to go wrong in the tally room, it is a very public place to make a mistake. And, from time to time, tally rooms have had their moments—not just ours, but others.

Taking all those things together, and considering the fact that we now have a very reliable online election result system and that the ABC was not going to be there, we thought that the time had come to follow the rest of the country. Sadly—to my regret, because I really love having a tally room; I have worked on tally rooms since 1982—we just decided that the various risks were not worth it in having the tally room in October.

**MS BURCH:** Can I ask a sort of follow-up?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**MS BURCH:** Will there be your own little replica tally room in the electoral office, in the commission's office, just for the night, for yourself?

**Mr Green:** Yes. What we typically do, not only at our election but at all elections around the country, is run a visitor program where other electoral commissions come and look at what we do. Sometimes international electoral people also come and observe what we do here in Australia. We will be offering a visitor program, so we will have people in our office not from the ACT Electoral Commission who will be there. We will have televisions and we will have computer screens in our office, but that will not be a public event.

**THE CHAIR:** What was the cost of the tally room? And how many FTE were dedicated to it

**Mr Green:** The direct costs, I am advised, were \$26,000 last election. We typically devote one full-time person to that, plus a lot of other people assist in the tally room. It was not a huge cost: this is not really all about saving money; it is about the other risks.

**THE CHAIR:** In regard to the security, whom did you have discussions with? The AFP or other organisations?

**Mr Green:** We did not talk to AFP. We took note of what the other electoral commissions had decided to do. It was more just a general reflection on the security risks around what is happening in the world today.

**MS BURCH:** Given that we will not have a big whiteboard—I am sure you will have a whiteboard somewhere in your office on the night—with electronic voting, the move to ICT and the fact that you will have real, up-to-date data available to everybody at the same time, when are we going to have electronic voting throughout the ACT? Will we ever have electronic voting throughout the ACT?

**Mr Green:** That is not a simple question to answer. To start with what we currently have, we will be effectively repeating what happened at the past several elections. We

will be having electronic voting in the pre-poll voting centres. Last election, 25 per cent of our voters were able to use electronic voting by voting at those locations. I am anticipating that the absolute numbers of people who vote in that way will continue to rise, as it has risen at every election—

**MS BURCH:** Just general pre-poll voting?

**Mr Green:** General pre-polling numbers are rising all across the country in every election that happens, and I am expecting that that will happen again in the ACT. The absolute number of people and proportion of people voting electronically is likely to rise, because pre-poll voting is going up.

We have decided in the past that setting up electronic voting at every polling place when we have 80 polling places on election day is too big a logistical effort for not enough return. I think the question for the 2020 election will be: at what point does the ACT move to internet voting? New South Wales has now introduced internet voting for its elections for people who are unable to get to polling places. I know that some of the other states around Australia are also considering using internet voting for their elections. There will come a time at some point in the future when every jurisdiction will be using internet voting, if the various concerns about internet voting can be overcome, and some states have already made the decision that they can be.

**MS BURCH:** Is it just assuring that the enrolled voter is the one actually getting on the internet and providing the vote? Is that the security?

**Mr Green:** That is one of the considerations. But the biggest risk that we in the ACT Electoral Commission see is the risk of hackers getting into your election database and compromising the actual election results that are recorded on the voting servers. If that were to happen, it is possible that an entire election could be compromised and the only thing you could do to retrieve the situation would be to have the whole election again. That is a huge risk. To date the ACT Electoral Commission has not judged that the internet is ready for our elections to be put to that risk, but other electoral commissions in other jurisdictions in Australia have decided that that risk is worth taking.

**MS BURCH:** Going back to electronic voting, and I understand it is pre-poll, there would be some booths on election day that are quite substantive and bigger than others, but you are not considering putting electronic voting into those larger booths, because you are sort of looking beyond that now?

**Mr Green:** The reason that we do not do it just for one day in the ACT is the logistics of setting it up in a polling place. It is quite a significant logistical exercise where we are putting about 20 computers into a polling place, setting it up, testing it, making sure it runs. We can usually only get into these venues on the Friday night before polling day, so that is not a lot of time to set something up and test. So it is quite a big risk to do that. With the pre-poll centres, we have them for a week before we move into them, so we have that whole week to make sure that they are tested.

With the way computer hardware has changed recently, by the 2020 election, even if we do not move to internet, there may be some other solution that might be a much

simpler solution. An out-of-the-box netbook or large smartphone solution might be an option at that point. The computer hardware and computer technology are changing at such a rate that by 2020 there may be things available that simply are not available now. While it is a steady as she goes approach for this election, by 2020 there may well be quite dramatically different options available.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Mr Green, I am looking at a copy of a letter that refers to the discontinuation of the tally room. What I am about to say is not meant to be flippant, but I should imagine that data integrity is a pretty important part of the operation. I am looking at something that twice misspells my name.

**Mr Green:** I am very sorry.

**MR DOSZPOT:** As I say, it is not a flippant comment, but I draw that to your attention. In the address and also in the addressing to me it is, “Mr Steve Dozspot MLA” with the “s” and the “z” in the wrong position.

**Mr Green:** I apologise unreservedly. I did not see those personally. We will put extra things in place to make sure that does not happen again.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Thank you.

**Mr Green:** I apologise.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I do not want to cause Robson rotation too many problems.

**Mr Green:** No. We do proofread the ballot papers very carefully.

**MR HANSON:** Good afternoon, Mr Commissioner. The issue of people who go overseas: for a federal election my understanding is that there are a number of overseas polling places where people can go to vote but that that is not the case for the ACT election. There is a certain time frame by which people cannot get the ballot for a postal vote, which is not unique to this election. Have you had a look at this to see if there is any flexibility to have overseas voting in embassies or high commissions in some of the more prominent overseas locations where people are likely to visit; I am imagining, London, Washington and perhaps a couple of major capitals.

**Mr Green:** It is not something we have ever provided for ACT elections. We have looked at this and the number of voters in each location for an ACT election is very low so it is not a very cost effective thing to do. What we have done and what we are planning to do for this election is that because we have fixed-term elections we are able to advertise well in advance when the election dates are. We inform people when the pre-poll votes are made available.

We have online applications for postal votes, and as soon as the federal election is finished with, we are going to put our online applications on to our website so that people who are overseas have a lot of time in which to apply for their postal votes. If they apply early, we will be putting them in the post as soon as they are available three weeks before polling day. So that is a full three weeks for them to go out and come back.

**MR HANSON:** If they have redirected their mail maybe to a mailbox overseas or something like that then there is a way that they could do it, if they are that keen to do it, I suppose.

**Mr Green:** The mail does have to travel to an overseas location and has to be in their hands, completed and back in the post box by polling day, and they have got a week after polling day to receive it. So timing is tight.

**MR HANSON:** Yes.

**Mr Green:** By 2020 I think we need to be looking at alternative ways of doing this, and perhaps some form of limited internet voting or some form of electronic voting might be the solution to that. But it is an area, particularly now that postal services are not as quick as they used to be, that we will need to address perhaps by the 2020 election.

**THE CHAIR:** There was recently an incident in Eden-Monaro where a spam phone message was sent purporting to come from a candidate. What is the law in the ACT regarding that sort of activity? If it was undertaken in the ACT what actions could or would you take?

**Mr Green:** The only offences in ACT electoral law are to do with authorisation of political communications. If something is being sent via the telephone network that is anonymous or is not correctly authorised, there might be an authorisation offence. But there is not any form of anti-spam offence. There is an offence of being misleading or deceptive in relation to the casting of a vote, but that is a very limited offence in relation to actually filling out a ballot paper.

I would imagine that that kind of activity would be anonymous and it would be very difficult to actually track down who is responsible for that. I am not actually sure what recourse there would be for that kind of activity.

**THE CHAIR:** As a follow-up from that, most of us have Facebook sites or Twitter sites or other sorts of sites and authorisations where we as politicians send on an email that somebody has sent us or somebody sends on something we have sent. What is the need for authorisations there?

**Mr Green:** Yes, we have had some recent communications with—

**MR HANSON:** I could answer that question.

**Mr Green:** Mr Hanson and others. Social media is obviously an evolving thing and we are making up the rules as these things change and evolve to try to make the Electoral Act that was written in the 1990s fit things that are happening in 2016. Essentially the law requires anything that is electoral matter—which is anything intended or likely to affect voting in an election for the ACT—carries an authorisation statement with some exceptions. One of the exceptions is related to social media posts by individuals acting on their own behalf and not being paid to express their views, so they do not have to authorise social media posts. In part, that is recognition of the fact

that many people when they are present online do not actually identify who they are; they use alternative names other than their real names, so it would be almost impossible to police that anyway.

But in terms of things that perhaps MLAs might have on their Facebook pages, there is a requirement to have on a Facebook page an authorisation statement which, in the case of an MLA, would simply be something like, “Authorised by Brendan Smyth MLA”, for example.

As to once things appear on pages and have been shared—we have been looking at this in the last day or so—we have reached the view that as long as a thing that is shared from place to place identifies the originator of the material and readers of the material are aware who has originated the thing—which is the way Facebook and Twitter typically work—that is sufficient for the readers to have an indication of who the author of the material is, which is effectively sufficient to authorise it under the Electoral Act.

**THE CHAIR:** So if my Facebook says, “Brendan Smyth MLA works at the ACT Assembly,” and clearly identifies me as a politician—same as, for instance, my letterhead does not need authorisation—is that sufficient, or do we have to have a little authorisation subtag on every post that we make from now on?

**Mr Green:** I will just take some advice on this one. Letterhead is different because there is actually a specific exemption in the Electoral Act for letters that carry letterheads of MLAs. So let us set that to one side.

**THE CHAIR:** But in effect my Facebook site is my letterhead. It is a letterhead. It identifies it is from me.

**Mr Green:** It identifies who you are. It identifies that you are an MLA. That is sufficient.

**THE CHAIR:** So on Facebook or Twitter or any of the social media, if it says, “Brendan Smyth MLA” or “Brendan Smyth, a politician in the ACT Assembly”, you would be happy with that as an authorisation.

**Mr Green:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** And then if somebody shares that, it still carries where it has come from.

**Mr Green:** As I understand it, if someone shares something that you have posted, it will still have your name on the material when it is shared. If someone wants to click on your name, they will come back to your Facebook page and find out who you are.

**THE CHAIR:** So you are happy with that as an authorisation now?

**Mr Green:** I am happy with that.

**MS BURCH:** So you do not have to authorise every tweet and post that you put on



Facebook? If the central source is Brendan Smyth, Joy Burch, Steve Doszpot MLA, member for whatever, that is enough?

**Mr Green:** Yes. This has particularly arisen where people take photographs of things that might contain electoral matter and then post that to their Facebook page. We were thinking that you might have to have something embedded in the photo that is an authorisation, but obviously that is not really practical if you are just taking something on your mobile phone and passing it on. So provided that when material is shared it is identified as to who has originated it, I think that is fine.

**MS BURCH:** Because we are all going to take selfies in front of our corflutes, I would imagine.

**MR HANSON:** A supplementary?

**THE CHAIR:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** I think that that is the advice that you gave me less than two hours ago.

**Mr Green:** Yes.

**MR HANSON:** I would like to thank you very much for your timely response. I acknowledge it is a bit of a minefield in this area, and I appreciate the fact that you looked into these issues and provided the advice formally to me that you provided to the committee now. I think it is going to be a difficult issue for you this year with the new rules of five and five and social media as it emerges. I would like to say thanks very much for your response to the correspondence I had today. I would not say we quite made the rules up as we are going along, but you looked at the issues and responded accordingly.

**MS BURCH:** There is a dot point of administering ongoing campaign finance reform functions and all of that. It will be a challenging year for you. You have prepped up for it, you have got the staff in, teams are ready to rock and roll, so to speak.

**Mr Green:** Yes.

**MS BURCH:** Is the community ready for it and what has been the objection to the new names—or are we way past that now?

**Mr Green:** As you know, the redistribution process had several stages where public comment was sought, and the number of objections to the new names and the new boundaries was not sufficient to convince the augmented commission to change what was proposed. The feedback we are getting is that people are comfortable with the names.

**MS BURCH:** Just to let you know, I am very grateful that “Brindabella” did not change for me.

**Mr Green:** Good. So as part of our information campaign we are going to be

introducing a new phase which will highlight the fact that we have new electoral boundaries. In fact, that is going to be kicking off our campaign, which will be jointly aimed at informing the electors that there is an election coming—another election in the context of the federal election—and that the boundaries have changed. So we will be doing quite a lot of effort with advertising on television, newspapers, internet, social media. We will be doing brochures to households. All of those things will be focusing on the new boundaries.

The federal election being held on 2 July has made us reconsider our timing of when we do this. So we are waiting for the federal election to be over and dusted before we start hitting people with our own messages, but we will be starting our advertising campaign in August.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I have a supplementary on that: how will you do that? Are you going to be specifically saying that there is currently a group of people who are your local members—the member for Molonglo, for instance? Are you going to make a comparison between being a member of your current electorate and also becoming a candidate for the new electorate?

**Mr Green:** We are more going to be focusing on what the new boundaries are, what suburbs are in the new boundaries and what people will be faced with when they come along to vote. I would have thought that it is probably more the responsibility of the candidates and the MLAs to explain the background of where they have come from and where they are going to.

**MR DOSZPOT:** I understand that. But where I am coming from is that we are also responsible for being members for our own electorates at the moment.

**Mr Green:** Yes, our website will make it clear that the current boundaries remain the current boundaries up until the election is held and that the members of the various electorates remain as members with those boundaries up until polling day. That will be part of the message that people will get from our website.

**MR DOSZPOT:** What directions would you give if you became aware of unauthorised political advertising on public buildings or public vehicles, particularly ACT government buildings and vehicles?

**Mr Green:** There are a couple of aspects to that. One is—this is happening very regularly—that we get reports of unauthorised electoral material. Our first response where we know who is responsible for the material is to contact them and ask them to correct it or to remove it. That is generally extremely effective. People do not want to be seen to be breaking the law; so they have an incentive to correct things. It is generally not intended to be unauthorised; it is just people who are not aware of the rules or not properly communicating to other members of their organisations that the rules apply.

Where material is anonymous, that is a much more difficult thing to deal with. We are seeing very little stuff, I think, that is anonymous at present. Mostly what we are seeing are things that are just inadvertently not authorised and we are getting those fixed up.

**MS BURCH:** Would you remove the anonymous material?

**Mr Green:** This is where I am coming to: if things are on public buildings—that is not something that has arisen to date—that would be something that we would be referring to the TAMS rangers, because that would be their responsibility rather than our responsibility to deal with that.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Have you had to give any directions regarding unauthorised political advertising by public officials in ACT government buildings?

**Mr Green:** In ACT government buildings? No, I do not think so.

**MR DOSZPOT:** Thank you.

**MR HANSON:** In respect of the decision to go to the five electorates, you have mapped out the boundaries for that. There has been quite a bit of development of late, particularly in Gungahlin affecting Yerrabi and Molonglo, which affects Murrumbidgee. With your five per cent plus or minus rule, are we still within that or have some of those new suburbs actually increased in size beyond the intended capacity, or have you not mapped that yet?

**Mr Green:** To be honest, I have not looked at those figures recently, particularly after the federal roll closed, because quite a large number of people got enrolled as a result of the federal election. That is something that, now you have reminded me, we will do soon. But the way the redistribution is conducted is that we go to the Australian Bureau of Statistics and to the relevant planning people in the ACT government. We have very good estimates of what development is planned. We build those estimates into our redistribution projections to October 2016, which are the things that we have to get within plus or minus five per cent. So I would be very confident that we have anticipated the growth that has happened.

**MR HANSON:** I know there has been quite a push to try to enrol younger voters. They seem to be the ones who are not on the roll. The federal electoral commissioner, I think, has been doing some work around that. I obviously see it in the media. Do you have a view? Have you sort of mapped out how many Canberrans are not on the roll and what the demographics are?

**Mr Green:** I have good news on this front. Just today we have received some figures from the Australian Electoral Commission that give the enrolment breakdown by age as at close of rolls for the federal election in the ACT. Let me describe the figures I am going to give you. What they do is use Australian Bureau of Statistics figures to estimate how many people ought to be on the electoral roll; so they are looking at Australian citizens over 18 who are resident in the ACT. They work out by age group how many people they think ought to be enrolled and then they look at the number of people who are actually enrolled.

According to the figures from the close of roll for the federal election, they are estimating that 99.7 per cent of eligible ACT electors are on the electoral roll, including 96.6 per cent of 18-year-olds, which I think is probably the highest we have

ever seen of the proportion of 18-year-olds on the roll.

This is where the estimates need to be taken with a grain of salt. They are estimating that 101 per cent of 19-year-olds are on the roll; 99.5 per cent of 20 to 24-year-olds are on the roll; 99.4 per cent of 18 to 24-year-olds are on the roll; 97 per cent of 25 to 39s are on the roll; 100.3 of 40 to 59-year-olds are on the roll; and 101.9 per cent of 60 and over are on the roll.

**THE CHAIR:** Vote early, vote often.

**Mr Green:** I think what this is telling us is that their estimates of people that ought to be on the roll are not as accurate as they might be, and that is to do with the age of census data and the accuracy of moving in, moving out statistics in terms of people entering and leaving the ACT.

What these figures do not tell you is how many people are on our roll who should not be on our roll. They might be people on our roll who do not live here anymore, which would inflate the figures. But given that these are the only figures we have got, and we do have a series of figures going back over time, this does appear to be the most complete roll we have ever had for the ACT. I cannot definitively say that because I would have to go back and check that, but I do not recall ever seeing figures this high for 18 and 19-year-olds.

Between the federal election and our election, I am expecting our roll will actually improve, because what happens at the federal election is that people will turn up on polling day wherever they happen to be living now and go to vote. If they are actually enrolled for the wrong place, then they will fill in an enrolment form or a declaration vote, which will get them on the roll for their correct address. This should impact on our roll to the effect that when our election comes along with the roll closing in September, the roll will, I am hoping, be even better than it is now.

**MS BURCH:** How does that translate into turning up to vote? Do we have a high level of turning up to vote?

**Mr Green:** In absolute numbers, I am pretty confident we would get more people turning up. In terms of the proportion of those people who actually turn up and vote, another thing to look at is why the enrolment is as high as it is. One of the reasons it is as high as it is is because the commonwealth now has had four years of their direct enrolment process. For example, people who get a drivers licence get automatically put on the electoral roll after they have been contacted and it is confirmed that it is appropriate for them to be put on the roll. So we are getting people put on the roll, whether they want to or not or whether they have actually taken the effort of getting out there and filling in an enrolment form themselves. That is, I think, one of the main reasons why it is as high as it is.

But I understand that there was quite a large number of people who voluntarily got on the roll at the last minute before the federal roll closed. So there were people keen to vote at the federal election. That, hopefully, will carry on to our election. But there are people on the electoral roll now who have not applied to go on the electoral roll; they were effectively automatically put on the electoral roll. It will be interesting when our

election comes along to see how many of those fail to vote for whatever reason. That is an unknown. We will do our best to get the message out that voting is compulsory and we do fine people if they do not vote. We will get that message out there

**THE CHAIR:** The electoral system upgrade that was rolled over, is that now complete?

**Mr Green:** When you say “electoral system”—

**THE CHAIR:** The ICT system upgrade.

**Mr Green:** So our ICT systems are all in user acceptance testing at the moment and I am very confident that they will be fully operational and implemented for the election.

**THE CHAIR:** Other questions, members?

**MR HANSON:** Could you remind me of the last day for parties to register?

**Mr Green:** The last date upon which an application to register a party can be received is 30 June. We currently have three parties that have applied to register and they are in the process of being—

**MR HANSON:** I think I saw that press release, yes.

**Mr Green:** But people do have until 30 June to apply?

**MR HANSON:** What about individuals? What is their last—

**Mr Green:** Independent candidates?

**MR HANSON:** Yes.

**Mr Green:** That goes to the nomination period. So that starts at the commencement of the pre-election period on 9 September and closes on 21 September, we think, without going back and looking at something official. It is a Wednesday.

**THE CHAIR:** There being no further questions, Mr Green, thank you very much to you and your officers. Mr Spence, Mr Hickey, Ms Camporedondo, you have done very well by remaining silent and letting the boss carry the can. Excellent public servicing. Thank you for your appearance today.

A transcript will be provided when it is ready. If there is anything you want to correct or any additional information you would like to provide, the committee would receive that gratefully.

Members, that is the end for today. Day one down; 10 to go, and we will see you all at 9.30 on Monday when the Treasurer will appear. I am sure he is looking forward to it and will prepare all weekend.

**The committee adjourned at 5.02 pm.**