



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2017-2018

**(Reference: Appropriation Bill 2017-2018 and Appropriation
(Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2017-2018)**

Members:

**MR A WALL (Chair)
MS B CODY (Deputy Chair)
MR A COE
MS C LE COUTEUR
MR M PETTERSSON**

CANBERRA

FRIDAY, 16 JUNE 2017

**Secretary to the committee:
Ms N Kosseck (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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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9.32 am.

CUZZILLO, MS REBECCA, Policy Director, Youth Coalition of the ACT

THE CHAIR: Good morning, and welcome to the first day of public hearings for the Select Committee on Estimates 2017-2018. In the proceedings today we will examine the views of 10 community and industry representative groups in relation to the 2017-18 ACT budget.

Please be aware that the proceedings are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard today and will be published, and the proceedings will also be broadcast and streamed live online. I do not imagine there will be too many questions taken on notice today, but if you do so, please state that you will take the question on notice. That will help Hansard and us to follow it up.

First up this morning is Ms Cuzzillo from the Youth Coalition of the ACT. Do you mind confirming that you have read the pink privilege statement and that you agree with it?

Ms Cuzzillo: Yes, I have read it, and I agree with it.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to give us a brief representation of how the Youth Coalition feels about the ACT budget?

Ms Cuzzillo: Sure. Thanks for having me here today. The 2017-18 ACT budget delivered a number of positive initiatives for young Canberrans that the Youth Coalition has been calling for over the last few years. In particular, we commend the ACT government for investing in youth mental health services, and we welcome the \$400,000 investment in headspace Canberra in particular.

With 25 per cent of young people experiencing a mental health issue in any given year, long wait times have become the norm for many of our youth mental health services in the ACT. We believe some of the budget measures focused on youth mental health have the potential to alleviate some of the pressure on these services and increase their capacity to support the mental health and wellbeing of young Canberrans.

We also welcome the increased investment in child protection and out-of-home care services. However, outside mental health and out-of-home care, there is little in the 2017-18 ACT budget that will ensure younger members of our community can share in the opportunities of a strengthening local economy. We are particularly disappointed with the lack of investment in specific initiatives to address housing affordability and youth unemployment and underemployment. While jobs growth is picking up for the rest of the population, youth unemployment and underemployment remain a concern. In the current context of a strengthening economy, we are disappointed in the lack of investment to address this issue.

In his budget speech the Treasurer pointed to the success of our education sector, which represents 30 per cent of our total service exports. We urge the ACT government to invest in measures that support our students with viable and

meaningful post-study job options that will facilitate their continued contribution to our growing economy. We believe it is important not only to attract young people to the territory to study but also to stimulate an employment market that allows them to remain here once they have graduated.

We also welcome the modest investment in specialist homelessness and housing support services in this budget. In particular, we are pleased to see the commitment to developing a system-wide trauma-informed approach to homelessness support services. Research by the Housing and Homelessness Policy Consortium, of which we were a partner, identified this as a critical need for the ACT. However, we are disappointed in the lack of investment in measures that will effectively address housing affordability. As an issue that gained considerable community support in the lead-up to the ACT election, we are disappointed that this budget does not include significant investment towards developing an affordable housing strategy.

We welcome the new focus on education equity, through the future of education program, but we do not believe that the education initiatives in this budget will deliver improved outcomes for students experiencing educational disadvantage. We look forward to working with the ACT government to ensure that the future of education program prioritises a student-centred approach that looks beyond the school gate and engages a broad range of stakeholders.

For many years we have been calling on the ACT government to move beyond funding in silos and approach the ACT budget with a strategic perspective that addresses the social determinants of health and invests in early intervention and prevention. Last year we commended the Treasurer for taking a whole-of-government approach to addressing domestic and family violence through the safer families package. We are happy to see that this program is continuing, but we are disappointed that this kind of approach to funding is absent in this budget.

We would also like to have seen more investment in prevention and early intervention measures, as this is what will ultimately alleviate the pressures at the tertiary end of our service system. An understanding of early intervention and prevention and the social determinants of health invites us to consider who is responsible for responding to significant social issues that affect our community across a broad range of spheres. It is our position that it is a whole-of-community and a whole-of-government responsibility, and we will continue to call on the ACT government to prioritise early intervention and prevention as a guiding principle when making budgetary decisions.

THE CHAIR: Ms Cuzzillo, the submission to this committee that the Youth Coalition has made talks about wait times for access to youth mental health services. What would be deemed or classified a long wait time for a young person, typically, in Canberra?

Ms Cuzzillo: When you talk to young people about wait times and how long they should wait when they ask for help, most of them will say they want help within a week. We do know that, when young people reach out for help, if that help is not there then they are much less likely to reach out once again. At the moment wait times have been up to six to eight weeks, for headspace in particular. That is just to have an initial assessment; that is not necessarily to get any clinical services. When we think

about six to eight weeks in the adult world, that is not really a huge amount of time for us, but for a young person that is an entire school term, and when you are in crisis you need that support pretty quickly.

THE CHAIR: Is the long wait time a symptom of the lack of practitioners locally, or is it simply a funding constraint?

Ms Cuzzillo: I think it is mainly about the funding. The \$400,000 that is in the budget for headspace this year will mean they can employ five more staff. It is only for one year, but we do recognise that, in the current context, with headspace nationally, their funding is not secure. So in that context we understand why it is for one year. We would like to see a long-term commitment to this kind of funding, but we understand why that might not be the case. I would say, in answer to your question, that it is mainly about the capacity of the service to fulfil the need, and they just do not have that capacity.

MS CODY: You spoke about educational disadvantage. Can you expand on that a little bit for me? What do you see as the major barriers?

Ms Cuzzillo: Equity in education has been a big area of advocacy for us over the last few years. In the ACT, because of the way disadvantage is spread across the city, similarly to the way we do not have pockets of disadvantage in housing, we do not have pockets of disadvantage in schools. It means that there are only a few young people who are struggling with school because of their home life and other areas of their life that mean education can be a challenge. There are low numbers in each school, which means they are hidden. That is one of the big challenges that we have in the ACT that is specific to us.

We understand that the student resource allocation program is currently being rolled out in schools. It is focusing on specific groups of young people who are experiencing disadvantage, which is great. In terms of this budget, we are pleased to see that the future of education has a focus on equity, but in terms of anything that was funded to address equity, it was not included in this budget.

MS CODY: Are schools currently doing things to address that?

Ms Cuzzillo: Yes, of course. We see some really great examples of work that is happening in the community and in schools. One of the things that we have been calling for is matched investment in community services. One of the things that the education system has said, and particularly through the schools for all program, is that when there is a need, we need to be able to reach out and get those wraparound supports for young people who might be struggling at home. We think that is a great approach. Community Services have a lot to offer schools. They have a lot of expertise. They probably already know these families, but in terms of capacity to respond when a school calls them and says, “We’ve got this young person who is struggling with this thing,” that capacity is not necessarily there because the services are already stretched. We would like to see more partnerships between schools and community. In order for that to happen, we need to make sure that Community Services have that capacity.

MS LE COUTEUR: This is probably a continuation of Ms Cody’s question and what you said earlier. You talked about working specifically with young people who have had trauma in their lives. I understand that CSD has allocated some specific funding for that. Do you have any idea when that is going to be happening? Continuing what you said to Ms Cody, is this the appropriate way to go? Should there be more funding going to CSD for these sorts of things or should there be another approach?

Ms Cuzzillo: We tend to not necessarily see it as a directorate responsibility. We would like to see Education take responsibility for seeing community services as valuable and purchasing that from within there. We do not necessarily think it needs to be siloed in different areas. In terms of a trauma-informed approach, the community sector has been going down that path and doing training in that area for the last few years. They definitely have expertise in that area. We would support more investment going into that kind of training for community services. I know that Education have been rolling out some training for their staff as well, in terms of a trauma-informed approach, which is great.

In terms of getting the capacity to have the services wrap around a young person who is experiencing disadvantage, we need to see funding across the community—within schools and within community services; it does not matter whether that comes from CSD, Education or another directorate.

MS LE COUTEUR: As long as there is more of it.

Ms Cuzzillo: I think so. One of our concerns is that, with the growing community and population, we are not seeing an increased investment in community services. We are seeing increases in planning for health and education, but not in our services. As suburbs are being developed and as there is more urban infill and things like that, the services that are servicing an area are not growing, but the area that they are servicing is growing and the population is growing. Over time, they get more and more stretched.

MS LE COUTEUR: I could keep going, but I think it is Mr Coe’s turn.

MR COE: Thanks for coming in today. My question is related to transport disadvantage in Canberra and whether the Youth Coalition has any research, or knows of any particular research, that tries to quantify transport disadvantage in Canberra and the severity of it.

Ms Cuzzillo: In terms of quantitative research, I am not sure. We ran a survey last year called “rate Canberra” where we asked young people in Canberra how they felt about different aspects of their life. We did ask them about transport. Over 2,000 young people completed that survey. We know that young people are really big users of public transport. We know that, of the barriers to them, cost is one but also the availability of services at the times when they need them. Young people are often working on weekends and at night, which is when there is not as much public transport. In terms of access to and availability of public transport when young people need it the most, that would be a key concern. In terms of quantifying the problem and the transport disadvantage, I do not know of any research that does that quantitatively.

MR COE: With the evidence that you do have, based on a survey last year which rated transport, is that publicly available?

Ms Cuzzillo: Yes, it is. It is on our website.

MR PETTERSSON: I was looking at your budget submission. One of the points that stood out for me was youth participation—recommendation 1:

Invest in strategies to engage meaningfully with young Canberrans regarding the Inquiry into the 2016 ACT Election and Electoral Act.

I am interested in that, but I want to take you to a broader point first. Before the recent announcements, how do you think the ACT government was doing on engaging with young people?

Ms Cuzzillo: Before the announcements?

MR PETTERSSON: There have been a whole bunch of reforms announced recently—things like citizens' juries, community consultation and representative samples. Do you have any comments on the previous system? I know that no-one has experienced what is coming up in the future, but previously, how do you think the ACT government was doing on engaging with young people?

Ms Cuzzillo: I think there has been a varied experience. Young people who are engaged in our community and who are part of things like the ministerial committee of young people often have quite good experiences with participation. Generally, most young people will say that people in positions of power—decision-makers of all kinds, not just politicians—do not necessarily value what they have to say. Across the board young people tend to report not feeling valued and that it is difficult to get their voices heard. Often the way that we engage young people in consultations is quite formal and not very child-friendly or youth-friendly.

In terms of how we were going before, it was probably not great, but we are pleased to see that there is a commitment to improving that. We would particularly point to the future of education, because that process seems to be taking a very broad approach to community consultation. There are not short time limits. They have a commitment to trying to make sure that people's voices are heard. That is what it takes to get young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in particular involved in this kind of thing. It takes targeted approaches that are much more resource intensive and time intensive than just asking the people who are already interested in having their voices heard.

MR PETTERSSON: You made a very good point—and I agree with you on this—that currently youth engagement is very formal. For example, the select committee process is incredibly formal. Do you have any suggestions on more informal ways that we could reach out and engage with young people?

Ms Cuzzillo: Yes, there are lots of different ways that you can do that. I think this kind of process is very daunting to young people—even the way that submissions are structured and things like that. Even if there were some specific resources put into

getting a group of young people together in a room and having someone else facilitate a conversation, you would probably get a much richer diversity of views.

MR PETTERRSSON: On a slightly different note, historically, would you say that young people have been under-represented in community consultations?

Ms Cuzzillo: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for coming in this morning and for being our first community group witness.

Ms Cuzzillo: Thank you for having me.

HOPKINS, MR MICHAEL, Deputy Executive Director, Master Builders Association of the ACT

THE CHAIR: Good morning, Mr Hopkins. Before we get started, I would like to draw your attention to the pink privilege statement in front of you and check that you have read it and understand its implications?

Mr Hopkins: Yes, I understand it.

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

Mr Hopkins: I will. Thanks for inviting us along this morning. Master Builders is a peak industry body representing the ACT construction industry. Ninety-three per cent of our members are small businesses. They are locally based. They all make a significant contribution to the ACT economy. Therefore, they also benefit from a strong ACT economy. It is for that reason that we are pleased to hear in the budget about the strong performance of the ACT's economy. There were a number of positive indicators reported. We are particularly pleased to hear about job creation and the population growth forecasts. We are also pleased to see that this growth is being underpinned by a significant investment in infrastructure in addition to the light rail stage 1 investment.

At the end of the day, for us a strong ACT economy means a strong construction industry, and that is what we are interested in. That forecast growth is going to drive demand for more skilled workers and apprentices, and drive demand for more land supply and more diverse housing stock. It will increase the urgent need to implement the building quality reforms which have already been announced by the government.

In our submission to this committee we have highlighted three areas that we would like to bring to your attention today. The first one relates to the infrastructure investment program or, more specifically, how the announcement of a chief engineer for the ACT could develop a long-term, 30-year infrastructure plan for the territory. Master Builders has long called for the development of a 30-year infrastructure plan. We think that the chief engineer would be well positioned to develop such a plan to map out infrastructure needs across all ACT government directorates and agencies, such as Icon Water, ActewAGL and even, where possible, private infrastructure providers like telcos. We would also encourage the chief engineer to work with the neighbouring regional councils to plan and coordinate cross-border infrastructure.

Finally, we think the infrastructure plan should not be limited to just physical infrastructure; it should also include social infrastructure. We heard from our last speaker about the need for infrastructure such as community facilities in addition to education and health projects. A long-term infrastructure plan would have significant benefits not only for ACT industry but also for the community. It would clearly show the direction of growth, it would set out a plan to show where and when social and physical infrastructure is going to be provided and it would help coordinate infrastructure planning across agencies and across jurisdictions. For industry, it would allow local businesses to make long-term plans to deliver the infrastructure, to skill up their workforce and to invest in the necessary plant and equipment they would need to

deliver the infrastructure over the long term.

The second point we would like to highlight relates to land release. We note, looking in the four-year land release program which was announced with this budget, compared to the four-year land release program last year, that land release will decline by seven per cent or 920 dwellings over the three overlapping years—comparing the two budgets. Over that same period this year's budget forecast population growth to increase by 1.5 per cent each year for those three years. So I guess it is fairly obvious to say that, without any additional supply from the private sector, such restriction on supply will drive up land prices and put new housing further out of reach of Canberrans.

It is logical, therefore, that the government has announced the sale of the next englobo parcel at Denman Prospect to the private sector. Likewise, it is logical that the CSIRO are now progressing with plans to develop their land at Ginninderra. We also welcome the commencement of the LDA joint venture at Ginninderry. All three projects will add to the supply of land. Our fear is that if planning approvals are delayed or if infrastructure costs and charges are excessively high on these three extra projects, the cost of land will just continue to increase at unsustainable rates.

Speaking of escalating charges, that brings me to our final point specifically related to the lease variation charge increases. We were surprised to see a 400 per cent increase in lease variation charges applying to certain residential leases. At the moment the charge applying to these blocks is \$7,500 per dwelling. That will increase to a flat \$30,000 per dwelling. This charge has been increased without any industry consultation, so far as we can see without any consultation more broadly and without any transitional arrangements.

It is not often that our office phone rings off the hook the morning after the ACT budget, but it did this year. This charge was the talk of the Gungahlin shops Wednesday morning. It was the talk of the Canberra Business Chamber budget breakfast, and at least one member has called me each day since the budget was announced voicing their concerns about this increase. The feedback that we have heard to date from some recent purchasers of blocks that would be affected is that they are looking to quickly resell their blocks before the market becomes fully aware of these increases. Some consultants are advising their clients to quickly lodge development applications before the new charge becomes effective. Others are advising their clients not to proceed with their projects altogether.

We are thankful for some advice we have received from the Asbestos Response Taskforce, which has qualified for us that the new charge will not apply to recent Mr Fluffy sales, which is a good thing. However, at this point there is still a lot of uncertainty about which blocks and how many blocks are affected, whether there will be any transitional arrangements or even why the charge has increased in the first place.

This approach to tax increase is not welcomed by industry. It gets us thinking about what charge will be increased by 400 per cent next. It runs counter to a number of other government policies of encouraging urban renewal and housing affordability. If government is needing to increase taxes by this level to balance the budget, then we

would welcome an opportunity to discuss the current charging regime with government, whether that be reforming LVC or even replacing it with a more efficient and effective system. We would be up for that discussion. More specifically related to this particular charge, we would welcome the opportunity to meet with government to discuss how a transition arrangement could be put in place for the current charge so that the recent purchases of existing blocks can adjust to this new charge over time. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Hopkins. I draw on your comments about land release. Has the Master Builders Association locally done any sort of modelling as to what the current supply curve actually is for new land?

Mr Hopkins: What we do know is that historically the ACT sustains around 4,000 to 4,500 dwelling approvals per annum. There have been spikes. I think 2010-11 dwelling approvals were close to 6,000 for that year. When we talk about greenfield land—probably more specifically if we talk about land for single detached housing—single detached housing typically has made up around 50 per cent of all dwelling approvals. But what is forecast for last year—the 2015-16 year—and for this current year is that detached housing approvals will drop to around 20 per cent of all approvals. I guess, based on that analysis, you could say that the demand for land for single detached houses is probably around double what is currently being supplied because we have seen that sharp drop-off this year and the previous year.

In our view, supply needs not only to meet demand but also to add to a growing stock of land on the ground—if you like, shovel-ready or build-ready land on the ground. Currently there are a few blocks at Throsby where that is possible. Otherwise it is in the private developments of Denman Prospect or some of the Mr Fluffy blocks which are build-ready. We would like to see that stock of land on the ground also building over time, just to avoid that situation that we have at the moment, which is a massive flood of land to the market when the LDA releases a stage and then a big drought when nothing is available until the next stage becomes available.

THE CHAIR: With the other projects that you mentioned, such as Denman, Ginninderry and the like, is there sufficient land in those projects coming on line essentially in the next 12 months to rectify the reduction in the government's land release strategy or—

Mr Hopkins: Yes, as we said, if they are brought to market quickly without approval delays or without excessive infrastructure charges. We do not know what that is going to be yet. We really do not have any detail about the CSIRO development, and obviously the Ginninderry development is only just starting now. The other projects that factor into overall supply include what is happening across the border in New South Wales as well. Googong is obviously adding to that supply, as will the future projects that are planned in New South Wales as well. So I think the answer is a sort of qualified yes, provided that there are not approval delays or infrastructure charges that—

THE CHAIR: All things going to plan.

Mr Hopkins: Yes.

MS CODY: I have a quick question about apprentices and traineeships. I noted in the budget that there was \$1 million to boost the number of female trades and also to help ensure mature-age workers upskill or make some shifts. The MBA supports that. Are there things that you are doing or could be doing to support the government's investment here?

Mr Hopkins: Yes, certainly. We are currently trying to seek a meeting with the government directorate to talk about how we could best allocate that \$1 million of funding. It will be very welcomed by industry. We are getting strong demand for MBA apprentices not only generally but including those two target areas of the government: females and mature age. We would be happy to sit down with government and talk about how we can implement that over the four years of the budget to increase female participation and mature age participation.

MS CODY: Including, obviously, safety initiatives as well to make sure that the apprentices and the workers going into these trades remain safe in the workforce?

Mr Hopkins: Of course. If an apprentice comes into the MBA apprenticeship program then they receive safety training before they set foot on a building site and they receive safety training throughout the life of their apprenticeship. They receive a number of other benefits, not only safety related, as part of an MBA apprenticeship which they would not get if they were hosted directly by an employer or hosted by another training organisation. Safety is, of course, part of that.

MS LE COUTEUR: I have got a lot of things I would like to talk about, but we have so little time. You talked about an infrastructure plan. Are there any particular projects you would like to see in it that maybe are not currently starring?

Mr Hopkins: That really is a question that would take a lot longer to answer. Our—

MS LE COUTEUR: We only have a limited budget so—

Mr Hopkins: Yes. The point in our submission here is not necessarily to advocate for particular infrastructure items. It is to advocate that there is benefit in long-term infrastructure planning. What actually sits in that plan is something to be worked out by government and all stakeholders together. We chose to talk about it in our submission because we think the appointment of the chief engineer is a real opportunity to make this happen. We have been talking about a long-term infrastructure plan. We are really excited that the chief engineer could actually bring this to reality.

In terms of actual infrastructure items, I think it is important that it is not just ACT government-funded infrastructure. Some of the benefits of the plan will come when we identify cross-border infrastructure and even infrastructure that is going to be provided by other levels of government as well. So I could not sit here and nominate any specific infrastructure item. I think if you look over the 30 years there are going to be too many to mention.

MR COE: Thanks for your evidence. Do you actually know or can you make an

educated guess about what impact the LVC changes will have on the supply? Can you actually quantify it in terms of the number of units that might be forgone?

Mr Hopkins: What we know is that it is a difference of \$22,500 per dwelling. That is the simple maths of it. How the market and how industry will respond to that I think is yet to be seen. Like I said, the feedback that we have from some of our members is that projects they had planned to commence they will now just put on the shelf and they will not proceed with.

I guess that others that are too far progressed will look to try and transfer that cost, pass it on to purchasers and just increase their prices by 22½. I guess that those investors that have not yet made the decision to buy a block of land will now just look elsewhere. I think the consequence of it is possibly all of those things already or any one of those things. The point is that all of them are negative for the ACT government and all of them are negative overall for the economy. A transitional arrangement is something that would help us work through this.

Remember that it was only a few months ago that we were having similar discussions with Icon Water about similar charges that they were seeking to introduce almost overnight, with very little consultation, very little transition. They got to a point where they are talking about a two-year transitional arrangement. That is something that industry can work with that would allow us to transition over that two-year time period.

MR COE: As a point of clarification, if someone does have a 1,000 square metre block in an RZ2 area and they have currently got a stand-alone house on it and they want to put two units—a dual occupancy—on it, will they get hit with a single \$30,000 charge or will they get hit with two \$30,000 charges?

Mr Hopkins: Our fear is that it would be two, but part of the issue here is that the level of detail we have about this charge is what we read in the budget papers and a letter we received subsequently from the asbestos task force. There was no consultation with industry, so we cannot really tell you exactly which blocks were affected, how many blocks were affected or provide a precise answer to your question. We will hope to get that detail over the next few weeks and months as we sit down with government. But ideally we would have had that discussion before we read about this in the budget papers.

MR COE: Yes. Thank you.

MR PETTERSSON: Mr Hopkins, I had a quick look over your submission. There was a particular item that stood out that I wanted to have a bit of a chat about. You say that government procurement can play a vital role to help grow and develop local industry, to the overall benefit of the ACT economy. What do you mean by that?

Mr Hopkins: I think that essentially what we are saying is we agree with the government's recent implementation of the local industry participation policy. The government agrees with us on this point: that it is important when government is making its own procurement decisions that it looks to maximise opportunities for local businesses. We are not saying that you should favour a local necessarily over

anyone else. We just think that the benefits for the broader economy and the broader community are going to be bigger if you choose a local contractor. There are many good local contractors that can carry out the government procurement opportunities that are available and announced in the budget. Essentially, what we are saying is that we agree with the objectives of that local industry participation policy which will, as I said in the submission, support and develop local industry.

MR PETTERSSON: Do you see a role for procurement in making workplaces safer, making sure that Canberrans' taxpayer money is spent on safe construction work?

Mr Hopkins: There already is. Safety is already a criterion to address in a government tender, and we definitely support that.

MR PETTERSSON: That is really good to hear that you are supporting local jobs and safe construction sites. Do you find the recent dialogue surrounding the memorandum of understanding with UnionsACT to be almost counter to what has been said today? I guess that the conversation that occurred surrounding the MOU was very vitriolic. There were lots of concerns about input from industry stakeholders in the process of procurement. Do you have any of those concerns with the future procurement code?

Mr Hopkins: Master Builders' comments about the MOU between government and UnionsACT were simply that it was unnecessary and that there was no role for a third party in government procurement. A government procurement decision is one between the government and the entity they are contracting with, and there is no need for an MOU to address safety or any of the other issues that we have been talking about today. It is simply unnecessary.

MR PETTERSSON: Are you aware of construction companies or developers ever making comment on the procurement process?

Mr Hopkins: Could you be more specific about "making comment"?

MR PETTERSSON: You said that you think the procurement process should solely be between government and tenderers. That is a fair viewpoint for some people to hold. Are you aware of any of your members going to government, making comment on the procurement choices of the ACT government?

Mr Hopkins: Obviously, with procurement decisions that they are involved in, absolutely they would be, yes. In fact, there is a formalised process after a tender decision for an unsuccessful contractor to have a dialogue with government so that they can learn lessons about why they were not successful that they can take forward into the next project. That sort of discussion or that sort of comment is already formalised in that process between the government and the contractors.

MR PETTERSSON: There is, after the decision has been made, a process. Do you think it is a valid and proper process to make sure that future tenders are better put together, are better constructed? Do you think that process is sound and good at the moment?

Mr Hopkins: There is a process. It works effectively. It is optional. It is not one where a contractor has to take up that option to seek comment and review. But it is certainly one that we support. It is not one that we think an MOU or any other document, or any other group for that matter, needs to be involved in to make it any better.

MR PETTERSSON: Do you see a role for employee representatives, trade unions, in any way making comment on the procurement process? Do you think they have valid input in any way on decisions that are made about government spending?

Mr Hopkins: Yes, absolutely, as do employer groups like the MBA. It is important that both of these groups contribute at a policy level to the discussion with government about infrastructure procurement practices and the like. But when it comes to a particular tender, a particular project, there is no need for anyone other than the contracting parties and the government, we believe, to be involved in that process.

THE CHAIR: Unfortunately, we are over time. Mr Hopkins, thank you very much for coming in on behalf of the MBA this morning.

CIRSON, MS ADINA, Executive Director, Property Council of Australia
ACT Division

THE CHAIR: Before we kick off, Ms Cirson, I will just ask you to familiarise yourself with the pink privilege statement in front of you and indicate that you are aware of the privilege statement and its implications.

Ms Cirson: I am; thank you.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to make an opening statement before we commence?

Ms Cirson: Yes. The Property Council here in the ACT is a not-for-profit member organisation representing about 140 members, who in turn represent about 2,500 employees who are employed by those member organisations. We strive to deliver excellence to our members through good events, advocacy and representing the views of the property sector more broadly. We have seven committees within our own organisation, which have about 130 participants who volunteer their time from across the sector to provide insight into particular policies and responses to government initiatives like the budget, Territory Plan variations and things like that.

The Property Council were very pleased to see the economic outlook of the ACT in good shape going forward. It corresponds with our own business sentiment surveys, which demonstrate that there is a lot of activity in the sector. We are very pleased that the budget reflected our own surveys in this area, particularly economic activity, which is well ahead of the national average. We are very pleased to see infrastructure investment of \$600 million over the next four years in particular, and the creation of jobs and significant infrastructure investment in the transport network.

The Property Council has for a long time been advocating for city renewal and saying that the heart of the city did not do the nation's capital justice, so we are very pleased, on the back of the announcements about the Suburban Land Agency and the City Renewal Authority made earlier this year, that some funding has been specifically earmarked for city activation and renewal, with \$59 million, and the City Hill and lakeside precincts, with \$20 million.

We noted the increased commercial rates charges, up six per cent—that was foreshadowed in the budget last year—and also the halving of commercial stamp duty this year and abolition next year for property valued under \$1.5 million. In my submission I noted that I am not sure of the number of commercial properties that will benefit from that particular measure, given that even the housing market here is on the up and up.

We will continue to make the point that tax reform here in the ACT must be revenue neutral. The Property Council have been very supportive since the commencement of the tax reform agenda that is being led by the ACT government, ahead of other jurisdictions. We understand that is a 20-year project and we are about five years into it, but we continue to make the point that that should be a revenue neutral process and that rates should not disproportionately increase in relation to the decreases in stamp duty.

As with the comments from Michael from the MBA, we are very disappointed to see the increase in the lease variation charge in particular, which will see, with certain residential leases, revenue collected of \$3 million per year over four years. The Property Council and its membership do not expect not to have to pay taxes and charges in this community. In fact, the property sector contributes about 55 per cent of taxes, fees and charges across the economy. But this difference, paying \$7,500 per dwelling—up to \$30,000 per dwelling—on those leases certainly came as a surprise, and we are really not clear what the intention of that significant increase is at this point. We are particularly concerned in relation to the effect it will have on land values. One member of ours who is looking to amalgamate three residential blocks in O'Connor and put in place 16 townhouses simply cannot make that project stack up, and it has more value as three single leases.

We are very committed to engaging constructively with the government on the lease variation charge and any potential reforms that may give greater transparency and certainty to the administration of the lease variation charge. The transitional period, and the lodgement and charging of the fee on approval, are particular issues for us. Again, like the MBA, we would like to see some transition and engagement with the sector so that we can better understand the intention of the charge and see if we cannot get a better outcome for all involved. I am happy to take questions.

MS LAWDER: You mentioned that you agreed with Mr Hopkins from the MBA about potential transitional arrangements for the introduction of the LVC. He also made the point that it was brought in without industry consultation. Do you agree that that was the case and that there could have been better consultation beforehand?

Ms Cirson: Certainly the first that we heard of the increased charge was in the budget papers. We went through a process very similar to the one Michael has outlined on the Icon charges. There were really two key issues. First, at what point does the charge apply? At that point, we would make the point that you cannot attract a charge based on approval, when you have a start date in place, because developers cannot control how long it takes to approve a project. We would make the argument that the charge should apply on lodgement of a development application. But also transitional arrangements are very important in being able to factor the charge into land prices. I have members say to me that they can factor charges and new increases into land prices but they need to be able to do that at the point of purchase, not after the fact.

The problem is that now, with a 1 July start date, we have a whole range of development applications in—I have one member who is probably going to have 150 dwellings affected before 1 July—that just do not stack up financially any more. If you are able to factor those prices into the price you pay at the land purchase point, it does make a difference.

MS LAWDER: Do you think it is usual or optimal that a 400 per cent increase will be introduced without transitional arrangements and without industry consultation?

Ms Cirson: No, of course it is not optimal. The conversation we had with Icon was exactly the same point. We can factor these prices in, but we need transitional arrangements, not having it happen at the point where the DAs are being lodged and

then having to factor those costs in.

THE CHAIR: Mrs Cirson, could I draw your attention to the land tax on vacant properties, which you also raised in your submission to this committee. What is the Property Council's position on this policy going forward, and do you think it is going to have the desired impact or effect of—

Ms Cirson: The land tax on vacant properties?

THE CHAIR: On vacant properties.

Ms Cirson: There is a broader challenge here in the ACT—and it is not unique to the ACT—and that is housing affordability. I certainly understand the intent of trying to make more properties available by getting them back into the market. The Property Council nationally has prosecuted an argument against the abolition of negative gearing, because there is a role for investors to play in the housing affordability space, and that is a point that I would like to make more broadly.

The property sector does have a role to play in the delivery of housing affordability product. We are not asking for the government to provide the silver bullet, the magic bullet, the fix-all for anything; there is a role for us to play in housing affordability. I think that better engagement with the property sector and encouraging investors to put rental product into the market are where you need to go. I certainly understand the intent of the land tax, but I do not think the way to get more affordable housing product is by increasing taxes on that type of product. I think there is a fine balancing act that has to occur between the policy intention and the actual delivery.

THE CHAIR: From the Property Council's perspective, what does housing affordability look like in the ACT? It is an easily thrown around term that we need to improve housing affordability, but in real terms, from the Property Council's position, what does affordable actually look like for the ACT?

Ms Cirson: There is no one answer. Housing affordability is a very complex issue. There are a number of supply and demand initiatives that can be done. Going from my own personal policy experience, I was involved in the first housing affordability strategy that was released back in 2007. What is very clear to me, and to the Property Council, is that you need the community sector, government and the private sector to be all working in the same direction and collaborating and coming up with some out-of-the-box thinking. And you certainly need Treasury at the table. You need all of the players at the table in order to come up with the right solutions.

I think the definition of housing affordability has broadened. We also need to not be thinking about affordable housing product as being the smallest one-bedroom unit you can get off the plan. There can be some very innovative solutions provided by the private sector if flexibility in the planning mechanisms is allowed within the planning framework. Ginninderry is an excellent example of some out-of-the-box thinking in terms of affordable housing product.

I think a redefinition of affordable housing needs to occur. I think there are some great things being done in other jurisdictions. We do not have to reinvent the wheel here in

the ACT. There is a lot to do, and it is a long game, but the Property Council and the property sector here are very engaged in the conversation and are particularly pleased to be involved in providing advice to government on the housing affordability strategy development.

MS CODY: I want to follow on from Mr Wall's questions. I know you stated that the vacant land tax was not necessarily a good thing. What does the Property Council see as actions to help combat vacant land issues, vacant buildings? You outlined the housing affordability side. How can we help to counteract that issue?

Ms Cirson: There is a link back to the lease variation charge as well. The Property Council understands that the lease variation charge, for example, has been in place to return a benefit to the community. I guess the property sector would say that there are other ways, beyond taxes and charges, to return a benefit to the community. One of those is to enable developers to build the product that is in demand, to fill that missing middle, to help meet the policy objectives of the government by delivering the product on the ground. The development community can deliver those things without an additional charge. It just needs to be more carefully balanced, I suppose.

And going back to the point I made to Mr Wall, encouragement of the investor market is an important part. Putting rental product on the market is a big part of this. It is not just about home ownership or unit ownership; it is actually about having enough rental product on the market to make it affordable for those who most need it.

MS LE COUTEUR: I will continue on the same theme. You said that if we were going to have more affordable housing in Canberra there were other planning changes needed. Do you want to tell us a little about where you think those should be?

Ms Cirson: The new director-general of planning addressed Property Council members a couple of weeks ago and clearly outlined that the planning system should be very outcomes focused, and that if you look to the outcomes you can work out what steps or what changes are needed within the planning system to get you where you need to go.

In particular, in housing affordability, we have seen on the Fluffy blocks the ability to unit title those blocks to create more product in the inner suburbs that is available for ageing in place or that enables carers to be located close to their parents so that people can stay within their existing communities. There are mechanisms within the planning system that can be easily changed to enable infill sites to be developed and to provide the two- and three-bedroom townhouses that are particularly in hot demand. The retirement living committee is always saying that there is a huge demand for the product. We have an ageing population. We do not need to be putting downsizers on the fringes of the city; they want to be in their existing suburbs. We have a great opportunity. The city is in a real transformational stage of urban renewal, and there are lots of opportunities that we can look at within the existing planning system that would enable that development.

I would mention flexibility in planning. People get very frightened about talking about height, but allowing height delivers flexibility in design and can deliver a better product if there is some flexibility built in. Again, you have to look at the outcomes.

You have to ask: what are we trying to achieve and what are the planning tools or the mechanisms, the levers that need to be pulled, to get to the desired outcome, which is more affordable housing product which is better designed.

MR COE: Ms Cirson, would you please fill us in. Do your members support the abolition of stamp duty and shifting that all into recurrent rates?

Ms Cirson: We certainly support tax reform, absolutely. The problem is that we are looking at a very long period of time. It is a 20-year program. We need to be able to see a revenue neutral approach. The Property Council has advocated for the abolition of stamp duty across the board, for more efficient taxes and charges, and is happy to support a shift to increasing land rates. But that needs to be along the lines of what the government has proposed, a revenue neutral measure.

MR COE: Is it revenue neutral at the moment?

Ms Cirson: I think it is very difficult to understand whether it is revenue neutral, because the figures in the budget really do not break down any further. You could argue that increased activity in the market will see greater stamp duty collected; that is certainly an argument. It is very hard to delve down under that level that is provided in the budget papers. I cannot really say, to be honest.

MR COE: Is a member who paid stamp duty five years ago, 10 years ago or 20 years ago and is now seeing a significant increase in rates content with the arrangement? Or are there members of the council that, quite frankly, feel gyped?

Ms Cirson: To be frank, no member of mine would be happy with having increased rates and charges, absolutely not. I think there is a general acceptance that tax reform is worth pursuing; it is just the implementation of that that it is important to watch and monitor every year.

MR COE: Are the higher recurrent costs for operating a building in Canberra or operating a property in Canberra compared to years gone by making the ACT less competitive compared to other jurisdictions?

Ms Cirson: I think we have to be very mindful. We need to create an environment in the ACT where we are more competitive, where we are attracting investors ahead of Sydney and Melbourne. In relation to the rates increases over a long period of time, coupled with a reduction in other taxes and charges—do not get me wrong: we are supportive of the abolition of commercial stamp duty on values of under \$1.5 million—I guess our question to government really is: how many properties would actually fall underneath that value? Although we have seen an abolition of commercial stamp duty, which is great, it applies to only a certain section of the market, and at the same time we are seeing a lift of six per cent in rates.

I might add, though, that these charges were all foreshadowed in the budget last year, so the sector has been able to prepare for those increased charges—and, similarly, the decrease in the stamp duty. Unfortunately, that has not been the case with the increase to the LVC.

MR COE: Most property leases have not been updated in the last year. Most leases go for considerably longer periods. Where the rates get passed on in full, either we are seeing tenants get hit with very high increases or we are seeing property owners absorb these increases where leases have not been updated. Is that fair to say?

Ms Cirson: I think we are seeing that there is a cumulative impact of rates and charges that are administered at different times of a project's life that are causing problems. When we had the Icon discussion, the MBA, the chamber and the Property Council all had the discussion about a need for review of how infrastructure charging is administered in the ACT, and it is something that we are doing some work on. I do not have the answer for you today, but we are very focused on doing a bit of analysis about what the cumulative impact of these taxes and charges is and whether there is a better infrastructure charging model which could benefit both the government and the sector and create the incentive to invest and develop in the city. We are looking at that.

MR COE: Sure.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We will have to conclude there. Thank you for coming in and representing the ACT Property Council.

WHITE, MR MICHAEL, Coordinator, Childers Group
WILLIAMS, PROFESSOR DAVID, Spokesperson, Childers Group

THE CHAIR: Welcome to the 2017-18 estimates committee hearing. I draw your attention to the pink privilege statement in front of you. Could you indicate that you are aware of that statement and its implications?

Mr White: Yes.

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

Mr White: Yes. I start off by thanking the committee for the opportunity to attend. We have been coming now for the last three or four years, after doing our budget submission. By way of general introduction, I think we are at a stage in relation to arts and culture in the city where there has been really good tripartisan support for the arts across all the parties. We have seen over the past 20 or so years a rich and vibrant arts and culture scene developing in the city. We have around about 18 or 19 key arts organisations. We have a group of program-funded organisations that are funded annually, and we have also a vibrant group of young artists and emerging artists and some artists in mid-career who get project funding; they are people who apply for one-off grants.

The Childers Group believes we are at a reasonably critical stage in the development of art and culture in the town. We did some research that we put into our budget submission this year and last year which indicated that, as the city has been growing, with more and more population and more revenue being collected, we feel the arts are starting to fall behind in relation to the sorts of support that we would see as necessary to keep the arts and culture scene going really strongly in the ACT. We also are very strongly supportive of the concept of arts and culture within the region. We are very much in favour of the idea that, in relation to tourism and bringing people into the town, Canberra exists in a really big region and we should be encouraging people to come along.

Looking specifically at the budget in relation to some of the key announcements, we are really pleased about the announcements on arts facilities across the territory. The investment of that money, particularly in Belconnen, is extremely welcome. The money for upgrades for some of our other institutions across the town is also welcome. The money to CMAG for an update in their lighting is fantastic. And we also support the money that was given to Canberra Theatre Centre to start their consultation in relation to hopefully a larger theatre being built across Civic Square.

If we have a question about the response from the government to our budget submission it is in relation to the \$750,000 going into project funding. While we welcome that money and we welcome the concept of that money being put into what is now called a baseline approach to funding, in relation to what our expectations were as a result of the promises made before the election, we had assumed that the extra \$500,000 coming into the project funding would be on top of what we assumed was the previous year. For those members who are not aware, project funding is the money that goes into the beginnings of the furnace to encourage young artists to

actually get their careers going; for example, grants of \$20,000, \$30,000 and \$40,000 that go into the creation of dance pieces, theatre pieces, individual artists starting up and all that sort of stuff. That is why project funding is so critical. We would not have the key arts organisations we have at the moment, like the Youth Theatre and all that sort of stuff, if at some stage they were not all individual project-funded organisations. So that is how it works and that is why it is absolutely critical that that money remains there.

Our understanding was that, in the year previous to that, \$700,000 had been allocated in that project funding round and we were expecting an extra \$500,000 on top of that. So while welcoming the stability that that baseline funding will now offer—and presumably over the next two years that might be able to be topped up—the concept of baseline funding is something new to most arts practitioners and people who have been involved in the arts across the territory. I have been involved in the arts for a long time; I have served on the cultural council and peer panels and all that sort of stuff and I have never heard that statement in relation to baseline funding. So while saying congratulations to the government for saying that that is what is there, we had expected some extra money coming on top of that.

Within that \$750,000, the \$100,000 over each of the next four years to go into the Indigenous area is really welcome. We look forward to finding out how the government are going to approach that. We understand there may have been some consultation that has already happened with our Indigenous community. I am not quite sure, but there might actually be a report. In talking to some of our Indigenous representatives, we hear they welcome that money and they are very keen to know how government is going to move forward on it. So that is something members from the Labor side and the minister will start moving on.

As to the other areas where there was a little bit of disappointment, one of our major statements in our budget submission was that for our key arts organisations it is getting harder and harder to live on CPI. I would imagine that is not just arts organisations but community organisations and all that sort of stuff. At some point the city state has to face up to the fact that a lot of these key arts organisations or community groups are living on CPI and that often means your ability to provide good services to the city state is slowly diminishing. We would like to have seen some ongoing commitment—maybe that can be done in the outgoing years—to starting to move funding for some of those key arts organisations to just above CPI.

The other thing the Childers Group has been banging on about—we have been to see individual members over the past six months and we have spoken to Alistair and Bec and Tara as well—is to try to get this concept of placing the arts as a key component in the way government thinks about how it is going to deliver services to the city state. We would really like to get some stronger statements of connections with different departments—health, education, police, Indigenous affairs—and how arts can fit into all of that. One of the things we were looking for—and maybe this can still happen—was more coordination across individual directorates so that that sort of stuff can happen.

As well as the arts being about people going to the theatre and galleries, the police minister needs to be asking how the arts can help in his portfolio. There is stuff

happening with health in relation to good arts activities, but in every portfolio I would be asking ministers to ask their bureaucrats, “How are the arts helping in my portfolio? What is happening in that area,” so that reporting can come back up through government and then to the Assembly.

Prof Williams: Our advocacy is really for a whole-of-government approach to support for the arts. As Michael said, we would like all the departments to look at their own activities and work out how the arts could fit in. We seem to be working very well, as Michael said, with hospitals, health and education, of course, but there is scope for that in all of the departments. As part of our advocacy for the value of the arts, we think our contribution is one of the ingredients that make the place so vibrant, lively and interesting. Those enterprising young people coming along, the new artists getting started and the support that is offered them through the infrastructure that we have is really an important ingredient in the mix that is the national capital, that is Canberra and the region.

MR PETTERSSON: A point in your submission that I thought was quite interesting was that there are existing strategic objectives to achieve higher than average participation in sport, physical and recreational activity. Do you think a values statement like that for the arts will make a difference?

Mr White: Yes. I think it is important for government to continue to make those sorts of statements in relation to a lot of things, and the arts tend to get left off the plate a bit. We do not often see formal statements” “Yes, we will make this commitment,” or “We think the arts are important in relation to the stories we tell about our city state and the stories we tell about our life.” I think it is important because we have those policy statements in relation to a whole bunch of things. The arts sometimes are left a bit alone on the side and people just say, “Well, the arts just keep going on and happening.”

I always argue, and when I speak to the Chief Minister I always say, “You should be an arts champion.” I think I have also said to members in the Assembly, “When you are out and about, you should be championing not only community, health and sport; don’t forget the arts play a really important role in that sort of stuff and generally raise the awareness.” Lots of people experience the arts all the time and they do not realise they are doing it—it is kind of there. As politicians are ambassadors for sport or whatever you are ambassadors for, it is important that you are ambassadors for the arts as well.

Prof Williams: If the Chief Minister shows up somewhere and he is seen to be there and supporting it, that is really a leadership thing which a lot of people take their cue from, especially the private sector: “If it is given the okay by the chief then it’s okay for us too.” Without that endorsement it leaves us a bit on the periphery.

Mr White: ArtsACT makes statements in relation to participation in the arts. The federal department and the Australia Council put out figures on who attends the arts, and the ACT always rates really highly in relation to people attending performances and libraries and all that sort of stuff. We are blessed because we have the national institutions here. Sometimes I think that is a bit of a curse as well because people think Canberra is only the national institutions. Particularly in relation to tourism—we

were talking to people from tourism recently—one of the great things about Canberra is that you can come and see the national institutions but within easy walking distance you can go to CMAG, private galleries and all sorts of local stuff. Tourists should be encouraged to come and stay an extra one or two days. We got a positive response from the tourism people and they are very keen for that to happen as well. It is not just the national institutions.

MS CHEYNE: As to the baseline funding, where there had been an assumption that the \$500,000 that was announced as an election commitment was on top of previous years but it has now been confirmed that that is the baseline funding, even though you said that is a new concept that was communicated to you, are members happy with that baseline funding ultimately as a starting point?

Mr White: It gives it stability. It was reported to us that the baseline was \$200,000 and then if there were any cost underspends they are made up by what goes into the project funding. My initial response was that it is a fairly strange way to run a program, and it certainly was not something that I was aware of. It was also said to me that because it is in CMTEDD there might be a bit of money left over in the “T” bit and they might be able to nick a bit off dough from there and funnel some of that into the arts. We would welcome the stability it would give. We look forward to that figure growing, particularly in relation to that bit of a hiccup with the project funding last year and the welcome top-up made by the new minister in relation to that. Generally in the arts community it has been welcomed, but there is still a little bit of confusion around it.

Prof Williams: The infrastructure is really quite important—and that is the baseline we are talking about—and that has a CPI increase every year. That is fine, but the expenses incurred by our infrastructure—Craft ACT, CMAG, Contemporary Art Space, Gorman House and so on—are rising more than the CPI. We have to be looking at that, and that is why we are arguing that we need to be watchful of that as a means of making sure that they are sustained at a level to do the work we are asking them to do and expecting them to do.

THE CHAIR: In the submission you made to the committee you state that funding for arts organisations is linked to CPI increases but that the lease fees of government premises are increasing disproportionately. Are you able to give the committee an example of an organisation in that space?

Mr White: That general statement was more anecdotal. Organisations that are in arts facilities, generally their fees for running the thing go up every year more than CPI. You just have to think of electricity, air-conditioning and all those sorts of things. The CPI model is useful for government, but expenses are always more than that. Eventually, any organisation has to say, “Right, those expenses have gone up. What are we not able to do? Who are we not able to employ?” That is where those kinds of cuts come from. I think the challenge for government is how we continue to maintain all our community organisations a bit above CPI because, in a sense, CPI is a bit of a false indicator.

MS LE COUTEUR: With the building costs, quite a number of the key arts organisations are in older, sometimes heritage-listed buildings. Is the cost of

maintaining those buildings one of the issues you are talking about here?

Mr White: Yes. I understand there is an arts infrastructure subcommittee that meets through artsACT. I think artsACT are looking at how they should deal with some of our older facilities. Gorman House is an obvious one. It has the blessing of being a heritage building but also the curse of a heritage building and what you can do with it. From talking to people at Gorman House, money needs to be spent on making sure that the internal structure is maintained. Tuggeranong must be 15 years old, maybe even more.

MS CODY: Easily, yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: A lot more than 15.

Mr White: So those buildings are starting to go. But Gorman House has issues with wiring and electricity and all that sort of stuff. Again, government needs to look at all its infrastructure. Eventually you need to bite the bullet, because if you do not spend the \$500,000 this year and you decide to do it in three years, it might be \$1 million.

MS LE COUTEUR: But there is also the question of whether it is appropriate for heritage preservation to be done out of the arts budget, because at Gorman House that is arguably what is happening.

Mr White: There are more sensible ways of looking at that sort of stuff, and I think that is a role for government.

MS LE COUTEUR: I could ask more, but we are basically out of time.

MR COE: Is there an optimum way to weigh up capital investment? Stage 2 of the Belconnen Arts Centre is costing millions of dollars, and obviously there is a huge opportunity cost to spend \$10 million or \$20 million on one particular project. I am wondering whether there is a best practice example of how you engage the community as well as experts to make the best possible decisions for how we spend huge amounts of money on future projects.

Prof Williams: I do not know quite how to answer that. But Belconnen Arts Centre has been worked out in very close consultation with the original committee and the community, which was looking to have that facility to assist with the development of its own cultural life and activities in the region. I do not think it is a pipe dream; I think what was proposed is sensible and government should think of it as an investment for the future.

MR COE: Yes. I am not reflecting on that project. I am talking about in the future or now: if there is \$20 million of capital available, how do you make the call about where to spend that money in light of the diverse and conflicting opportunities?

Mr White: A bit off the top of my head, those sorts of major investments probably happen only every 10 years or something like that. I have often wondered why Gungahlin has not got a community centre being thought about, being talked about, being prepared, because that is one of the fastest growing areas in the country.

Eventually communities adopt these places: Belconnen is well supported; Tuggeranong is well supported; Ainslie is well supported. For me as a taxpayer it comes down to that being a great investment in the life of our city. Those big decisions need to be made, and good on governments of all persuasions who do that and make those decisions.

I hark back briefly to the initial discussion about building a big theatre here. I remember when it was first talked about it was going to cost \$70 million, and that was 15 years ago. People jumped up and down and said, “No, it’s going to be a waste of money.” We are now looking at \$130 million, \$140 million in just what it costs to do it. I think governments need to be bold about making decisions in relation to some of these big infrastructure developments. If they have good consultations with the community, I think the Canberra community will say, “Yeah, well done.” And some people might say, “You should have done it 10 years ago.”

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, Mr White and Professor Williams, for coming in on behalf of the Childers Group this morning.

DERRICK, MS ELLEN, member, Cystic Fibrosis ACT
PROWSE, MR ANDREW, member, Cystic Fibrosis ACT

THE CHAIR: I draw your attention to the pink privilege statement that is on the table in front of you and ask you to indicate for our benefit that you have read it and understand its implications.

Ms Derrick: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I invite you to make an opening statement.

Ms Derrick: My professional life, and what I have escaped from this morning to come and see you—and I appreciate your time—is as a consulting partner with Deloitte. I love my job, but my real life and my heart lies at home, where I have a 13-year-old and an 11-year-old. My 13-year-old daughter has cystic fibrosis, hence my involvement with CF ACT. Indulge me on this for a moment. Kate is 13. She is a swimmer. She represents the ACT in multiple national swimming events. In 2013 she won the ACT Youth Commitment Award. She also in the same week won the Chief Minister's Award during Children's Week.

Since birth, over 13 years ago, Kate has received all her care for CF in the ACT, something that we are really quite grateful for. And in working with the system, we have seen it improve quite a bit. I tell you that not just to indulge me in my proud mummy moment but to give you a sense as we run through our submission of the community that we are talking about. Kate—I am biased; she is mine—is representative of our community, a community of very high functioning, high contributing people who, unfortunately, have been born with a degenerative disease. Despite what you might call her pull on the system, given what is a very short bit on her resume, I consider her a net benefit to this community.

Our job at CF ACT is to make sure that Kate and others like her continue to be right as they progress. CF is a degenerative disease, which means that as time progresses it gets harder, it gets more expensive and health declines. Our job as a community group is to provide services that essentially are not currently being provided—everything from gaps in Medicare, and things that provide vital support in our required treatment that are not currently supplied, to community and psychological supports and other things that we see as gaps. As an organisation we support 100-plus clients and their families. We receive zero government funding. We are 100 per cent community funded. We provide that support with about 0.4 FTE and, again, it is vital to our community.

With regard to our budget submission, and having looked at the budget, while we have seen and really applaud the improvements that have been made for CF care and treatment and the new paediatric hospital and a few other things, we do feel there is limited funding for the community. So our priority area is really focused on three key things. I will just run you through those briefly and then perhaps we can take questions and have more of a conversation.

The first one was really around subsidising what is essential treatment for CF. CF treatment is brutal. It is every day. You do not get a day off. It includes everything

from physical therapy and physio to antibiotics and vitamins and a lot of different things that we need to do every single day. A number of those essential treatment items like nebulisers—basic equipment—and the vitamins that you must take every single day are not covered. They are not covered by Medicare and, because they are medical, they are not functional; they are not covered by the NDIS either. Those are supports that we as CF ACT provide but, again, they are just a gap in the system.

Secondly, CF standards of care, the base care, centres on what are essentially CF clinics bringing multidisciplinary teams of allied health and multiple specialists together to provide care. Both the paediatric clinic—and I love the paediatric clinic here—and the adult clinic have over time typically been under-resourced and underfunded. Again, as we see patients transitioning through that system and particularly into the adult clinic, which is very new, sustainable funding and dedicated resourcing for those clinics needs to be increased. We are seeing the benefit of an interesting problem that we love. CF patients are living longer and longer. CF patients are living into adulthood. We love that. It is causing a different form of strain upon the system, of course, in terms of gaps we need to address.

The third element is around extending some of the care, such as hospital in the home. CF patients love hospital in the home for a number of reasons, and it is frequently used by CF patients. Hospital in the home for both of us is a great thing. When you have CF patients using hospital in the home, it frees up beds, it minimises your costs and it puts less strain on the system. For us it means that patients are in their more comfortable environment, they are exposed to less risk of contamination from other patients and, of course, they are with their family and oftentimes can continue to participate in their life, which is all my daughter and most people ever want.

The issue with hospital in the home is that the care that you receive in hospital and the care that you receive in hospital in the home are not equal. The definition of that is aligned to national standards of care for CF, published in 2008, which made me giggle a bit before. We are not compliant with 2008. It is 2017; things have happened—but anyway! The allied supports that you will get as an inpatient in the hospital we are not receiving in hospital in the home. There is a gap there. So our ability to fully leverage that system is not there and, like I say, there is benefit for both of us in making sure that happens.

When I look at our submission and what we are talking through, nothing we are saying here is transformational, to be perfectly honest. There are simple improvements here. We do not need to launch wide-scale reform. There are targeted, tactical improvements we can make that certainly would reduce costs at a macro level across the system and provide significant support and benefit to CF patients as well. I might leave it there, unless there is anything you want to add, Andrew. But I would love to take your questions.

Mr Prowse: I am a 30-year-old with cystic fibrosis living in Canberra. I was quite heartened to hear of the funding announced by the ACT government in this budget regarding expansion planning for hospital in the home. CF ACT are very hopeful that that expansion planning will be undertaken quite quickly and that resources for allied health, such as physiotherapists and dietitians, will be allocated to hospital in the home so that this inequity in treatment between being an inpatient—you are actually

an inpatient as a hospital in the home person—and being in hospital in the home is addressed. That is something that we want to have addressed quite quickly. CF treatment cannot wait. We would like to make sure that we are meeting the national standards of care, and it is quite important for our community to have confidence, full confidence, that they are getting the same level of treatment in hospital in the home as they can get as an inpatient. Certainly from experience I can tell you it is much more pleasant being in hospital in the home for my treatment than it is being in an acute ward setting.

Ms Derrick: Do you have questions?

MR PETTERSSON: I want to continue from where you stopped. What are the key differences between hospital in the home and being an inpatient? What are the services that you would like to see at home that are not currently provided?

Ms Derrick: I might start, and then we have an expert here, as much as we have used it ourselves. What Andrew started to speak about is nutrition. Given the issues with cystic fibrosis and digestion, that is really key. If you were in the hospital you would routinely be seeing a dietitian. There is a physiotherapist a few times a day. There is psychology. It is really a spectrum of allied services. What am I missing?

Mr Prowse: With respect to that, CF is a multi-organ disease and requires multidisciplinary care and treatment. So we cannot have these additional services being overlooked or missed. As I said, they are critical and they are not optional. They need to happen. People with CF need to access that in the hospital in the home setting.

Ms Derrick: Yes. If you were in the hospital you would have multiple visits per day by a physiotherapist. You would see a dietitian. You would likely see a psychologist. Those are the most significant. With regard to your decision to stay in hospital versus transitioning to hospital in the home, those are the key decision points because once you are home you will not be receiving those services. It will be up to the family to be doing physio—and we do that all the time—but when you are hospitalised you get that care. It needs to be professional levels of care.

Mr Prowse: Because of this inequity in the service between being an inpatient in a ward and being an inpatient through hospital in the home, as we said in our submission—and I want to highlight this—it does and can prevent early discharge, which means that that person is spending longer in an acute hospital bed, taking that bed from someone else who may need it. This person is ready to transition to hospital in the home, but the intensive services that they may need in that setting are not there. That keeps them back and increases the hospital stay.

Ms Derrick: In the current scenario CF ACT would step in and often fund, for example, those physiotherapy sessions to happen in the home rather than being a continuation of the hospital care.

MR PETTERSSON: So it is not the case that they cannot do the physio sessions at home because they have not got the right equipment; it is a case of you can do the physio session at home, but it is not currently provided under hospital in the home?

Ms Derrick: Correct.

MS CHEYNE: What cost is it to CF ACT to provide those allied services in the home that are not funded by the government at the moment?

Ms Derrick: Honestly, it is market rates. Any typical physio is normally \$80-plus per hour. Given the volumes for us, as opposed to a whole-of-system approach, often it is a one-to-one user-pays scenario. You know what I mean. We have had grants before in blocks, but it is a one-to-one type of model. It is not cheap.

MS CHEYNE: And that support that you are providing, in pie chart terms what percentage is that of your total operating funds? Are you trying to fill this gap—

Ms Derrick: In terms of supplementing hospital in the home—and it is an interesting question—it is difficult to separate from some of the other medical supports that we provide. But, again, we have very little resourcing. So the bulk of our funding is around those support services. We are looking at about 70 per cent of our entire operating budget.

Mr Prowse: And we have about 95 per cent engagement with our member base of around 100 people. We are supporting quite a large number of people.

THE CHAIR: Just briefly, how does the range of service and support for CF in the ACT compare to other jurisdictions?

Ms Derrick: We provide a significant amount, a greater amount of medical and social support services than any other jurisdiction. Western Australia is funded by the government to provide resourcing and a set of services to members. Many other jurisdictions have a mix of government and community funding, but we provide a much larger range of medical and other support services.

Mr Prowse: I would just add that CF ACT's focus is on providing the services that people need that are not being met through other support systems. You have got to understand that when you are an inpatient or if you are going to an outpatient clinic, you are prescribed a whole range of treatments. As soon as you walk out that door you are effectively on your own to get support for that treatment, and that is where CF ACT comes in. The organisation works quite closely with the adult and paediatric clinic teams here in Canberra, for those essential items of treatment and care.

MS CODY: That was very helpful.

MS LE COUTEUR: I guess one of the obvious questions is: I think you only put in a response to the survey, but what sort of budget do you have annually? How much money are we talking about in rough figures?

Mr Prowse: Our revenue is \$200,000 to \$250,000 per annum. We are quite a small not-for-profit and we channel as much of our resources into providing direct service support as we can.

MS LE COUTEUR: That is very admirable. With regard to hospital in the home, the government have put money in for expansion. Are they going to be concentrating, do

you think, on the things that are relevant to your clientele? It sounds like part of your problem is that you have fairly specialised needs for physios and dietitians.

Ms Derrick: That is right.

MS LE COUTEUR: Is there a possibility that they will expand the program but they still will not make it specifically better for your clientele?

Ms Derrick: I think so. For me the expansion is about breadth rather than depth. My concern is that, no, it will not be specific. Again, some of these improvements would classify as improvements across other conditions as well, not just CF. But, yes, that is my understanding of the program.

MR COE: Just quickly, are there services interstate, especially in New South Wales, where you think, “I wish we had that here,” either in the hospital setting or in the broader service setting?

Ms Derrick: Yes. I am leaning specifically towards the adult clinic, and that is probably best coming from you, Andrew.

Mr Prowse: Certainly with regard to resourcing for the clinics, we are getting to a point where our population is growing, people are living longer into adulthood and the level of resourcing has not kept up and needs in the future to keep up with the increase in patients in the outpatient clinics. Cystic fibrosis people in the ACT do not have cystic fibrosis treatment centres, which differentiates from the clinics which are interstate. There are treatment centres, highly specialised centres, in Sydney, Newcastle and other major capital cities interstate, and we are getting to the point now where resourcing seriously needs to be looked at to get cystic fibrosis paediatric and adult clinics to a cystic fibrosis treatment centre level.

Ms Derrick: To specifically answer your question, we have worked really closely with the paediatric team at Canberra Hospital to put in place a range of improvements for the paediatric centre. That has been fantastic. Like I say, we get all our care there. If you take New South Wales and what they do that we do not, that transition from paediatric care into adult and then having the same level and standard of care around that adult CF clinic is where it needs focus. That is what we do not have. A lot of effort and funding have been put into paediatrics because this was a paediatric disease. You know that is changing. That transition is a really vital time, of course, in terms of the disease. The establishment, to your point of dedicated CF care for adults, is lacking in the ACT.

Mr Prowse: I must commend the paediatric and adult clinics. They do excellent work with the resources that they have.

Ms Derrick: Absolutely.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for making the time to come here this morning.

Hearing suspended from 11.19 to 11.29 am.

LYNSKEY, MS RACHEL, Membership and external services officer, Pedal Power ACT

RYAN, MR STEPHEN, Member, advocacy committee, Pedal Power ACT

THE CHAIR: Welcome back to this hearing of the estimates committee for 2017-18. Pedal Power ACT is now appearing before us. I ask that you familiarise yourselves with the pink privilege statement that is on the table in front of you. Could you indicate that you understand its implications?

Mr Ryan: Yes.

Ms Lynskey: Yes

THE CHAIR: I invite you to make an opening statement.

Ms Lynskey: Thank you for the invitation to speak on behalf of Pedal Power. We represent people who ride bikes in Canberra, or people who would ride a bike if it was easy and safe to do so. We promote bike riding for transport, recreation and sport, and recognise the positive health, economic and environmental contributions that bike riding can provide to our community.

We provide a range of products and services to our members and organise high-profile events and social rides, as well as maintaining strong advocacy here in the capital. We see our purpose as enabling more Canberrans to ride bikes more often for a better community. In order for this to occur, we need to see strong government investment in a number of areas relating to cycling.

We were disappointed in this budget to see the minimal amounts of allocation to funding for cycling-related activities. To begin with, we found that there was a distinct lack of clear identification of cycling-related funding in the budget. Active travel falls across a number of government directorates and in different programs and outputs. For the committee and the public to establish a complete picture of the active travel commitments in policy and infrastructure, we need to see this more clearly identified. Without this information, the budget and other processes are difficult to analyse and there can be less informed analysis and debate.

Pedal Power recommends that the ACT budget include a comprehensive fact sheet on the expenditure related to active travel. We provided a detailed pre-budget submission with a number of key items that we believe are all vitally important. There is not one item alone that is going to achieve the aim that both we and the government share: to get more people riding more often.

Our recommendations ranged from infrastructure to children's education, tourism opportunities, integration with other forms of transport and resourcing the active travel office to make sure that there is cross-government coordination; and, importantly, we recommended the move to a four-year funding model to allow that longer term commitment to be realised. I will speak to some of these items to highlight our priorities.

Firstly, on major infrastructure investments, Pedal Power continues to recommend that the government improve the poor bike connections in and around town centres. Despite years and years of planning work, feasibility studies and other studies, only Tuggeranong and Gungahlin have received an allocation of funding for implementation of improvements that will include active travel upgrades. This leaves many other projects with stalled consultations, feasibility studies and planning.

We have been involved in numerous projects over at least the past four years, including the Molonglo to the city super highway, Woden town centre, Kippax group centre, Weston Creek group centre, Kingston group centre, connections between west Belconnen and Belconnen town centre and the list could go on. We are extremely disappointed that these previous funding commitments to studies and feasibility initiatives are not progressing, because there is no allocation for the implementation and construction of infrastructure and of those recommendations from the studies.

Secondly, on the ACT's path network maintenance, we have an ageing path network in the ACT and it is currently maintained by an inadequate budget. We recommended a special capital injection of \$14 million over four years to address the backlog of maintenance issues and overcome past failings of an inadequate budget. The annual maintenance budget needs to be progressively increased by \$1 million per annum, with a long-term goal of reaching \$12 million per year in real terms to avoid further increases to the backlog of maintenance issues.

This is based on work undertaken by our advocacy team on the maintenance budgets over previous years, as well as a study of the real cost of maintaining our path network. It found that community path maintenance was at \$3.3 million in the 2016-17 budget, which is the lowest in over five years and part of a downward trend. It also found that the real cost required to maintain a safe community path network is estimated to be \$11.8 million, based on the 2016 network. So there is a huge gap between nearly \$12 million and the real \$3.5 million that we have been seeing in the last few budgets. The 2017-18 budget did not provide any level of change. We think this is setting up the ACT government and the ACT community for significant future costs as the network continues to deteriorate and require increasingly high input for repair.

Finally, we want to highlight the importance of a whole-of-government administrative allocation to implement cycling items. We saw with the Labor-ACT Greens parliamentary agreement a number of important initiatives. We question whether these have been fulfilled in this budget. There are three in particular that we want to highlight. With respect to raising the profile of the active travel office, to ensure that the ACT government have the required personnel and funding to fulfil their role in achieving their active travel policies and goals they need to have an office that can facilitate this and ensure that there is progress on bike-related matters.

There was also identification of a rollout of \$30 million of additional footpath maintenance funding, cycling and walking upgrades and other suburban improvements coordinated through the active travel office. We see it as essential that this is an additional \$30 million and is not offset from existing active travel programs and infrastructure funding. The allocation of this additional funding is not specifically identified in this budget and we want to ensure that it is done in priority areas as soon

as possible.

Lastly, another component of the agreement was to adopt the World Health Organisation's health economic assessment tool, or HEAT model, to assess active travel projects. This is an example of a measure that provides real value on public health benefits. In this case it looks at the reduced mortality that can be achieved through encouraging walking and cycling. Using tools like this will better facilitate evidence-based decision-making and provide us with a more comprehensive cost benefit analysis of transport interventions and infrastructure projects which are needed if the ACT government is supporting an active and healthy population. There is no evidence of using this type of model in the 2017-18 budget.

In conclusion, we know the benefits of getting more people to ride bikes here in Canberra. An argument is made for investing in bike riding infrastructure and promotion in order to reduce pressure on our healthcare system and our transport system. We know that it will be positive for the territory in a range of areas, everything from tourism and business to environmental and sustainability outcomes.

Pedal Power ACT wants to help the current Assembly to make Canberra the best place to ride a bicycle in Australia. This is important for the benefit of the whole community. I hope that this committee takes seriously the recommendations that we provide.

THE CHAIR: The cycle path maintenance seems like quite a big shortfall in what is required against what is actually being carried out.

Ms Lynskey: Yes.

THE CHAIR: How do you see the allocation of those scarce resources being delivered so far?

Ms Lynskey: At the moment, within the allocated budget, priority is placed on issues to be resolved, as opposed to looking at the real cost of how much needs to be invested to address all of the backlog of issues. We have had a report around the maintenance situation of all shared paths—footpaths and shared paths. The ACT has an extensive network. I think over 50 per cent of it is 40 years or older, so it is a considerably aged network. By allocating only enough funding to deal with the highest priority issues, it leaves a lot of minor problems to get a lot worse over coming years.

MS CODY: You mentioned that you would like to see Canberra become the best cycling destination in Australia. How do we currently compare to other states and the territory?

Ms Lynskey: I think we have a fantastic reputation. As I said, we have this extensive network that is now considerably ageing. When you look at the Australian Bicycle Council's allocation of funding across states, we do come up quite high because of the federal matching of work in National Capital Authority areas. But per head of population we are towards the middle of the pack. There are a lot of other states investing a lot—in Western Australia, in South Australia—to really catch up. While

we have this great skeleton network from decades ago, the new investment and the increasing allocation of funding for future programs and future infrastructure have been really lacking in the last few years.

MS CODY: I note that our on-road cycling has increased over the past few years. How does that compare?

Ms Lynskey: Certainly, with the resurfacing of a lot of roads, we have nearly reached the capacity so that we can redraw those lines to ensure that there are on-road cycle lanes. It is fairly standard practice across the world now, and certainly in Australia, that any major new road infrastructure has dedicated cycle paths. ACT is doing that, but it is the bare minimum. In terms of investment above and beyond that, we have not really seen an increase in any kind of world-leading infrastructure here in Canberra.

Mr Ryan: The thing that makes us unique is that we have a lot more people riding on high-speed roads. When you go interstate or overseas, people have a heart attack if you are going on a 60-kilometre road. I have been on roads where people have complained that they are riding down a 60-kilometre road with a metre and a half verge. They say it is too dangerous and you say, “Come to where we are. We ride down roads with 120 or 110-kilometre an hour traffic.” In Canberra, because it is city-based cycling, in terms of on-road cycling, it tends to be on the faster roads and then our trail network takes you away from those areas.

MS CODY: I do a lot of cycling myself, both here and interstate, and I really like our on-road cycling. Compared to Sydney, I think we are leaps and bounds—

Ms Lynskey: Yes. We have to look at infrastructure that means people are willing to ride in those environments. It is about how we get above and beyond that. How do we increase the number of people riding within existing infrastructure? Pedal Power conducts a cordon count every year and we have seen a real plateauing in figures. So the number of people riding is not growing. There needs to be significant investment in new infrastructure and in different things that will make people feel safer and ready to get on a bike, and facilitating and assisting that. We need to invest in that in order to see those numbers grow.

MS CODY: The investment in the Belconnen cycle paths, is that not something that is working?

Ms Lynskey: Yes, that is a great initiative and it has a lot of potential. As we said, there are a lot of other town centres that are—

MS CODY: Absolutely. I am not from Belconnen, so I would love to see more down south. I am just saying that there has been a—

Ms Lynskey: Yes. It is a real opportunity to trial some new things and bring us up to standard with a lot of the other infrastructure that we see around—

Mr Ryan: The other downside of road cycling in Canberra is that there are a number of places where the sign comes up as you are riding along that tells you the cycleway

ends. That is the most frustrating thing in Canberra for on-road cyclists: you are riding along and then suddenly this sign appears and the cycle path ends. You think, up on the bike, “What am I going to do?” Suddenly you are looking for footpaths and all the rest. Those connections are missing, and often it is because the roads were built 40 or 50 years ago, they become too narrow and they do not want to put a line on it. It means you have to make the investment at some stage, to actually be able to have full through connections.

MS LE COUTEUR: You talked about all of these submissions and consultations you have been part of—the Molonglo to city et cetera—and that they did become actuality. What do you think we could do to make sure that, instead of just planning, we actually deliver?

Ms Lynskey: In terms of the allocation of funding, as we said, there should be a four-year minimum kind of funding model, so that design happens this year, and next year you know there will be allocation of funding to ensure that the next year things get built. With the Belconnen bikeway, that is where it is moving to; there has been an allocation of the overall cost of the project, this particular budget has in it the initial design year. We need the forward thinking to know that they have allocated how much the overall project is going to cost.

Instead what we see is that you do the funding for one year, and even with the town centres, which do get a little bit of funding, it is not enough to realise all of the recommendations of the overall plan. With Woden, it has been a very piecemeal approach; we have enough funding for this block or this street, and it does not connect with other things. As you said, if it does not have those connections, people are less likely to want to use it, or they will use it and they will have a bad experience, because you are in a safe environment, riding along, and suddenly you are thrown out into the traffic, and that is not what you wanted or expected.

It is about having the comprehensive vision and picture, and knowing over years how that is going to be achieved. It is not necessarily going to happen in just one year, but it is about how we build on the planning and studies in coming years to fund those recommendations.

MR COE: A few years ago there was some work done by the government with regard to line treatment for on-road cycle paths. I think they experimented with various raised treatments.

Ms Lynskey: With the separations?

MR COE: Has there been any development of that issue since that trial was conducted a few years ago?

Ms Lynskey: That was trialling some different forms of separation on-road—more than just a painted line; some raised things or a kind of flexible bollard or pole-type things—to provide a bit of extra safety. I know in the evaluation they found in some cases that those treatments made it less safe for bike riders. That is what you get from doing a trial. I think the ACT government could learn a lot from giving stuff a go and having a trial for a few months to see if it improves safety or what other

considerations come into play.

We certainly would love to see more trials of separation between cars and bike riders on the roads, as well as in busy recreational spaces with a lot of different users: walkers, runners, people with prams and dogs et cetera, and bike riders. There are some real areas of conflict arising, as many of you have probably experienced around the lakes and things. There could be an opportunity to trial some things. We do not know what will work until we give it a go. There are a lot of other test studies from Australia and around the world that we could draw from and see how it works in the Canberra context.

MR COE: Are there any options currently being considered about separation or segregation of on-road paths on the major arterial roads? I am thinking of roads like Adelaide Avenue, for example.

Ms Lynskey: Not in that particular location that we have been made aware of. Obviously, there is lots of work going on continually, and we are trying to stay abreast of it all. The initial discussion in relation to the Belconnen bikeway has been that this could be an opportunity to trial some things and build a world-class facility to test some of that stuff.

Mr Ryan: Coming back to your original question, you would have to ask transport, but I can tell you that the trial separation between Kingston foreshore and the wetlands is still there, and that was one of the original trial sites. So it is still set up in the same way it was for the trial. We are not sure whether it is still being assessed, but it is certainly still there and in position.

MR PETTERSSON: I have a couple of quick questions about the capital injection of \$14 million over four years that you were talking about. I am not sure if you are the best people to speak to about this, but can you outline for me how you came to that number?

Ms Lynskey: Yes. The public document, the report addressing path maintenance that we put together, looked at working with Roads ACT—independent from them but using the figures that they have in terms of the cost of resurfacing or repairing different types of hazards that arise in the network, and then looking at the number of kilometres that we have in our network. It is about looking at the maths: we have this many paths and this amount to repair it, so what is the real cost of that?

MR PETTERSSON: You said it was a public document?

Ms Lynskey: Yes.

MR PETTERSSON: Is there any chance you could share that at some point?

Ms Lynskey: Yes, definitely.

MR PETTERSSON: Thank you.

Ms Lynskey: You will be able to see the breakdown of that and how we came to

those conclusions. Obviously, it is a constantly changing thing, as the number of kilometres of network increases. It depends on the different types of technology that you are using to repair the path with.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for appearing on behalf of Pedal Power this morning.

DONOVAN, DR BILL, Chair, ACT Policy Advisory Group, National Seniors Australia

McLEOD, MS JUDY, ACT Policy Advisory Group, National Seniors Australia former president of the National Seniors Australia Canberra North Branch

THE CHAIR: Welcome to the Select Committee on Estimates 2017-2018. Before we get started, I ask that you familiarise yourself with the pink privileges statement that is in front of you and say whether you are aware of its implications.

Dr Donovan: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I invite you to make an opening statement.

Dr Donovan: Listening to the last speaker, I was sitting here imagining an 85-year-old white-haired senior barrelling down the middle of a bikepath on a mobility scooter with very little regulation, probably no registration and probably no insurance cover, and wondering about the health and safety of all the bike people. We have someone in our suburb who has a fully enclosed mobility scooter that looks like a Goggomobil that barrels down the middle of the main road in our suburb daily. Anyway, that is not what we are talking about, but it is an interesting seniors issue.

We have had excellent participation in the budget process. We put in a submission. The minister and his staff, and finance staff, have all met with us, and we have met with the opposition spokesperson on the ageing. We really appreciate that and we see this as part of the ongoing dialogue with seniors in the ACT.

We represent 2,000 paid-up members in the ACT but we represent over 40 per cent of your electors. Probably some in the Assembly fit into our category, because anyone over 50 is a senior. All of you, of course, are very young by the look of it.

I want to mention one other thing; I am not sure how relevant it is. We went to the budget lockup. Compared to previous years, this year was a marked improvement. It was a great process, well organised, with plenty of officers for briefing. That was just an interesting sideline.

In response to the budget, we happened to have a meeting of our National Seniors branch this week, two days after the budget, so we got immediate feedback. And of course we got a lot of ad hoc feedback from commentary that others made to us in various locations we have been in during the past week.

Generally this year—and Seniors are probably like all other organisations—people have been reasonably happy with the budget in overall terms. They like what they see happening to Canberra and would want to see it happen under all parties, whoever was in power.

There is the issue of improvement of the municipal structure. One of our members, in a meeting with the minister, said, “You ought to adopt a principle to make Canberra great again.” By that, they meant cleaning up all the footpaths, mowing the verges, cleaning up the graffiti and you name it. There appear to be some initiatives in the

budget to improve that, but we would like to see a lot more of that. Our members are very concerned about the view of Canberra, because they tend to have lots of people visiting. They live here and are close to their grandchildren and so on, so they have this desire for Canberra to be probably restored to that pristine image they saw back in the 1970s though they realise that the problem is to find the money for doing it.

The main issue that concerns the senior citizens of Canberra, as you well know if you ever sit down with any of them, is their health. That is always their number one priority. We have voting on a priority setting exercise every year to determine what they are really interested in. They talk about issues such as dying with dignity, the right to gay marriage and so on. But when it comes to voting they all disappear down to number 9 and 10. The things that concern them are the things that concern them individually.

So we were pleased to see some initiatives in the budget about improving health, particularly for seniors, in terms of what they are doing with the hospital. A key issue that our members are bringing up more and more as the years go by is the mental health of seniors, which tends to get neglected. While there is some money in the budget for that, people would like to see a lot more.

The second thing that people are concerned about is their housing arrangements. For years we have been lobbying the government about the fact that it is very difficult for seniors to find the right sort of housing. We call it right-sizing rather than downsizing because all sorts of seniors come under different categories. Workers, pensioners, people on fixed incomes and people who are self-funded retirees all have different needs for housing. Not everyone wants to be shoved into a 90 square metre two-bedroom unit on the third floor of a retirement village. That has been the attitude of providers and, I think, underlying it, even the advisers to the government. We would like to see much more of what people want, freestanding smaller places that are all one level. They are building a lot of two-storey houses now for retirement people: you live on the bottom; you never go up to the top. Anyway, that is another area we are concerned about.

The third thing is that social isolation is increasing amongst older people. There are some initiatives in the budget about home transport and bus transport, picking up people and taking things, which is great. All the trials are being continued; that is great. But as Canberra sprawls more and more and goes up more and more, you are going to have more and more isolation. I do not think there is enough in this budget to address that.

Lastly in terms of the concerns of our members is the cost of living. That is massive for people on a pension or on a fixed income. It is not just what is in the budget in terms of increases in rates, car registration and so on; it is the \$600 a household increase in water, electricity and gas that is concerning everybody. If you add that to everything in the budget, people are saying that they are going to be \$1,000 cash worse off a year. If you are on \$19,000, that is huge. We do not see much in the budget to alleviate that. We have noticed a subsidiary statement about a fund perhaps being set up to support people who have energy cost problems.

On a smaller point that probably affects us more than it affects anybody else, we put

in a submission asking the government to do something about the way older people are treated by the officers of government and the officers of private enterprise that deal with people in terms of home care and all the things that go on with the elderly. There is a general belief that people need to be trained a lot more and there ought to be a lot more money and emphasis put on training public servants on how to deal with the elderly, not treating us as if we were senile children three years old and being told, “This is what you need,” rather than having them find out what we want. That is a deep concern. Our members will say again and again that they go to a hotline, a website or a person and they do not get listened to or heard and there is not any consultation.

Finally, we appreciate being able to talk to you about this and have an interaction about any issue. We are happy at any time afterwards to do that. I did a more detailed one-pager that summarises all this. I do not know whether you want a copy of this while you are talking to us. It has a bit more detail on the specific issues we like and dislike about the budget.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much, Dr Donovan. We will circulate that. Are you happy to take some questions?

Dr Donovan: Yes.

THE CHAIR: You touched on ageing in place and the impact of cost of living on seniors. What sort of feedback are you getting from the membership around the government’s changes to the land rates and the tax reform package? Particularly for seniors who are no longer in the workforce and are on fixed or limited incomes, I would imagine it is having a fairly major impact.

Ms McLeod: I live in an inner suburb where the rates are already high, and it is quite a big slab. I cannot see a stop to it happening. That is one of my big issues. People are saying, “We’ve coped this year, but we are really at breaking point now. What will happen next year?” Members are really concerned about the rates increase. It is forcing some people who are living in certain suburbs to move. Red Hill is one, but on the north side there is Hawker. We have members in Weetangera and Bruce.

It is not just that; it is that at the same time other things have gone up. It is not just one isolated thing going up; everything has gone up. When you retire—and you can all look forward to this—you retire on a set income. You have no opportunity to get a promotion. That is it. That is what you have got for the rest of your life. The neighbour next to you does. Do you know what I mean? Seniors are not set in a group somewhere where you can keep those rates low for them only. The fixed income is the real problem, and people are having trouble dealing with the rates because it is the hardest one.

I guess as the year goes on we will get more complaints about registration and parking. Parking they did bring up. But just to summarise, it is a real problem, yes, and it is forcing people to move. At the same time, the government is not really giving them any assistance in that decision to move. At one stage, if you downsized, you got a special concession from the government. That has now finished. The government believes that after three years anyone who was going to take advantage of that should

have moved. But that is not quite the case because there are people retiring all the time and then suddenly facing where they are. A younger person can get a second job if suddenly something goes up that has not been budgeted for; they can work or do something. But a senior is very limited in what they can do. They are stuck with that income. It is a fixed income.

THE CHAIR: When people have taken the decision to move from what I would imagine in many cases has been a long-term family home, what sorts of challenges are they finding when they have to relocate?

Ms McLeod: The biggest thing is this right-sizing that we are talking about, finding something that is suitable for you. I myself did the round of all the retirement villages on the north side and I did not find anything that met my criteria. Being a retired public servant, you always set out with criteria for what you want, and there was just nothing there. I want a bit of grass and I want to see the sky. They are quite simple things, but there is nowhere a body of people that have taken any of this into account. We get told what we should have. I have to be fair: the people building these things have to make money, I guess, so they are cutting corners. There are a few places that have been built and sold on the plans where you had three and four units together—two houses were pulled down—but even they are not available at the moment because of the costing. There is not enough profit in that for private enterprise to keep them going. Nothing is being done to help you to move out.

I live in a four-bedroom home on my own, and that is where I will stay, because I have just got to—

THE CHAIR: No other option.

Ms McLeod: Yes, there is no other option available at the moment, having done the circuit.

MS CODY: I want to pick up on the point you were talking about in your opening statement, Dr Donovan. Ms McLeod, you also mentioned it. It is about government entities and private entities giving you what they think you should have. I worked in aged care policy for eight years or something, so I had a lot of interactions with seniors, and my parents are seniors. How can we lessen that impact? Is it a matter of an education program? What sorts of things could we be doing?

Dr Donovan: Essentially what we put in our budget submission. Let me answer it another way. Public servants should deal with all members of the public in an appropriate way, whether they are young or workers. It just seems that in public meetings and in private things, when people deal with seniors they tend to see us as not having any intelligence or any ability to make a rational decision about our own lives. Granted there are a lot of people like that. If you have Alzheimer's disease and you are locked away, you are like that. But if you go to a public meeting about any issue, you might be listened to and slapped down. Both of us were public servants in a way, although I was a principal of a school, but that is a different issue. It has to be part of the culture of the organisation. It has to be brought into the organisation top and bottom and by training. That is really what needs to happen. I think public servants are trained in nearly everything these days, aren't they? There is probably an

overload. We do not have any real solutions to it apart from asking that it be done.

Ms McLeod: And consultation.

MS CODY: Sorry?

Ms McLeod: Consultation. I feel that consultation and open discussions are needed. Sometimes when you go into these meetings, a lot of effort goes into putting these meetings on but that is it. It dies there. Suddenly in 12 months you are back at another meeting and there has never been a report from the one you went to the previous time. That is one of the issues we have.

MS CODY: Do you think some of the new initiatives announced in the budget, like citizens juries, will help with that consultation stuff?

Ms McLeod: They have said that they are looking at better accommodation for the elderly or seniors. It will be interesting to see what they base that on. I am aware that on the south side there is a place with units that people are very happy with, but I can honestly say I have not been out to the south side to look at it.

MS CODY: There are some very nice ones that I have seen for my parents.

Ms McLeod: Are you saying the south is better than the north?

MS CODY: Well, you know.

Ms McLeod: We used to say at work, “Draw your passport and cross the lake.”

MS CODY: Absolutely. Thank you.

MS LE COUTEUR: Your submission talked about needing a review of public transport options. I was interested in what major issues you see. Is it the financial issues or is it the lack of services? In terms of lack of services, is it lack of services for people with mobility issues or is it just that the buses do not turn up where you want them with sufficient frequency?

Ms McLeod: I am referring more to the expansion of the flexible bus. That service is wonderful, and it would be really great if that could be expanded to areas that are not covered. It is great to see that going into the north.

MS LE COUTEUR: That is being expanded.

Ms McLeod: I had a fall in the Jamison car park and the man who picked me up said, “You should be using the flexible buses. I drive them.” I have been on them, and they could not be better. I also use the community car. But in terms of the actual buses, no. In terms of timing, as you mentioned, both the community car and the flexible buses depend on the workload at the time. With the community cars, you have to book up to 10 days ahead, and some days are booked out totally. With the flexible buses, they say two days, but it depends. You yourself have to be flexible to work around when they can take you and be happy to give way to those with appointments. That is the thing.

Some people do.

In terms of the actual buses, I have only been on a couple of buses. Members have said that it is difficult because not all buses are accessible for people with walkers. The complaint I got, which was, I guess, an individual one, was that a person had got on the bus with the walker but the bus driver did not help her put the walker up the front and then it took off. There was a little drama. I have only been on a few with my walker, and those few times the bus came, so I can only speak from that. It is not so much the bus not turning up that we have had comments about; it is more about the mobility problem in getting on. That was the big issue. If that could be expanded, that would be good. Several of our members come from Dunlop, for example, and they said that you cannot get the flexible bus out there.

Dr Donovan: The biggest complaint we get from members when they provide feedback on transport is that when they get on a bus, there are all these people sitting in the seats that are supposed to be reserved, and you have to stand up because they take no notice. There is a lack of respect for the rules or courtesy for older people. You cannot stand there and say, “Get off my seat,” although I know some people would probably do that.

It is the general principle that Judy is talking about that we want reviewed. But we also asked for certain things, and a lot of them were in the budget, as Judy was saying.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for coming in. Unfortunately, that is all we have time for today.

Dr Donovan: Thank you.

CAFFERY, MR DAVID, President, MusicACT and Director, Dionysus
FINDLAY, MR GAVIN, Vice-President, MusicACT

THE CHAIR: The committee welcomes representatives from MusicACT.

Mr Caffery: Thank you for having us. A huge amount goes into what you are doing, no doubt, and your time is valued. The mechanisms that facilitate our being here today are really appreciated. I think it is a really good structure.

THE CHAIR: No, we appreciate your making the time as well. Before we kick off, I draw your attention to the pink privileges statement which is on the table in front of you. Can you indicate that you are aware of it and its implications?

Mr Caffery: That is fine.

THE CHAIR: I invite you to make an opening statement to kick off.

Mr Findlay: I will start. We are very grateful for the opportunity to come and speak today. We will start off by saying that we are very enthusiastic about a lot of the measures that have been put forward in the budget after a long period of diminishing returns in the arts when there were no rises in real terms in the arts budget for many years. This is obviously a significant boost; so it is not as though we want to quibble with these items, because no-one could say that any of these things that are in the budget are not worthy or are a bad idea. Our picture that we want to draw is a broader one. It is about the way that the government looks strategically at the development of the arts in Canberra.

We submitted a report to the ACT government in late 2015 called *Cool little capital*. I realise that some members may not be so familiar with the report because there has been a bit of turnover in the membership of the Assembly. But in 2015 Minister Rattenbury put a motion to the Assembly that there should be consideration of whether there was a need for a live music policy in the ACT. It was unanimously agreed by the Assembly that the government would consult on that topic and consult with our organisation particularly. We produced this report, which was delivered to then Attorney-General Simon Corbell at the end of 2015. We were promised by the government that there would be a whole-of-government response to it.

I just raise the point that it is a cross-portfolio report. It addresses issues of planning and noise and issues of liquor regulation, as well as arts policy. We submitted it as part of the budget process in 2016 but we did not get an opportunity to speak to that as well. But we have sort of come back and we are asking, "Does that mean that we have to resubmit this report every time or are we actually going to get some kind of coherent response at some point from the government to the recommendations, which we took a lot of time and effort to develop?" That is the broad picture. I will hand over to my colleague.

Mr Caffery: Gavin and I work hand in hand in running MusicACT. I also run my own place-making and cultural development company called Dionysus. I wear a number of other hats, specifically a cultural program at New Acton, where we have

had a lot of sound issues. I will say very bluntly that the Art, Not Apart Festival is not able to continue legally the way it is because of the environmental authorisation legislation at the moment. We are always looking the other way when we are doing some of that activity. So are a lot of other people working with the festival.

Obviously, it is a very appropriate event in the context. We had no complaints in the last two years. That is quite an achievement for a 15,000 person festival. However, there is a legislative issue there, which I raised in the *Cool little capital* report. We still have not got a formal response about that specific requirement.

It raises a larger issue that we want to talk about regarding planning and the ability to have a more vibrant city at a very fundamental level. The Territory Plan and the crown leases are not drafted in a manner which recognises leased buildings and land being used for ephemeral uses such as cultural and charity events. That includes music, but it also includes all other types of arts, activation, innovation events.

For example, we had funding and wanted to do a large-scale activation of the city west car park in line with the government. Canberra CBD's goals are to have a more active city. It is absolutely impossible to do that under current legislation. It does not make sense that cars can park there but we cannot put an art park there. We want to be able to bring life to that sort of area.

Not many event managers are at the point where they are talking to people like you about this. There are a lot of people that just want to do it. If legislation allowed that, you would not need to do anything further. They would just activate themselves. I am not saying that you need to fund them. I am just saying that buildings not deemed 9B under the building code or under the Territory Plan are not zoned in a way that precludes events. If we can fix that legislation then you are going to see a much more active city.

I might also add that the sound problems in New Acton have not changed; so we cannot legally do the jazz and the sorts of activities that we have been wanting to, which raised some issues in the papers. This was discussed in the Legislative Assembly in 2015. We have not even got a formal response to what might be the solution there. We are looking at a summer program. We are not sure if we should continue it.

It is going to be a big problem for mixed use developments across the city. We are working on a project on Northbourne Avenue which is meant to be a vibrant mixed-use precinct for the corridor of our city. It is going to have exactly the same sound problems that New Acton has. So too is Kingston. We are talking to Geocon about the Kingston arts precinct. I do not see how the legislated requirement of 4,600 square metres of outdoor event space is going to be legally viable under the current sound legislation.

Mr Findlay: Can I step in here and talk about how this relates specifically to the budget? We were part of an extensive consultation around urban sounds that happened last year. It was a good consultation. Lots of really good stuff came out of it. Particularly, there was a lot of talk about establishing entertainment precincts and so forth. But we cannot find anything in the budget about continuing the process around

noise regulation.

We notice, for example, that there is some money allocated for consultation around the Canberra Theatre Centre development, but there is nothing as far as we can tell in the budget about continuing this. Noise regulation is something, I might add, that the government resolved to address in 2011. It is six years later and we are still waiting for some action.

Consultation is one issue that we want to discuss. We are aware that there is a process outside of the budget that the minister for the arts has put forward around a ministerial advisory process. But there are no resources devoted to it as far as we can tell in the existing budget.

Mr Caffery: The second part of our submission, which is just a little bit more delicate, is about the Canberra CBD Ltd funding specifically to do with the budget. I understand that the Greens went to the election with a commitment to move roughly \$1.9 million from somewhere to a city activation fund of some sort. I understand that that is about the same amount that Canberra CBD Ltd are receiving through the city improvements and marketing levy.

I would support the movement of that money. We have a lot of experience with Canberra CBD Ltd. It was required by the ACT government and I think it was a bold but very positive move that Canberra CBD Ltd needs to start spending more money on activating the city. Of course, it was their role beforehand and now they have been told how to do it. They did not like being told how to do it. They did move in theory \$500,000 across to a grant which I structured. They commissioned me to write criteria and process for the delivery of that grant.

I have recently been removed from the panel because I kept asking them to hold to due process. They are not following the criteria that I wrote for the grant which was intended to depoliticise the decision-making about how that money was being allocated. They are not experienced place managers. They are not experienced event managers. They have an opportunity to have a more vibrant city but I do not believe that they have a long-term strategy for doing that and it hurts me to say that. But I think there are many ways that our city could be more vibrant.

There are a lot of things that could be done in the middle of the city. There is a lot of money being spent trying to do it and I do not think it is being done in a holistic fashion. The 10 years of research that we used from the cultural development networks criteria about what makes a good cultural project were put into that grant. They are not being used as the criteria for that grant at the moment in real terms, which is a missed opportunity.

MR COE: I would like to touch on the cool capital action plan that you mentioned. What could have been achieved already had there been a prompt response? What are we missing out on as a result of dragging the chain or everything being six months longer than it has to be?

Mr Findlay: A couple of years actually.

Mr Caffery: There are two quick answers to that. One is that some things have already been done. An indirect response has been Access Canberra. That has greatly enabled the delivery of events and activations throughout the city, which I think has enabled some things to happen that we have already seen. However, there are a lot of other things that could have happened—for example, the use of buildings that are not deemed to satisfy under the current Territory Plan. They would be lively with concerts and events at the moment.

Mr Findlay: Yes. Part of the report and the consultations that we undertook in developing it was the lack of venues in the ACT. It is very hard to start a new venue. The bar to start a new music venue is very high because you have noise restrictions which are onerous. There has been some relaxation recently under the latest lot of liquor amendment that came through for smaller venues. But there are still no strategic views around this. For example, we are looking down the barrel of the Kingston development being locked in. When the plans are locked, probably at the end of this year, they will be locked in under these outdated regulations that have been sitting around for years. You are talking about a multi-use venue where you have residential in close proximity to entertainment and arts.

This is one of the recommendations that we put through in the Liquor Act consultation. It said that, like New South Wales, it would be great if we could have, for example, as the intent of the Liquor Act the support of arts and entertainment as well as simply liquor sale. New South Wales has it in their legislation and we recommended that it be so. It went through to the white paper stage. Then when it came through to the actual legislation itself, it disappeared. We are sitting here saying that somebody made the decision somewhere along the way but we do not really understand why. We gathered best practice from around the country on how to solve these issues. We have lost the opportunity in the short term to facilitate new entertainment venues that will provide a broader spectrum of entertainment in the city.

MR PETTERSSON: Thank you for coming in. Mr Caffery, towards the end of your opening statement there was this throwaway remark that there has been lots of money spent in the city but we could be spending it better. I was hoping you could expand on that when you say that we could do a little better.

Mr Caffery: Sure. The grants-in-the-city strategy specifically details how that might happen. It is about supporting emerging people who want to put activity on in the city to support their developments so they become more professional. It is not just the government putting on events. It should be everyone putting on events. We have a very new and amateur event management industry. There are some highlights by all means; absolutely. Wouldn't it be great if lots of people were putting on their own activity in the CBD? Wouldn't it be great if the infrastructure and the legislation supported that?

MR PETTERSSON: I have a second question unrelated to the first. This might have been an area we have spent too much time on but do you have any thoughts on the music performance venues across Canberra? Do you think we have a large enough capacity for large musical performances in this town?

Mr Caffery: The 2009 Loxton report deemed that there were insufficient mid-sized

live music venues and that has not changed.

Mr Findlay: It has not changed. I have asked various members that I have spoken to over the past few years, “Have you ever thought about the fact that once upon a time Canberra used to be on the circuit for big name international touring acts and it has dried to a trickle?” I am waiting for the government or the Assembly to say, “Music industry, would you like to tell us why this is the case and what can we do about it?” I know, for example, that when the Rolling Stones were going to be touring the Chief Minister was actually behind the scenes trying to get them to come to Canberra. It did not work out. We are sitting here saying that part of that is noise regulation and the lack of ability to start new venues because we are over-burdened by regulation.

We have artsACT, which does a wonderful job, but it does not have a focus on the kind of cross-portfolio regulatory issues that burden the music industry in particular as opposed to other art forms. This is why we feel there has to be a parallel body of policy thinking that is in consultation not just with the music industry but with the hospitality sector and with developers so that we can actually address some of these issues. We have been calling for this now for a couple of years and I guess we are disappointed that we have not seen any evidence of that in the current budget.

Mr Caffery: We documented in the *Cool little capital* report that the pinch point in the development of the music industry is a lack of venues. If you give us some more platforms, not money—platforms that work—we will have a better music industry.

MR PETTERSSON: I am going to reveal just how uncool I am here. What are the venues on the larger side in Canberra for our musical performances?

Mr Caffery: There are a lot of sizes from—

MR PETTERSSON: Let us start with the biggest.

Mr Caffery: The biggest are the stadiums but they are not working properly. I heard from the head of Elite Sound and Lighting today that there are a lot of major touring agents looking for where to put on events around the country. Canberra is missing because it does not have an easy-to-use over 5,000-person venue. Roughly, ideally 7,500 is a nice size. Of course, the Arboretum goes to 5,000. It is all outdoors. It is really hard to use. It is a beautiful space; do not get me wrong, but it is not going to be able handle the systematic use of touring artists. We need a bigger indoor space for that.

That is a quite an investment. I am not suggesting we need to do that right now. Somewhere around the 2,000 mark would be nice and then a step down again from that to around 750—between 350 and 750—and then a step down again from that to around 200 to 350. I might add that the ANU is replacing the ANU bar with a roughly 350-pax venue that I will be heading up. That was an expensive exercise for the ANU to do. It is a \$7 million pop-up village. It is only for 18 months. Most operators would not be able to afford to do that but they are. They have seen value in it from a wider strategy, which is fantastic. The city should be able to leverage that. I just want to point out how hard that was.

Then under that, your under-200s are really important for more local acts all the time. I might add that Smith's, the Phoenix bar, the Transit Bar and a few others have been doing a really good job supporting those. They are not the only ones, I might add, but they are few and far between.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much. Unfortunately, time is up. I appreciate your coming in. I forgot to ask; is that submission online that you made to the—

Mr Caffery: *Cool little capital?* Yes, it is on our MusicACT website.

THE CHAIR: Thank you.

HELYAR, MS SUSAN, Director, ACT Council of Social Service Inc.

WALLACE, MR CRAIG, Advocacy Manager, ACT Council of Social Service Inc.

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon. You are both veterans at this, but I draw your attention to the pink privileges statement in front of you. Can you indicate for the benefit of Hansard that you are aware of its implications.

Ms Helyar: Yes.

Mr Wallace: Yes.

THE CHAIR: I invite you to kick off with an opening statement.

Ms Helyar: Thank you, chair. The 2017-18 budget delivers on many of the election commitments that ACTCOSS saw as priorities for investment early in the term of government. The investments in health, education, transport, city and suburban renewal and public housing are all welcomed. We note that even with such significant spending on these items the community will gain more fit-for-purpose infrastructure but is unlikely to see adequate growth in supply needed to match growth in the population.

ACTCOSS commends the decision on lease variation charges and the ongoing reduction in stamp duty at the cheaper end of the home purchase market. We support this rebalancing in the taxation system with the proviso that if a home owner experiences significant financial hardship as a result of rates increases, the concessions program should be used to mitigate this hardship. We also note the impact on rental charges as a result of landlords passing through costs to tenants.

Red tape reduction relevant to community organisations is welcomed and we look forward to further reductions via procurement and funding administration reforms identified as priorities by our members. We welcome funding for the ACT government to improve the community's involvement in decision-making. The aim of those changes should be to ensure that the knowledge and capacity of people most affected by decisions are better enabled to contribute to decision-making. We would also note that good practice in one part of government should be adopted across all portfolios to ensure a consistent, coherent approach.

In an economy that is presented as strong, diversifying, and with a sustainable growth trajectory, there should be more room to match investment in universal services and a number of once-in-a-generation infrastructure renewal projects with investment in essential social services that support people not well served by universal systems and infrastructure.

We do not see a vision to hold back the growth of inequality, to reduce costs of living for low income households, and to increase and maintain the supply of vital community services as our population grows, or improve amenity for people living on low incomes in the ACT. In the budget we do not see respect for our members as first responders to people facing difficult circumstances and adverse life transitions that are not the role or capacity of education and health services to respond to. In fact, we are

not presented as essential social infrastructure with equal standing with health and education services.

We are struck by the invisibility of community services in the community briefing material presented on budget day. We are the fastest growing labour market in the territory, a labour market that welcomes diversity and provides entry level jobs and a career pathway beyond those entry level positions. We build human capital and skill as volunteers, as employees and as leaders. That human capital then contributes more broadly to other industries and to development of the city.

Community and health services are projected to grow by 16.6 per cent through to 2020 at least, and currently these labour markets contribute 24 per cent of jobs growth in the territory. That is why we were surprised that we were not presented as part of the growing economy of this city.

There are welcome but modest investments in workforce development in parts of community services, but the only substantial business development funds remain those collected via a levy on services during the previous five years. Ceasing the levy is very important and welcome, but the lack of investment in planning and renewal of a growing industry is short sighted and potentially compromises the opportunity to grow the export market for community service capability development and provision. This is in stark contrast to support for other industries.

Manuka Oval has been provided with \$11 million to modernise its broadcasting capacity. Where is the investment in modernising ICT in community services? Police are being given \$2.7 million to purchase a taser for every officer. Where is the investment in ensuring community services volunteers and workers have the right tools of the trade to do their jobs safely and well? The construction industry has a clear program of physical infrastructure renewal by the government on which they can plan and align their business development. Where is the coherent procurement plan for human services that will ensure relevance, quality, continuity, diversity, sustainability and security of supply to the community and clarity for future planning for workforce needs, service and business models?

The foundation for a decent life in our city is affordable, accessible safe housing with security of tenure. We do not see the measures that relate to housing affordability as providing a scale of response that will grow the housing supply that is needed in the lowest end of the market, especially for low income renters not in public housing.

A number of investments have been made in specialised social services unable to meet demand, including homelessness and housing support programs, mental health services, justice programs, legal assistance, disability support and child protection. They are all absolutely vital, but we do not expect that the funding provided will fully meet demand or turn the tide of demand because there is not a sufficient focus on prevention, early intervention or support through recovery.

There are modest investments in multicultural and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community needs, but we do not see authentic and genuine engagement with these communities or the people within them who are most affected by racism, discrimination, exploitation and exclusion, particularly in the labour market and the

housing market.

Our overall assessment of the ACT budget is that whilst it checks off a number of election promises—and we welcome that—the investments do not provide a long-term plan to meet the community’s expectations about the priority that should be given to those who deal with sustained long-term cost of living pressures, who face difficult circumstances and who do not enjoy the benefits of Canberra’s prosperity and livability. We welcome your questions.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. There has been a lot of discussion about the future of SHOUT in the light of the transition to the NDIS. I am keen to get a view from ACTCOSS’s perspective as to what you believe the long-term solution is going to be for organisations that do not get direct funding through the NDIS and that are providing self-help, referral and information services, key services to the community, but are not necessarily recognised under the formal NDIS? Do you have any solutions as to how they could be funded or supported going forward.

Ms Helyar: That is when we talk about the lack of investment in core social infrastructure. Self-help groups and information services supporting informal pathways into the service system are absolutely fundamental to a well-functioning community and a service system that can genuinely find and respond to the people who need it. The challenge we see in the transition to the NDIS is that we have changed jurisdiction responsibilities, we have changed funding flows and we have changed entitlement arrangements but we have missed some of the things that do not fit into those new ways of funding following those new arrangements around entitlements.

We acknowledge that the ACT government took a calculated but supported risk around being the jurisdiction that went full scheme most quickly, and we have been talking to our colleagues in other jurisdictions about us being the canary in the coal mine around: “Of course the NDIS is a good idea; and of course the changes are valued, but we are seeing where the big gaps are.”

There has been some investment in health to address those gaps, and we think there probably needs to be more. It is not just about what goes to the NDIS, because the ACT government maintains a responsibility under the national disability strategy to provide core infrastructure that all citizens should have access to, and it is on that basis that we say there should be more investment.

THE CHAIR: How are the other jurisdictions and their trial sites dealing with this issue as it arises?

Ms Helyar: I think the reality is that they are not really dealing with it because they have not had full scheme rollout, so it has not emerged. We think it will emerge in those contexts; the ACT is just more advanced and more sharp in it. We value the \$70,000 that went to SHOUT to help them to think through the next stage and how they might create a viable model going forward. I think that is important. But it is more than that: it is about what the ACT government sees as its responsibility in providing the core underpinning infrastructure on which the NDIS sits on top.

Mr Wallace: If I can slightly expand on that, whilst SHOUT is at the pointy end of this because the contract arrangements and the funding have become due, it is not the only example. There are also things like bespoke equipment that is not easily marketised. From one day to the next they can be meeting quite different demands and providing quite different products at different price points, and there is always going to be a need for some underpinning social infrastructure that supports people with disabilities to cover over the paving of the NDIS and things that that system will not fill.

THE CHAIR: Regardless of how much transitional funding or rescoping of funding is provided by government, there is always going to be a need for government to be funding these services in some way, shape or form, is there not?

Ms Helyar: Yes, there is, and the question with the jurisdiction and the policy responsibility changes is: where does it sit in government? Up until now it has largely sat with community services, but it actually is not just that portfolio's responsibility, so it is thinking through across portfolios. In the transport portfolio, what are their responsibilities to step up to fill gaps in transport infrastructure? What is the responsibility of the health system to recognise its role and its responsibilities? What is the role of community services? That is part of what has been the challenge: as we have transitioned all the responsibilities we have not had the other areas of government in the space and stepping into spaces.

THE CHAIR: Taking responsibility for their portion of that portfolio?

Ms Helyar: Yes.

MS CODY: In your submission to this committee you touched on transport disadvantage. I note that you spoke about ensuring that we have transport services that are accessible and affordable. Can you expand on that and what sorts of things—

Ms Helyar: Yes. There are two forms of transport disadvantage. One is when you are stuck in traffic and your time is used up because of congestion. That form of transport disadvantage, I think, is being well considered and addressed.

The other form of transport disadvantage is around more of the social determinants: whether you can access transport where you live for the routes that you need at a price that you can afford and in a way that fits with your support needs. That is the transport disadvantage that we do not think is being fully addressed.

We have certainly had some welcome conversations with transport policy and planning areas of government around better integrating the planning around mass transit and with the planning around community or flexible bus services or other forms of transport and then also thinking about the taxi system and the ride-share regulations as actually all being important, and each of those can address some bits of transport disadvantage. But if we do not consider them all together we will create gaps.

There are some really big gaps. If you are a single parent with young children without access to a private vehicle you are pretty stuck, and it is pretty hard to get around the city. You are not really entitled to most of the transport assistance support that is

made available. Certainly one of the things we spoke with the transport planners around was: with the way transport is being thought of at the moment, you could be travelling from Kaleen to the CIT in Reid with your two kids to go to your VET course and you would have to do three transitions to do that by public transport and would that really encourage you not to take your car? Probably not.

If you are a cleaner working in the hospital doing a late night cleaning shift, how do you get there and get home? If you are a person working in the hospitality industry you are paying a lot for your parking. Probably your first couple of hours of work are spent paying off your parking and your transport costs and keeping your car on the road. There are those groups that we do not feel have enough visibility in the planning.

MS CODY: I could not agree more but have you got some ideas? Obviously there is a lot of work to be done in those areas. As a single mum, I know how hard it was to get me and my children to where we needed to be.

Ms Helyar: We think it is to do with the planning. We need to map who are the people who experience that transport disadvantage we are talking about and how are we developing both the regional centres and the transport systems in collaboration and together to really address their accessibility and availability challenges.

Measures like the free bus service have helped some groups, and that is valuable, but it is not always the price that is the issue. It is often where it is at what time. And we think the solution to that is actually for the group of people we are talking about to be the core business, not just the commuters going 9 to 5 to major town centres for their work, which is what we have seen as—

MS CODY: So it is about ensuring that we are actively thinking and planning for all cohorts?

Ms Helyar: Yes. And we know from a lot of urban designers that if you plan well for that group actually everybody likes the changes. The changes work for everyone. We know that when you do that you actually create systems that are valued by a much broader cohort. But if you do it the other way around you miss a lot of the problems that need addressing.

Mr Wallace: I think one of the questions we have been asking publicly about this is: as we embark on group centre redesign, stage 2 of light rail, thinking about flexi bus, thinking about community transport, to what extent are we kind of overlaying those things so that they help those with the greatest barriers to get where they need to go and actually do that in a systemised way? You almost need to kind of overlay those planning systems and come up with a plan that integrates transport design and accessibility in Canberra. Citizen voice and community voice and people with lived experience need to be at the centre of that.

Ms Helyar: And that will not get picked up in the usual surveys because often the surveys test the usual users, the current users, who are not the people that—

Mr Wallace: The traders.

MS CODY: Yes, the traders.

Ms Helyar: Yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: You were saying we needed to spend an extra \$100 million a year on affordable housing, and I would agree with you on that. One thing I want to reflect on is: if we were to make any increase in investment in public or affordable housing, have you got any ideas about how to make the process more acceptable to some other members of the community? I am bearing in mind some of the reactions not just in Weston but in other parts of Canberra where there have been some significant negative reactions to the idea of affordable housing and public housing.

Ms Helyar: I think there are some prejudices that drive those reactions but I also think there are some concerns about a renewal process that does not engage adequately with communities about what they are looking for out of renewal, what they value in their community, what they want to keep and what they are happy to see change. I think we need a much stronger conversation that is about renewal overall, and then we can have a conversation about affordable housing, public housing. Changes in urban form that create more affordable housing, like increased density and different housing forms, can come from that.

Certainly that is what we have argued to government but we do not step away from saying to the community, “Do not be disrespectful and do not have prejudices.” I think that is the critical thing in that space. But certainly we have really welcomed the engagement we had prior to the election. We were able to put out a housing strategy document that was signed by professional organisations—business, union and community organisations—who could all see a value in a collective way forward that included affordable housing and we have encouraged government and committees to engage with that group as we think about how to talk with the community more broadly about the need for a significant shift and a significant increase in the amount of affordable housing available in our communities.

MR COE: By way of transport disadvantage and also housing affordability, is progress actually being made? There is obviously a lot happening and there are projects and programs and reports left, right and centre. But in Canberra are things actually getting better or are we going the wrong way? If so, how long has the trend been the way it is?

Ms Helyar: I think in terms of transport disadvantage we are getting a lot more traction on the issues. Compared to two years ago there is a lot more engagement and dialogue around transport disadvantage.

MR COE: What about actual outcomes, though?

Ms Helyar: I would argue that things like the improved flexi bus services, the no cost at certain times of day for different population groups, do make a difference, and they have been valued. But we need things to go further. I think in terms of affordable housing the big shift we have had is the recognition that affordable rental, affordable long-term, secure tenure rental, is actually one of the major gaps in our market, and we have seen that acknowledged both by the private sector and by government. But I

would agree with you that we have not seen enough change yet, and that is why we were critical following the budget. There are small measures around housing but what we have been advised is that in October the housing and homelessness summit will be held and that will be the opportunity to see the commitments on the way forward. So we await that.

MR COE: But is transport disadvantage diminishing or is transport disadvantage increasing in Canberra at the moment?

Ms Helyar: At the moment we do not have good data on that. The only data we have is from the survey that was done in, I think it was, 2012, 2013. We have asked for that to be done again because we do not actually know. But from speaking with our members, transport disadvantage is a continuing problem, particularly around the growing number of the ageing population who often have issues around mobility and maintaining their ability to drive, and we have a growing number of people who are working but who are struggling to keep their car on the road. On that basis, we would say that it continues to grow.

MR COE: And in terms of people who are mobility impaired, does transport disadvantage also go to whether you need to transfer or interchange onto different—

Ms Helyar: The example I gave before was about someone who has to use three forms of transport. That is tricky with two under-five-year-old children. That is tricky if you have got a walker. How we make sure that transport works for those users—

MR COE: But that of course gets entrenched with light rail, and so—

Ms Helyar: And that is where we have been having the conversation about how we make sure that there are options other than doing a three-step process. We have talked about the bus routes working for people differently from light rail.

MR PETTERSSON: On a slightly different tack—and I bring it up because I have not seen anyone else bring it up and I think it is an important issue—in your community shares statement you call for investment in certain areas and you say that in the 2017-18 budget there has not been any spending on sexual and reproductive health. Where are the shortfalls in the system at the moment?

Ms Helyar: I do not have the detail of that with me. I am happy to take that as a question on notice. There are some significant issues that have come out of the NDIS transition for people who live with disabilities and their access to sexual health and reproductive health information, advice and services. That has been one thing that Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT has been raising for some time, and I think it has got some recognition. But it is one of those gap areas. How do you do that as part of an individualised package? It is probably more like a core infrastructure thing but in the transitions that fell out.

There are issues around culturally competent and accessible sexual and reproductive health services and how you maintain access to those. Certainly there are issues around access to funding for translating and interpreting services, that kind of thing. But I will be happy to get some more information back to you on that.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for coming this afternoon.

Hearing suspended from 12.54 to 1.48 pm.

CRIMMINS, MS FRANCES, Executive Director, YWCA
MARTIN, MS MISHKA, Senior Policy Officer, YWCA

THE CHAIR: Welcome back to the short afternoon session of day one of estimates. We welcome the YWCA. Before I pass over to you for an opening statement I ask that you familiarise yourself with the privileges statement and indicate that you are aware of its implications.

Ms Crimmins: Yes, I have reviewed the privilege statement.

Ms Martin: And I have also reviewed the privilege statement.

THE CHAIR: I invite you to make an opening statement.

Ms Crimmins: Thank you. I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land we are meeting on today and pay my respect to elders past, present and future. I am grateful to have the privilege of living and working on this land and thank elders for their ongoing contribution to the cultural, economic and social benefits that we all enjoy.

I would like to express my appreciation for the invitation to address the estimates committee on the 2017-18 ACT budget. YWCA Canberra is a feminist, secular not-for-profit organisation that has been providing community services and representing women's issues in Canberra since 1929. Over the years 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 programs.

YWCA Canberra began 2017 by launching its policy priorities that included gender equality, safe and affordable housing for women, supporting vulnerable young people, and quality early childhood education and care. These policies and priorities and our continued analysis are directly informed by our programs and services. It is with this vast knowledge of the local women, girls and families who make up our community that we approached our submission to the ACT government's pre-budget consultation process.

We have observed that this year's budget has been broadly guided by the parliamentary agreement, a document of commitments that paved the way for the ACT Greens and ACT Labor to form government. While we applaud the government's steadfast approach to delivering on its commitments, we are concerned that it has been to the detriment of other areas of significant need. Of particular concern is the ACT women's plan which, I note, in its first year has received no funding for implantation or promotion.

As the former chair of the ministerial advisory council on women I was witness to the development of the women's plan 2016-21, and the council worked closely with the Office of Women to guide this process. The plan was intended to be a guiding framework for a whole-of-government approach to addressing key issues impacting women and girls in the territory. The plan delegates responsibility to each

ACT government directorate, allowing them to achieve their own gender equality outcomes and to apply a gendered analysis to understand how all policies and programs will impact women.

To achieve this, the women's plan in 2017 commits to building our knowledge base. This includes developing or procuring tools to capture gender disaggregated data, developing gender impact statements across all directorates so that by 2018 the annual women's budget statement is able to be produced, and addressing cultural barriers through training on sex discrimination and sexual harassment.

We note that separately the parliamentary agreement also commits the government to implementing a triple bottom line analysis. These are all crucial and significant steps forward towards addressing gender inequality in the ACT. A triple bottom line analysis, for example, requires a long-term commitment to the resourcing and implementation of a whole-of-government approach to a gendered analysis. We understand that as far back as 2012 the ACT government published triple bottom line tools for directorates to implement. However, this now needs to be matched with the resourcing and leadership to implement this important initiative.

Our concern is, given that the first year of the women's plan has gone unfunded: how will the government ensure that this work is prioritised within directorates? Foundations need to be laid in the first year of implementation to build evidence on effective approaches going forward. Equally, bringing the directorates on board will require significant resources and ongoing support. This is why YWCA Canberra's pre-budget submission called on the ACT government to appropriately resource the Office for Women so that they are well equipped to drive this agenda across government directorates.

We believe future budgets will fail to contribute to gender equality and meaningful change until this regulatory approach is taken. This, along with the gendered budget analysis will enable us to comprehend how budget decisions affect diverse women in the ACT, decide on future priorities for women and agree on long-term measures towards gender equality.

We applaud the ACT government's sustained commitment to addressing domestic violence through the safer family package. The family safety hub is a crucial initiative that will benefit women enabling them to more easily navigate a complex system of services during times of crisis. However, our concern remains that the safer family package only addresses the end of the domestic violence spectrum by responding to crisis. These measures must be complemented with investment in primary and secondary prevention strategies to tackle the root causes of domestic violence.

YWCA Canberra's firm stance on investing in primary and secondary prevention initiatives is backed by international and national evidence demonstrating that violence is preventable, which is crucial to the long term goal of achieving gender equality. The evidence is clear that the education of young people and children is crucial to ending the cycle of violence. It was, therefore, alarming to see that funding for the respectful relationship curriculum has now ceased. Meanwhile other jurisdictions across Australia are increasing their investment in primary prevention education in schools. For example, last year the Victorian government invested

\$21.8 million to roll out the respectful relationships curriculum.

We acknowledge that the ACT government's commitment to tackling bullying, particularly experienced by LGBTQI students, is evident in their sustained funding for the safer schools package. However, a holistic curriculum is needed that explicitly recognises and addresses inequality, gender and power and how they are linked to gender-based violence. Comprehensive curriculums such as respectful relationships have been proven to promote more egalitarian relationships which are characterised by shared decision-making and reduced violence. To achieve these longer term outcomes beyond the playground the ACT government must commit to implementing a holistic curriculum that is part of a broader strategy to prevent violence.

On the issue of women and housing affordability, we welcome the government's commitment to delivering a housing and homeless summit and we see that \$525,000 has been set aside for this. We hope the summit provides a genuine opportunity for consultation with a broad range of stakeholders representing the most vulnerable groups in the community. This summit needs to go beyond a box-ticking exercise and instead bring together the brightest and smartest solutions from across the country.

We have asked for a separate stream for women, particularly factoring in the older women cohort who often remain invisible from the debate and yet face heightened vulnerability and require particular policy response. Anglicare's most recent rental affordability snapshot found that of the 1,280 private rentals surveyed online only 24 properties were affordable to single, aged pensioners. If you look to the latest specialist homeless service data, there is a striking trend towards older persons accessing specialist homeless services with the proportion increasing from 11 per cent to 17 per cent in the ACT. However, we know this data does not tell the whole story because the unsustainable, unassisted population is not entered into the system.

Given that women so often hide or self-manage their homelessness, their invisibility is not surprising. On the evening of 4 April a woman presented at the YWCA Canberra's office. I was the only staff member on. Because she faced sleeping rough and had nowhere to go and as I was the last person in the office, I took it upon myself to call OneLink on this woman's behalf. I was told in no uncertain terms that she should sleep in her car. This woman did not own a car. This is not an unusual response; we have testimonies we can share of other women who have had similar experiences. The problem is that these services are simply blind to older women. They are not their target group and so their needs go unmet.

The Community Services Directorate evaluation of reforms to the ACT homeless service system came to a similar conclusion, that is, for women not exiting domestic violence there is a gap in services. With the new housing and homelessness agreement announced by the commonwealth government, the sector eagerly anticipates further information on this new bilateral agreement. We understand that the ACT government will have some negotiating power with this and, once again, we hope this provides us with genuine opportunities for women and women's organisations to play a meaningful role in the lead-up to these negotiations.

We welcome the government's commitment to deepening democratic processes in the

ACT and hope that these principles of participatory democracy will filter through all branches of government. YWCA acknowledges that the focus on this budget has been to meet the demands of an increasing population and that health, education and infrastructure are all vital investments to meet this increasing demand. However, the decisions made reveal a dangerous assumption that the growing social and economic inequality in the ACT can be fixed by the market.

The evidence tells us that domestic violence is intrinsically linked to how many women we have on our boards and to the disproportionate number of older women who face homelessness. The safer families program has demonstrated a powerful model for the whole-of-community response. The government needs to build on this to consider a whole-of-community response to gender equality.

The social and economic case for gender equality is crystal clear. Women make up one half of the population and deserve equal access to health, education, economic participation and decision-making power. Ensuring that we adequately use half of our talent pool improves economic growth, competitiveness and future readiness. Not taking action is costly, with research suggesting that failing to address gender inequality in Australia costs \$195 billion or 13 per cent of gross domestic product.

Sadly, we have got a long way to go to achieving gender equality globally, in Australia and right here in ACT. Some of the statistics we know are: ACT women who work full-time hours on average earn \$300 less than men each week; the Workplace Gender Equality Agency 2016 scorecard reported the gender pay gap in Australia to be 23.1 per cent, with men earning on average \$26,000 per year more than women; women account for 65 per cent of the ACT public service but only 42 per cent of the senior executive positions; on average, women retire with half as much superannuation as men while one in three have no superannuation at all; on average women in Australia spend more time each day working paid and unpaid and more than double the time men spend each day on unpaid work; women are less likely to have paid leave entitlements in Australia; single mothers are the least likely to have access to paid leave entitlements, with nearly a third lacking access; one in three Australian women have experienced physical violence; one in four have experienced violence by an intimate partner; and one in five experience sexual violence.

We know a gender-equal society will not just emerge organically; it needs to be driven by strong leadership, legislative and regulatory reform and appropriate resourcing. 2017 marks an unprecedented moment in Australian history—in Canberra's history as well—with women holding more than 50 per cent of the seats in the ACT Legislative Assembly. This is rather fitting, given that women comprise more than 50 per cent of our population in the ACT. We know that when women hold positions of leadership in our governments, businesses, families and communities, everyone is better off. YWCA Canberra implores the ACT government to adopt a proactive, bold stance on progressing gender equality from which all Canberrans will benefit.

THE CHAIR: I want to get a bit more of a feel for how you see the state of youth mental health support in the ACT at the moment, and I do notice that you make reference to the school psychologists that were committed to during the election and have in part been funded as part of the budget.

Ms Crimmins: We recognise that the school system does need more support to assist when children and young people are in school. Our concern is that there is a gap for those children and young people who may not be presenting to school and that there is not sufficient funding to support community-based counselling that is more holistic. Children and young people do not live in silos. Often the reason why they are not appearing at school is issues with family violence and therefore a community-based therapeutic counselling service that can work with the whole of the family is an area that we noted needs to be extended and funded.

THE CHAIR: To what extent do you see the need for that type of service in the ACT?

Ms Crimmins: Marymead and YWCA both provide the same type of therapeutic services. Within our service we currently have a six-month waiting list and just really cannot take any more people within our own—

THE CHAIR: Six months from?

Ms Crimmins: That is a service that is able to support the equivalent of 2.5 full-time counsellors. That is the funding amount. We could not tell you the exact need because we do not have the full data and our service is full, but we do know that there is significant unmet demand. Interestingly, most of our records come from the school system because these young people are not actually in the school system. So an investment in the school system is good. However, we need to also have more community-based counselling services.

MS CODY: Thank you for your statement. That was quite eye-opening. I want to touch on a couple of things that you mention in the statement and that are in the budget submission. You spoke about a gap in housing for women who are not escaping from domestic violence. What about women with teenage boys who are escaping from domestic violence. Is that addressed?

Ms Crimmins: It is very hard for me to be able to answer that question when I do not have access to the data—which is actually currently held in OneLink—but it has been in the past that if you have adult sons it can be hard to access emergency safe housing. In our 13 homes currently there are 48 children under 18 with the accompanying adult. We do outreach to 10 families at any given time and we do not differentiate between male and female children.

MS CODY: I know that it was very hard and difficult to answer but I guess the point I am making is: yes, there are lots of gaps in the system for women who are homeless.

Ms Crimmins: Yes.

Ms LE COUTEUR: Again, you may not be able to answer more of this because of the data but you just told me about an instance where you were personally aware of someone who was referred to OneLink and they suggested sleeping in a car. Are you aware of this being a one-off or are there other instances? It just does not seem appropriate in a city as affluent as Canberra.

Ms Crimmins: Only within the scope of our own service and the work that the housing support officers provide—and we are regularly asked to do outreach to women and sometimes women with children who are sleeping in their car—we know that this is not a one-off.

MS LE COUTEUR: It is a fairly horrible situation. Are these mainly people who have been in a crisis situation? I suppose particularly because of domestic violence they have had to leave and they figured the car was better than staying where they were? Or is this a more ongoing problem? You talked earlier about more issues with older women than there have been in the past.

Ms Crimmins: It seems to be, from the case studies that we have seen, that it might have been people who were couch-surfing and those family relationships have broken down. They might not be fleeing an immediate crisis. They may have already had to leave, be staying with friends, families, and it is when those relationships break down that the only option is a car. In this particular case, where the woman did not have a car, we paid for a motel room that night and commenced outreach work the next day.

MR COE: I am interested in how you interact with the police and whether there are any issues or areas of improvement for how the police deal with these situations, because everyone is in a difficult situation of course. I am just wondering what opportunities there are to make it even easier for people to work on the same page.

Ms Crimmins: We have just commenced discussions with the new family violence unit of ACT Policing. We had a very good relationship with the former Chief Police Officer who has now moved on. The new person in the job in the first week did come to meet with us, and the Chief Police Officer is actually coming down to our Lanyon community centre next week. I probably cannot fully answer that but they are very open to working with the community services so that we can identify any of those gaps and things that can be streamlined.

I can say the biggest gap that we know is that, when you actually go to get a domestic violence order from court, the biggest stressor is that the police cannot issue that like they can in other jurisdictions. We have had this discussion. If the police officer is there and witnesses the stress on a woman and a child and they have to go to court to get that and actually see the perpetrator of that, this causes more trauma. I think we can learn. That was just one of the things we spoke about briefly that really could be a simple fix because it is working in other jurisdictions. The police have the power to issue them because they have actually got the evidence to show that violence occurred.

I cannot give you any further examples. I applaud the establishment of that unit and they are absolutely reaching out to talk to community services providers so that we can work closer together.

MR PETTERSSON: There was a comment that you made, Ms Crimmins, in your opening statement that I wanted to follow up on. You mentioned that there was a gap in homelessness services for older women who were not escaping domestic violence. Is that something you mentioned?

Ms Crimmins: Yes.

MR PETTERSSON: Excuse my ignorance on the matter but what are the differences between someone experiencing homelessness generally speaking, a relationship breakdown more broadly, as opposed to someone escaping domestic violence? Are there different services provided to them based on whether or not they are escaping that immediate—

Ms Crimmins: We are—and again we applaud this—prioritising women who are presenting as escaping domestic violence. If you are an older woman who is homeless due to loss of a job, death of a partner or a health issue where you are not able to maintain employment, you can no longer afford market rent, it is those women that we are not capturing who are falling through the system. They are not on a priority list and they often do not have children anymore, they might not have a disability, they are just not on any priority list because they are an individual person who is homeless due to not being able to afford market rent.

MR PETTERSSON: So it is not a case that there is not services for them, it is just the services have a priority list and people escaping domestic violence are on the priority list and they are taking up the majority of spaces and that is why—

Ms Crimmins: Yes. Older women, the research tells us, hide their homelessness better. They might be couch-surfing and they do not often identify. In this case when this woman needed help from me she was not even a priority. I did not even think that was recorded in the system.

Ms Martin: Can I just add one thing to Frances's comments, which is that many of the housing options that are available, emergency housing options, might be being accessed by people with complex needs, whether it be drug addictions and whatnot. That can actually contribute to an older woman's vulnerability. That sort of setting is actually not appropriate for her to enter and she would avoid going into a refuge-type situation. Just adding once again to Frances's comments, sometimes they might be in private rentals and are spending sort of 90 per cent of their income to meet rent and not meeting a whole bunch of other critical needs, whether it be health care or food.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for your time this afternoon. That concludes today's hearings. I note that a proof copy of today's transcript will be made available to you when it is available. We have had one question taken on notice today. As per the committee's resolution there are five working days for those questions to be responded to after the release of the draft *Hansard*. That does not affect you, it was another group.

The committee adjourned at 2.14 pm.