



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON ESTIMATES 2018-2019

(Reference: [Appropriation Bill 2018-2019 and Appropriation \(Office of the Legislative Assembly\) Bill 2018-2019](#))

Members:

MR A WALL (Chair)
MS T CHEYNE (Deputy Chair)
MS C LE COUTEUR
MS E LEE
MS S ORR

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

FRIDAY, 15 JUNE 2018

Secretary to the committee:
Mrs 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.

WHITE, MR MICHAEL, Coordinator, Childers Group

THE CHAIR: Good morning. We will kick off day one of estimates public hearings for the 2018-19 inquiry into the government's budget and appropriations. If you do take any questions on notice, can you clearly state, "I will take that on notice." It makes it easier for follow-up from the *Hansard*. I trust that you are familiar with the pink privilege statement in front of you and that you are aware of its implications?

Mr White: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Excellent. Did you want to make a brief opening statement to kick off?

Mr White: Good morning. Thanks very much to the committee. My name is Michael White. I am one of the co-coordinators with the Childers Group, which is an arts advocacy group for the ACT and its region. In our opening statement on the budget, we give a positive thumbs up to the announcements that have been made in the budget in relation to the arts in the ACT. Of particular importance to us is the announcement of the appointment of an Indigenous arts officer in artsACT. Childers has been asking for this in the last two or three budget submissions that we have made.

We also understand that, regarding the Indigenous arts committee, formed in consultation with the work that artsACT has done, this was one of the recommendations that came out of that body. We think that is a really important step forward in relation to the arts in the ACT. We see other important and positive things. The announcements in relation to the Cultural Facilities Corporation are welcomed. The announcements in relation to the development happening at the Belconnen Arts Centre are certainly welcomed as well.

Of particular note, in relation to one of the smaller issues—I think it is a really important step for the Cultural Facilities Corporation and the work being done at the Canberra Theatre Centre—is the connection with the CIT to develop a training regime for people wanting to move into the area of work, particularly backstage and front of house at the Canberra Theatre Centre. It is a pathway for people interested in moving into that particular area. We have not had that sort of training program in the ACT before.

I know the Canberra Theatre Centre has been working with colleges around the town. That is a really important step as well. The money that has been put forward in relation to the screen industry development fund is a positive step forward as well. The money that has been put forward in the scoping project for the hopeful build of our new large theatre space across the way in Civic Square is also welcomed.

Having said that, there is one thing that Childers would say. In a sense, a lot of those initiatives are the easy ones. An important one we put in our budget submission is that we still note that—we noted it when we reported to this committee last year—as the city is growing, unfortunately the commitment to arts funding, particularly in that money that goes into the creative furnace where the arts are created, that is the arts project funding, is still slowly diminishing. We have been putting forward a case in

our last few budget submissions that money into that particular aspect of cultural funding in the city is really important. From the figures that we were looking at, we thought that an increase of about \$800,000 into that particular aspect of arts funding would be really crucial.

A great example of that for me was a play I went and saw the night before last at the Street Theatre, which was *Diary of a Madman*—a great tour de force by one of our great local performers. I was sitting there watching and I thought, “That’s the creative furnace.” Money that has been given to the Street Theatre, particularly for the development of theatre work, is the really important side of arts funding.

That is what I have been saying to our politicians. It is often not easy to say, “We’re going to make a really strong commitment to developing and putting money into that area.” It is great that we put money into buildings. That is easy. Politicians can go along, they can open that and cut ribbons, and all that sort of stuff. We would like to see more money go into that aspect of arts funding that is often intangible.

The money earmarked for possible new festivals in the city is welcomed as well. We wait for some more information on that, particularly in relation to the new innovation and coding, and that kind of aspect. That was welcomed as well. That is basically our opening statement.

THE CHAIR: You touched on the diminishing pool of funding available for arts grants. What do you think is the impact, at a community level, of the grants dollar diminishing?

Mr White: I think it has two impacts. As the city grows, there are more and more people saying, “I’m going to make a living out of the arts. I want to move into that particular area.” It just makes that area much more difficult. Artists struggle at the best of times to make a living wage. The last time I read any information on that, the average wage for an artist across Australia was something like \$20,000 a year. There is not a lot of money involved in that. That is why the money into that particular arts funding area is so crucial, particularly if we are looking to develop new younger artists coming through. We want to try to encourage those people. We want to try to encourage them to stay in the ACT so that they do not go elsewhere.

I notice that there has been particular acceptance of the new arrangements at artsACT for grant applications that have been put in place by the minister. It seems as if there will be a much easier way, particularly for those smaller grants. There will be a double round of money, up to \$50,000 and that sort of stuff.

There has also been an announcement of a one-off figure of something like \$320,000 into the community arts fund. We think that is a really important move as well. I hoped that that money would be ongoing, but in our discussions with the minister I think I heard that that may only be a one-off figure. That is the sort of money that can be used at Belconnen Arts Centre, Tuggeranong Arts Centre, Ainslie and Gorman, and in that sort of area. That is the money that drives the cultural practice and the excellence that we strive for. That then links into tourism and the other things that the arts can do.

MS ORR: I guess this is more for clarification than a question. I think Mr Wall asked about the community. In your answer it sounded like you were speaking very much about the artists' community, the individual artists. You then mentioned the community facilities at Belconnen. I want to get a better idea of which community we are talking about and where the difference is.

Mr White: I suppose there are two communities: there is the arts community itself, the arts practitioners; and then there is the general Canberra community.

MS ORR: If I understood correctly, the project grants would very much be for the artists' community, supporting them in the work that they do, which obviously has a flow-on effect to the wider community. Then there are also other parts that go to broader arts within the community. Have I understood that correctly?

Mr White: I think so. In relation to our arts centres, there are community arts officers who work in those areas, who organise and work with various community groups. There is a chance for them to get some government money to support those sorts of projects. It is a double thing: you have artists working in the community; you have community members themselves devising their own projects. They may be working with artists or doing it themselves. It is a multifaceted thing.

MS CHEYNE: Thanks for appearing today, Mr White. In your submission you mentioned that arts is not adequately integrated with policymaking and service delivery in the ACT. We have artsACT, but how are we doing it in directorates? Do you have any suggestions about how that could be achieved?

Mr White: One of the things we have been banging on about over the last few years is that there does not seem to be a coordinated response in relation to the arts across all the directorates. We actually thought about having an officer in all those individual directorates whose responsibility it is to say: "We have a vibrant arts and cultural sector in the ACT. How can the work of that particular group fit in to the directorate that we are involved in?"

We know there is some good work happening with Health. I think there might be some activity happening in the justice area. But there seems to be a lack of coordination between who is doing what, with whom and how. We thought that if you actually had an officer in each directorate and that was part of their work, and then they would work closely with artsACT, they could report back to the Assembly and also to ministers to say, "If we are looking for a coordinated response in relation to the arts across all the portfolios, this is actually what is happening in that sector." There is a lot of exciting work happening with that overseas. I was reading a big national—

MS CHEYNE: In terms of coordinated work?

Mr White: I will give an example of how the arts can work in a sort of non-specific arts related area. There was a big report that was done in the UK of the value of the arts, not just in relation to people going to the theatre or listening to music but how it actually works through the community. As part of the treatment of people suffering from depression, through the NHS people can now go to their doctor and they can get an actual prescription to attend some arts-related activities.

Who would have thought it a possibility that you might be able to do that? But that is a thinking a bit outside the box kind of approach to how the arts can work. I would like to see an arts officer working at the prison. I would like to see arts people more active in the community services area, more active in the health area as well. It is a way for government actually to make a commitment, not only through the money they give to bricks and mortar and that sort of stuff but across the whole of their responsibility to the ACT community.

MS LEE: Are there any specific strategies that you would recommend that the government undertake to get the ball rolling in that regard?

Mr White: I think in our budget submission we fleshed it out as much as we could. We said that we thought the role of the arts in these areas should be recognised with the establishment of officer positions, at a senior officer level, in the ACT government directorates, including education, training, health, environment and planning, and even Canberra Metro.

It also gives that approach some credence within the public service if you have a senior officer working in that particular area and they are going to meetings of their colleagues and saying, "Right, arts is on the agenda. What is happening in relation to health and the arts? I need to report back to artsACT; I need to report back to the arts minister and eventually report to the Chief Minister." It also means a kind of a change in thinking from our bureaucrats working in other areas: that this is important, that the community values the arts and the government values the arts. Hopefully, this is a positive way forward.

MS LE COUTEUR: I have a different tack. How is the Kingston arts precinct going? Are the organisations that are involved actually involved? I guess that is the question.

Mr White: That is actually an interesting question. In looking through this year's budget papers I could not see any mention of any specific new announcements in relation to that.

MS LE COUTEUR: No.

Mr White: I know that work is being done. I think it is one of those things where we are waiting a bit with bated breath to try to get some sense of how that is progressing. It is a really important hub that is being developed down there. It may be that I have not kept up with that, but I thought there might be some mention of Kingston, and I could not find Kingston at all mentioned in the budget papers.

MS LE COUTEUR: I guess the other thing I am interested in, though, is the organisations that are meant to be part of this. Do you have a feel as to whether or not they actually are being involved in the planning and development of it?

Mr White: My understanding is that they are, but I am not sure how rigorous that is. There is obviously the Glassworks; there is Megalo. I am not sure who else is due to move down there. I do not know whether things have slowed down a bit or whether they are waiting on some other announcements. We would certainly welcome some

updates on that situation.

MS ORR: Are the groups involved in that—for example, PhotoAccess—members of the Childers Group?

Mr White: Childers does not have actual membership. We are a voluntary small group. We canvass across all sorts of areas. People come to us and say, “Do you know this is happening or this is not happening or whatever?”

MS ORR: So it would be more through informal conversations with people?

Mr White: Yes. We spent most of last year talking to you guys both locally and federally. One the things we are hoping to do this year—we have done some small amounts of it already—is actually get out a bit more to some of our constituents and say, “Look, this is what Childers is doing. Are we doing a good job?” People ring us and say, “You are not doing a good job,” or “Yes, good on you; that is important.”

MS LEE: Some of my questions have been asked. I know that Ms Orr has a burning desire to ask some more. I also have just noticed the time.

MS ORR: We only have about three minutes. I do not know how long this line of inquiry can really run. Michael, given that we only have three minutes remaining, is there anything that you wanted to say in summary?

Mr White: No. Hopefully I have been able to summarise everything. The question of funding is a difficult one. I am sure people from the community sector will come along as well. But I think one of the things we see is that a reasonably small investment in funding for the arts, when you look at the totality of the ACT budget, would have a really major impact. That is why we keep banging on about that.

I know that for our key arts organisations—there are about 19 or 20 of those—the CPI model in the end kind of lets them down a bit. That is because the CPI goes down a bit and then comes up a bit. I know all our arts organisations struggle with that kind of stuff and probably our community organisations struggle as well.

I think that at some point that needs to be addressed across all the community sector. We need to bring those people up, give them all a reasonably significant increase—then perhaps CPI comes back—because cost of living expenses such as electricity, gas and all the normal sorts of things that arts organisations have to front up with are not running along CPI lines. They are always running higher.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much.

Mr White: Thank you very much. No doubt I will see you next year.

THE CHAIR: Fingers crossed!

LOLICATO, MR SANDY, Convenor, Ginninderra Catchment Group
HOEFER, MS ANKE MARIA, Coordinator, ACT and Region Frogwatch Program,
Ginninderra Catchment Group
PREUSS, MS KARISSA, Coordinator, ACT and Region Frogwatch Program,
Ginninderra Catchment Group

THE CHAIR: I welcome Ginninderra Landcare and ACT Frogwatch to the estimates hearing. In front of you, there is a pink privilege statement. Could you acknowledge that you have read it and you are aware of its content and implications. Yes? Beautiful. I will hand over to you to make an opening statement if you wish to.

Mr Lolicato: Thank you for inviting us to the estimates committee hearing. The Ginninderra Catchment Group is one of the three catchment groups in the ACT. We were established in 1996 to improve the health and sustainability of the Ginninderra Creek catchment.

On behalf of the catchment group and the broader Landcare community, I would just acknowledge the recent government announcement in the budget statement to provide funding of \$352,000 in support for three Landcare catchment groups to continue to undertake catchment management in the ACT. This funding will enable the group to continue to play a crucial role in the support of urban-based Landcare groups to help regenerate and preserve the ACT's natural environment. Unfortunately, the budget papers did not have any announcement around Frogwatch funding. There was a bit that was put in last year for consideration by the committee for that funding.

Frogwatch is the only ACT frog monitoring program and is managed by the Ginninderra Catchment Group. It has collected data on frog occurrence and abundance since 2002, which makes it one of the few long-term datasets on frogs in the world. To date, almost 6,600 surveys have been carried out, which have resulted in approximately 20,000 data points on frog occurrence.

The funding base for Frogwatch was significantly reduced at 30 June. It previously was supported at a level of around \$80,000 by the commonwealth government, the ACT government and, to a small extent, non-government organisations. The commonwealth ceased providing funding towards the Frogwatch program from 2015. We can understand that funding is quite tight when you have other sources of funding. We appreciate that the government have further consideration of this, possibly looking at other sources. Examples are the water abstraction charge, which could be directed as well.

We believe this is a small investment by the government, taking into account the strong benefits in ERM, citizen science and community engagement. Anke Maria will say a few words about these benefits and how the program interfaces with ACT government priorities.

Ms Hoefer: I have been running this program single-handedly since 2011, based on funding to work half a day to two days a week. Despite the issue of having very insecure funding over the last three years, we have achieved amazing things and far-reaching things. I will just give you a few dot points about these. You can read further detail in our budget submission or I am happy to answer your questions.

One of the main things that Frogwatch is really good at is community engagement. It is a fantastic engagement tool. There are a range of activities. We are one of the few programs that engage people from all backgrounds and also all ages.

We grab a lot of young people and provide a stepping stone for them to other natural resource management or environment related activities. People that have never done anything like this before come in through Frogwatch because it is a fun activity. Frogs are iconic. People do something at night, something different. They love it and then they move on; they get interested in their local environment. That is a win-win situation.

We have been so successful that Frogwatch has received, in the last three years, two ACT Landcare awards, including one for the program itself, as a citizen science project, and one which I was awarded last year—very exciting—as the support person in this area in the ACT. That was a big achievement. Another achievement is that we are now acknowledged and named as an outstanding example of a community engagement tool in ACT government policies. You can read up on these different policies in the paper.

Another thing that we are really doing very well is education. We are going out to schools, to talk to schools. Just two days ago, I opened the recruiting and the setting up of this year's tadpole kit project, which gives tadpole kits to schools so that people can observe tadpoles developing into frogs. We can only offer 120 kits each year; within the first 24 hours, 60 of those 120 kits had already been booked. Since then, bookings have been coming in. It is highly successful in getting these young people appreciating our local environment early.

We run workshops for people in the new, as well as established, suburbs about creating a frog-friendly habitat, which helps the urban heat effect, helps people appreciate nature and creates connectivity corridors.

What else? Education. The main stronghold in our backbone for Frogwatch is citizen science, which is data collection. You heard before that we started in 2002. This has been a bit like a good wine: it has to sit for a while, until it is ripe, to reap the rewards. We are right in the middle of this. It is one of the few long-term datasets on amphibians in the world. This is an amazing asset that we have here in the ACT.

Since 2015 scientists from CSIRO and the ANU have been sitting together and have produced an international journal publication based on the Frogwatch data. Since 2017 we have been working with the University of Canberra and have developed a world-first remote frog survey device based on mobile phone technology. This has received a lot of international interest. Since 2015, also based on our long-term data, we have put in habitat management suggestions for wetlands in the ACT. That has been included in the management guidelines for the ACT wetlands and ponds.

So we have had a lot of influence with this. We are working on a climate change project, which has been funded for the first three years. We have not received any more funding, but our volunteers are so engaged that for the coldest five months of the year they go out once a week to collect data on frog calls here. They are so

engaged because they love that they have hands-on experience; they have that feeling; they feel empowered that they can go out and do something on climate change and raise awareness. This is amazing. We will keep going, no matter what, with this project. This is due to our fantastic volunteers.

Another thing with the data is that because we have this wealth of data and we have established these relationships, this really strong connection, with all universities in the ACT and the CIT, people just want to be involved. They want to use this data simply as baseline to compare to other experiments or other data that they find now. Or they want to take it to use it in different projects but have it as a baseline or extra data. This is so strong. We have worked on this for so long; it would be a shame to not keep going. Yes, we want to do a good job, but we just need some extra funding to keep this going. Thanks for listening to this.

THE CHAIR: Mr Lolicato, you mentioned that the funding that you were receiving previously was commonwealth funding. Is that correct?

Mr Lolicato: Yes, that is right.

THE CHAIR: Was a submission made to the ACT budget process?

Mr Lolicato: That is right, yes.

Ms Preuss: For the last three years we have not received any commonwealth funding. Prior to three years ago, Frogwatch was funded through caring for our country, commonwealth funding. However, as you probably know, the federal guidelines have changed significantly. The Frogwatch program achieves a lot of ACT strategies, so it is actually far more applicable to ACT goals than to the federal funding.

THE CHAIR: When were you advised that the ACT would not be continuing its funding?

Mr Lolicato: We put in a budget submission last year. As was mentioned before, we did get the announcement about the funding for the catchment group, but it did not have any announcement around Frogwatch funding.

MS CHEYNE: So wasn't the ACT continuing its budget?

Mr Lolicato: It was not included in the budget papers that were released last week.

Ms Hoefler: To clarify on the budget, as Karissa mentioned before, three years ago that federal funding stopped.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Hoefler: Since this, Frogwatch has been leapfrogging, so to speak, to get some extra funding.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Hoefer: Where we previously had a core budget, for our annual census and for the community engagement, of around \$55,000 a year, and we would attract some extra funding for specific little projects, that has reversed this situation. We got some core funding over the last three years from the ACT government, which only covered a quarter of our costs. We are running on a shoestring budget and we had to try to find three-quarters of our project funding from other sources or through other projects. The issue with this, as with all extra external funding, is that there are project-specific needs and milestones attached that made it just not doable anymore. So we are running out of resources.

MS ORR: Can I check that I have understood what you said. The commonwealth funding ceased, there was a small amount of money from the ACT government for core projects, and that was offset by additional sources of revenue, but that core money from the ACT has now ceased?

Ms Preuss: Ceased.

Mr Lolicato: Ceased.

MS ORR: Now it is whatever you can attract. What you have asked for in your submission is for some core money back?

Mr Lolicato: Correct.

Ms Preuss: We have got very strong indications that we will be receiving money for the education component of Frogwatch through Icon Water but, unless we receive some funding through the ACT government, the census which has been now operating since 2002 will cease this year and it will be a major—

THE CHAIR: And the amount of \$90,000 is what you are ideally after?

Ms Preuss: That is right.

Mr Lolicato: That is right.

MS ORR: \$90,000 is for the census?

Ms Preuss: That was for Frogwatch as a program. Potentially, it could be slightly less now that we do have some funding for the education component.

MS ORR: Will the education component that Icon is going to be running go to the school kids, the community engagement on the tadpoles?

Mr Lolicato: Yes.

Ms Hoefer: Yes.

MS ORR: So the census is the part that is really not on—

Mr Lolicato: Yes.

Ms Hoefer: And it has been going since 2002. It is just such an integral part now, and it has also been extended. It was very clearly just a one-off in October, whereas now, because people love it so much, I get inundated with data because people want to do it and want to contribute. The people feel empowered. They can do something.

Yesterday we had a short radio interview and, to my surprise, really, someone called in, one of my long-term volunteers that I had not seen in the last two years. She just explained how many boxes this program had ticked for her young family. She went out with little toddlers and teenagers and they had an introduction to scientific procedures. They all got a job. They had an appreciation to sit out at night. She said it was a miracle; they all went quiet sitting around the waterway listening for the frogs, under the stars, because they just loved it.

Ms Preuss: It is a census which has multiple benefits.

Ms Hoefer: Yes.

Ms Preuss: And then the other part which is really lacking, and which is associated with the census, is the climate change component which, yes, is very much linked to the census.

MS ORR: The education component is funded; the census is not. The climate change part which is linked to the census is not funded. Are there any other activities that you have been doing that would have funding from an additional source or are currently unfunded?

Ms Preuss: There is the on-ground environmental restoration of frog habitat. That is an area that happens under the frog program, but it is not an area that we are as concerned about as the census because there are other sources of funding. Obviously it would be wonderful to have that, but the census, including the climate change component, is the critical bit that we cannot continue without funding.

MS ORR: Playing devil's advocate for a moment—pretend I am treasury, for example—you have received funding for the land care, the Ginninderra Catchment Group. Again, this not my personal opinion; we are playing devil's advocate. Why should Frogwatch be facilitated under that funding and under that banner?

Mr Lolicato: That funding is directed towards the catchment group to do catchment group activities which we have in accord with our strategic plan. It is very much more directed for the catchment group. This is a specific program. It is across all the regions, all the catchments across the ACT. It is very specific. It is similar to Waterwatch funding, which is broader across the ACT and the region. We did not see it as appropriate to direct that segment to a program.

Ms Preuss: We are meeting with Ian Walker next week and we will raise that point. If that is the case, our stand is that because Frogwatch is across the entire region we would not expect that the Frogwatch funding would come out of just the Ginninderra Catchment Group bucket; it would come out of all three catchment group buckets. And that is not a decision we can make. That is very much up to Ian Walker and the

directorate. But we do know that they are very supportive of Frogwatch and are trying as hard as they can to find some funding. As we all know, funding is tight in this environment, yes.

MS CHEYNE: On a similar line of questioning, you said before that you have been operating on a budget annually of \$55,000. Why do you need \$90,000?

Ms Hoefler: That was till 2015. Since then Frogwatch has been getting bigger and has a much wider reach. For many people we are the first go-to if they find a frog or we get calls, “We found a cane toad.”

Ms Preuss: And prior to 2015 there was not the climate change project; so the climate change project was an additional \$20,000 that we received from the ACT government. That funding has really enabled, yes, an additional project. As these additional projects come on board, it would be in some ways a shame to lose them now we have got the data for those particular things.

Ms Hoefler: And it is also that more people want to get involved. More people are involved, and with this come a lot of meetings, as you all know, I am sure—meeting with people, talking to people, getting involved in planning. People want input into decision-making for new developments, for a wetlands plan. There is a lot of interest because there is the data.

But someone has to be there to answer the phone and do it. I do a lot of this public relations and advocating for frogs. With the project, as I mentioned before, now that the data is so ripe I need to meet with these professionals. I need to go to the ANU, and we need to scratch our heads and look at the stats and try to come up with different solutions, contact other scientists, ask about their findings and try to relate our findings. There is a lot of—

Ms Preuss: Frogwatch has moved to a new point now where not only is it collecting the data but it is also the process of analysing that data and creating these reports. In a way, since that time, the program has expanded and has all these additional benefits.

MS CHEYNE: Could you just break it down? From the \$90,000, what is the figure for the census, what is the figure for the education component—particularly, potentially, another source of funding is coming—what is the source for the climate project, and then what is left over?

Ms Preuss: In some ways it is difficult. We can get those figures to you but probably cannot give them to you exactly now.

MS CHEYNE: That would be helpful. That is fine.

Ms Preuss: Basically, the costs that we have been operating on are about half of what it actually costs to run the program. Anke Maria has been coordinating a whole team of volunteers, but those teams of volunteers are not always available. I guess what we could do is actually present—

MS CHEYNE: Are people currently spending their own funds to keep this program

alive?

Ms Preuss: Mostly they are committing a huge amount of time. We also have received donations towards it in the past when Frogwatch has had funding—

Ms Hoefer: And in a way, to call a spade a spade, I volunteer a lot of my time working for this because I so believe in this project. I just so much think this is so important. I want to support the volunteers, and it is so hard to just say, “No, I can’t do it. I’m not funded for it.”

You have seen that with Waterwatch. When the Waterwatch program was not funded for a year, they lost a lot of their support, a lot of volunteers, and they almost had to go back and start at square one. I do not want to do this and even if it is, in theory, a one-off activity in October, I have to keep talking to these people and writing newsletters. They come back with questions. As I mentioned before, that was a decision that was driven by the needs of volunteers.

We do more ongoing frog watching now. People contribute more data about frogs in the ACT because they want to. They really want and need an engagement and it may also be a bit of a reason to get off the couch at night, leave that bag of chips and go out and do a nice walk and listen to the frogs. Maybe you meet your neighbour or you have a good talk to your partner or whatever, meet your friends.

MS ORR: So it has got some social benefits?

Ms Hoefer: It has a lot of social benefits, yes.

Mr Lolicato: There is a lot of that. We are willing to give you a breakdown of what the \$90,000 would be in those three areas and also—

MS CHEYNE: Yes, and with those caveats, that is fine.

Mr Lolicato: It is complementary with a lot of volunteer time.

THE CHAIR: If you can take that on notice, that would be great.

Ms Preuss: And presumably you would want that as soon as possible?

THE CHAIR: Yes. That would be wonderful, thanks.

MS ORR: Can I also ask that you give us a bit of information on what the climate change project is when you are providing this?

Ms Preuss: Sure, yes. Absolutely.

MS LE COUTEUR: While we have been through it all, if we had more time I would say that I went to the Conservation Council dinner and, for those who did not, you did frog calls and it was absolutely amazing. I do not know how Hansard would cope with it, but if we had more time—

THE CHAIR: We are still grappling with foreign language; frogs might be a smidge too far.

MS LE COUTEUR: It really was stunning. That is the only word. If that is a bit of the education program, it is stunning.

Ms Hoefler: Thank you so much.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for coming in.

Mr Lolicato: Thank you.

Ms Hoefler: And on behalf of the frogs, I say goodbye with the call of the little toadlet. I hope this gets you going. Thank you very much.

ALLARDYCE, MRS FIONA, Executive Director, Epilepsy ACT
GRAY, MS LOUISE, Committee member, Epilepsy ACT

THE CHAIR: Welcome to the estimates committee community group hearing. Have you read and understood the implications of the privilege statement?

Mrs Allardyce: Yes.

Ms Gray: Yes.

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

Mrs Allardyce: Yes. Epilepsy ACT has been assisting people diagnosed with epilepsy in Canberra for over 30 years. Statistics show that two per cent to four per cent of the population—8,000 to 16,000 Canberrans—manage epilepsy at some time in their life. While epilepsy is more prominent in children and people over the age of 65, it affects everyone in different ways and at any age.

Epilepsy ACT provides accessible support, case management, information, education and connections for people living with epilepsy in the ACT, their families, their support network and their community. Our vision is that every person living with epilepsy in our region is to feel safe, connected and able to reach their full potential. Epilepsy ACT funds its service delivery with a combination of fee-for-service training, fundraising, donations and, until recently, government funding.

Government funding is important to ensure that Epilepsy ACT can deliver the flexible case management support that is crucial for people with epilepsy in our community, especially those who are recently diagnosed. This case management support fulfils that crucial gap between health care and practical support. It is crucial for people with epilepsy in our community.

This support is not provided during a specialist appointment or in the hospital environment. The introduction of the national disability insurance scheme in the ACT means that epilepsy no longer receives funding through Disability ACT. It has become clear that treating epilepsy as a disability for the purposes of funding does not fit within the NDIS framework.

The outlook for many people with epilepsy is to live the most normal life they can, as long as they have the right support and treatment in place. Epilepsy ACT has been unsuccessful in two of the NDIS ILC funding rounds. We are aware only of one epilepsy service provider in all of Australia that has been successful in any of these rounds, and this is for a non-specific disability support program that is not epilepsy focused.

Epilepsy ACT, with the support of a business investment package, has undertaken a strategic review, planning and engagement process. It has highlighted that, while all avenues are pursued to become self-sufficient through expanded fundraising and fee-for-service activities, there still remains a shortfall to provide the free, flexible and timely case management support that the individuals and families in our region rely on.

Epilepsy ACT submitted a bid that was unsuccessful in securing any funding or engagement through the 2018-19 budget process. Our proposal, which has been tabled with the committee, sought \$95,000 per annum through the Health portfolio. This would enable Epilepsy ACT to engage a clinical staff member to continue to deliver the essential case management services. In this process, Epilepsy ACT is seeking to be recognised as a healthcare provider rather than a disability service.

Epilepsy ACT are in a good financial position, which enabled the organisation to continue to deliver services from the cessation of any government funding. However, we will be forced to wind up the organisation in December 2018 if we cannot secure some additional support. This will leave people in our region with no support.

MS LE COUTEUR: I also reflect that I am on the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services. We are doing an inquiry into the NDIS. This is not totally atypical. I think you put a submission in to that.

Mrs Allardyce: Yes, we did.

MS LE COUTEUR: Sorry, my memory is not good enough.

Mrs Allardyce: No, that is fine.

MS LE COUTEUR: I suppose the obvious question is whether there is any way the free services you have provided, and are continuing to provide, can be funded out of participants' packages. Is it that participants do not have enough or do not realise that they should be asking for this as part of their packages, or are you doing something which the NDIS simply will not fund?

Mrs Allardyce: It has become apparent that people who have epilepsy are not getting packages on epilepsy alone; they need to have a second, third or fourth condition that they qualify for. Then epilepsy issues are included in a package. We also provide a service at initial diagnosis. When someone is first diagnosed, their life changes. They cannot drive cars; they cannot get to school or work. There are a lot of things that happen. This happens right at the beginning and at the moment packages take a while to come.

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes, certainly.

Mrs Allardyce: So it is that gap in between. Most people are not getting the funding, but also it is the initial diagnosis part that really we are helping with a lot of the time.

MS LE COUTEUR: Initially, did you think that NDIS would regard epilepsy as a disability rather than a health issue? This is clearly one of the bigger issues with NDIS: when is it health and when is it disability?

Mrs Allardyce: It is a question that we do ask: when is it a disability and when is it health? But because we had been funded previously for many, many years—decades—through disability—

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes, you thought that—

Mrs Allardyce: we were encouraged to apply. We got transitional funding and we just have not been successful.

MS LE COUTEUR: Has ACT Health said to you that you are not health, you are disability or—

Mrs Allardyce: I guess we just have not heard.

MS LEE: Thank you for coming and giving us that evidence. In terms of the pre-budget announcement, the minister did mention that there was going to be some funding set aside for groups that were falling through the cracks in the transition to the NDIS. Have you heard anything from the minister about whether Epilepsy will be able to access any of those funds?

Mrs Allardyce: No, we have tried to contact them a couple of times but we have not heard anything.

MS LEE: In terms of the funding that is stopping, it is February, isn't it?

Mrs Allardyce: It was in February.

MS LEE: Yes, it was February this year.

Mrs Allardyce: Yes.

MS LEE: You mentioned that you have not heard anything from Health, either?

Mrs Allardyce: No.

MS LEE: Since you have not heard anything from Health, have you heard any update from disability—either the minister or the office of?

Mrs Allardyce: No, we have not. We were given the transition funding and then the business package. It was explained that that was the end of the money for this. After that we have not heard.

MS LEE: You mentioned that you are facing basically the prospect that in December you may have to wind up if something is not done.

Mrs Allardyce: Yes.

MS LEE: Can you explain how many people Epilepsy ACT serves and how many people will be left out without the core services you provide?

Mrs Allardyce: Currently, we get one person per week with a new diagnosis, but then we are also ongoing with regular people. We spend about three hours a week on the phone with people, discussing their possibilities. We do home visits and people come into our office as well. We estimate that there are 8,000 to 16,000 people in Canberra.

We obviously do not need to see all of those people, but it is increasing, with the ageing population.

MS LEE: You mentioned your office. Do you pay rent?

Mrs Allardyce: We do. We are at the Grant Cameron Community Centre. It is ACT government, yes.

MS LEE: Yes.

THE CHAIR: How much rent do you pay a year?

Mrs Allardyce: It is approximately \$12,000 a year.

THE CHAIR: It must be pretty offensive that some organisations are getting \$1 a year that have closer ties to government, shall we say.

MS ORR: I want to try and get my head around something a bit more with your budget submission. With this nurse practitioner, would this be a clinical staff member? Would this be the first time that it is offered? Is this a new initiative on top of what you are already doing or are you already offering this?

Mrs Allardyce: We offer the same support. It is just unqualified, as such. We have had nurses on staff previously through the years. We do not currently, but having that sort of service professional, whether it be a nurse, an occupational therapist or even a social worker, gives that backing to the person. It gives them that extra confidence that they would have from a professional. And there is also the lingo and the medical background that they would bring to it as well.

MS ORR: So even though previously there have been clinical staff, has it just depended on who was available at the time? Is that how it works? This would be a dedicated position that you are looking at establishing?

Mrs Allardyce: Yes.

MS ORR: So with the funding that you have requested there—I will just get my question clear for you—you are already running the service; you have all these great things, from what you were saying, to support the community; and you are looking for this additional one. With the money that you have sought from the government, and, you said, continuing your services, I am just trying to get my head around what you need to continue what you are doing, as opposed to what you would need to grow?

Mrs Allardyce: Previously, for approximately the last eight years, we have been funded at about the \$85,000 mark. That is what we have worked on before. We have increased our fundraising and things like that; this is why we are asking for the \$95,000, which would allow us to employ that extra person.

Ms Gray: We did receive that core funding, and part of that contributed to the practitioners that we engage. The additional funding covers both the cost of a practitioner and the ongoing running costs of the office. To date, we have been

dipping into our financial reserves. Yes, we have increased fundraising, but it is very competitive and it is not always the sort of charity that you think of first to donate to. It is putting a lot of financial pressure on the organisation.

As Fiona said, a lot of our work is done in the early stages of diagnosis, and that is when the stigma really hits. There is a tendency not to seek support, because it still has that sort of stigma around the nature of the illness. And that is when you need the intervention. Because we are slipping through the gaps, it does make it hard for us to respond quickly and before the damage is done, particularly to children, who can find themselves ostracised at school.

MS ORR: The part that I am just trying to get to the bottom of is this. You mentioned that you may have to finish up in December this year. If my assumption is correct, and please correct me if I am wrong, you go into your financial reserves and that is when the financial reserves will cease to cover the costs?

Ms Gray: Yes.

MS ORR: Putting aside the financial reserves, if you had the funding for this practitioner, that would allow you to continue the service. Is there anything in addition to that that you could do, or would it be the practitioner covering what you already—

Mrs Allardyce: Some of that money would be towards a practitioner. At the moment we have some volunteers that do that position, which is not working the best. It is not best business practice for us to continue to do that. The majority of that money would be used for training, to give training, case management and things like that, but also it would be used for rent and office usage: things like photocopying, transport and those sorts of things, and then admin support.

Ms Gray: Just the linkage work that we do. About half of it would be around that sort of professional expertise, but a lot of it would also allow us to keep up that three hours plus a day that we spend with families and people with epilepsy, connecting them with services and helping them to translate what their diagnosis means on paper.

MS ORR: It is unclear at the moment, just because the conversation has not been had, whether you could benefit from the transition funding for people falling through the gaps of the NDIS? That is just a question that is still out there; it has not been resolved in any way.

Mrs Allardyce: Yes, we would. And there is that big issue of whether this is a disability issue or a health issue.

MS LEE: You previously talked about your counterparts in other jurisdictions. You mentioned that one group had received funding but that was because it was part of a bigger pool; it was not a specific recognition of epilepsy. Do the other jurisdictions have funding through a disability stream or a health stream or is it just general funding?

Mrs Allardyce: There is a mix. I think a lot of it is due to health. It is swaying a lot more that way. Some of them just do not have funding, but it seems to be moving to

the health area. In some cases, they move into education as well, to training.

MS LEE: Have you had any discussions with the Education Directorate at all?

Mrs Allardyce: Not yet.

MS LEE: So just Health at the moment?

THE CHAIR: Of the individuals that Epilepsy ACT assists, what proportion would you say have qualified for the NDIS?

Mrs Allardyce: I am not sure. Possibly 10 per cent.

THE CHAIR: Anecdotally, and I understand that it is only anecdotally, what proportion of that 10 per cent would have specific funding to address their epilepsy? Is it largely where they have a co-disability or co-ailment that is the bulk of the package?

Mrs Allardyce: I am unaware of any of the people we see that have epilepsy alone on their NDIS plan. It is all co.

THE CHAIR: So even an opportunity for a fee-for-service component does not really exist for those clients, unfortunately.

MS ORR: Is that mostly down to the way that epilepsy has been classified by the NDIS scheme by the federal government?

Mrs Allardyce: To my understanding, yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you very much for taking time to come in this morning.

CRIMMINS, MS FRANCES, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Canberra
MACHALIAS, MS HELEN, Director, Communication, Advocacy and Fundraising,
YWCA Canberra

THE CHAIR: I welcome YWCA Canberra to the community hearings and industry group day. These proceedings are being recorded and broadcast. In front of you is a pink privilege statement. Could you both please acknowledge that you have read and understand that statement.

Ms Crimmins: Yes, I understand that statement.

Ms Machalias: Yes, I understand.

THE CHAIR: Thanks. We invite you to make an opening statement if you have one.

Ms Crimmins: I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land we are meeting upon today and pay my respects 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 today.

I would like to express my appreciation for the invitation to address the estimates committee on the 2018-19 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. During this time we have built a strong reputation for providing high quality and innovative services in children's services, training and education, community development, housing support, therapeutic counselling, youth engagement and women's leadership projects.

YWCA Canberra believes gender inequality is preventable and can be addressed in the ACT through the implementation of gender-responsive governance mechanisms, policies and practices to promote gender equal workplaces, primary prevention programs to eliminate the drivers of violence against women, and housing and homelessness services which are sensitive to the needs of all women.

Our analysis is directly informed by our program and service delivery. We drew upon this vast knowledge of the local women, girls and families who make up our community for our submission to the ACT government's pre-budget consultation process and advocacy in the lead-up to the release of the ACT budget. Many of YWCA Canberra's recommendations from its pre-budget submission and *Leading the Change* report were reflected in the budget, including funding for women's homelessness and domestic violence services, investment in STEM education for young people, and programs to develop women's leadership capacity.

YWCA Canberra has welcomed the ACT budget's increased funding of domestic violence services and the women's plan. YWCA Canberra also welcomed the continued funding of specialist women's domestic violence and housing services, ensuring that women seeking help are provided with the expert, competent support that they need.

However, for the ACT government's aspirations for a gender equal Canberra to be realised, shifts in policy and funding approaches are required. My statement will focus on the following key aspects of the budget: women's housing and homelessness; the prevention of violence against women and their families; gender responsive government in the ACT; and early childhood education.

I will begin by addressing the issues of women's housing and homelessness. YWCA Canberra has consistently highlighted the need to deliver housing and homelessness support that meets the unique needs of older women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and women and children escaping violence. We welcome the allocation of \$6.5 million over four years to increase front-line homelessness services funding, including for services delivering support to older women, women with children escaping domestic violence, young pregnant women, and migrant families.

As a front-line service provider, we understand the significant and growing demand for housing services. We are pleased to see the continued funding of specialist women's services such as Beryl, Doris and Toora; the extension of OneLink's operating hours; and a focus on wraparound support.

This budget reflects the growing concern in our community that renting or buying a home in Canberra is becoming out of reach for many Canberrans, particularly those on low incomes. However, we echo the comments of other community sector organisations that the budget does not present a fully funded solution to the territory's housing affordability and homelessness crisis that recognises the scale and complexity of the problem. We will continue to advocate for a significant increase in rental housing supply for those on low incomes and the introduction of land tax reduction for properties managed by community housing providers.

We also echo the calls made by numerous housing and community sector organisations to introduce a tenancy advice and support service for older women as a critical step in connecting them with available support options as well as ensuring that services meet their diverse needs. Within this tenancy service, staff should be trained in gender sensitivity with an older person specialist.

In the ACT, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are over-represented in homelessness statistics, at seven times the rate of non-Indigenous people seeking support. For this reason, we welcome the announcement that the ACT government will build a new housing complex to provide up to 10 more homes for dedicated and culturally appropriate housing for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans.

Indigenous-led housing organisations, Indigenous staff and communities play a key role in effectively shaping and delivering services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In recognition of this, we recommend that, in addition to building a specialist housing complex, the ACT government work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to address the need for additional Indigenous-led housing support and service provision and fund additional culturally appropriate training for employees of mainstream housing and homelessness services.

Family and domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness for women and children and costs Australia \$22 billion annually. We applaud the ACT government's sustained commitment to addressing domestic violence through the safer families package. The family safety hub is a crucial initiative that will benefit women, enabling them to move and to easily navigate a complex system of service during times of crisis. We welcome the funding for trial projects at the hub focused on early intervention programs for pregnant women and their families in the 2018-19 budget.

Because of violence, women and their children can experience long-lasting trauma. But there is still limited investment in long-term crisis support for women who have engaged with the legal or justice system and not entered a refuge or homelessness service. There is crucial need for ongoing support to ensure that women's and children's initial improvement in safety and wellbeing is sustainable over time. Yet funding for women's refuges does not include funding to support women and children beyond an immediate crisis response. Existing measures must be complemented with investment in primary and secondary prevention strategies to tackle the root cause of domestic and family violence.

YWCA Canberra's firm stance on investing in primary and secondary prevention initiatives is backed by international and national evidence that demonstrates that violence is preventable and that the education of young people and children is crucial in ending the cycle of 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. However, as at 2018, the ACT and the Northern Territory are the only two jurisdictions that have not funded a respectful relationships curriculum. To achieve longer term outcomes beyond the playground, the ACT government must commit to implementing a holistic, mandatory curriculum that is part of a broader strategy to prevent violence.

We acknowledge the ACT government's commitment to building school awareness and teacher capacity to deliver initiatives that address gender-based violence. There are a range of options available to the ACT government schools to support students experiencing and at risk of using violence. Our Watch, which we signed up to in the ACT, provides a comprehensive list of programs that meet the national standards developed by Our Watch Australia. Research has found that the most effective programs address issues such as consent, gendered power dynamics and the drivers of gender equality in a systemic way. That is clearly articulated in the national third action plan that the ACT is party to.

There is a great opportunity for the ACT to become a national leader in gender equality for women, both within and outside the Legislative Assembly. The implementation of the ACT women's plan for 2016-26 is also an important step for the jurisdiction. However, as at 2018 the plan is yet to be fully resourced for effective implementation. We welcome the early funding announcement of \$696,000 over four years to implement actions for the ACT women's plan, specifically the launch of the ACT diversity register, the delivery of the board traineeship program and associated leadership development, and the creation of a resource building evidence base for gender equality.

These are important initiatives. However, we continue to be concerned by the ad hoc and underfunded nature of the plan's implementation to date. It is important that gender equality is placed at the centre of government decision-making, and funding and accountability measures attached to the plan are an essential part of demonstrating this commitment. Currently, the ACT's whole-of-government approach to gender analysis is not embedded in consistent and systemic processes led by the Chief Minister's directorate.

The ninth parliamentary agreement commits the government to implementing a triple bottom line analysis. This analysis 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 the directorates to implement. However, this now needs to be matched with the resourcing and leadership to implement this important initiative.

A gendered budget analysis will enable us to comprehend how budget decisions affect diverse women in the ACT, decide our future priorities for women and agree to long-term measures towards gender equality. This analysis should be a transparent participatory process for women and their organisations, central to the tool's design and application.

The first action plan of the women's plan includes actions to research and develop appropriate gender impact statements for use across directorates. However, the action plan does not specify how the impact statements would be used across directorates, how they would be funded, and what monitoring, reporting and accountability mechanisms are in place to oversee the implementation.

Without strategic implementation and appropriate resourcing, such initiatives have limited scope for success. The success of the plan requires all directorates to demonstrate ongoing support for the gender equality initiatives they are responsible for. So the office of women must be adequately resourced to effectively drive this agenda across the ACT government.

We were disappointed to see that there were no new investments made in early childhood education and care, especially in the areas of immediate need, including funding for supporting children experiencing disadvantage and the workforce development of the sector. This is particularly critical at a time of significant change for early childhood education and care, when children experiencing the most disadvantage will miss out on education because of the changes that link Australian government subsidies more closely to work and ignore the broader developmental benefits of education.

We acknowledge the announcement of \$6.7 million over four years to develop an early childhood strategy, but further detail is required to ensure the funding goes towards benefiting vulnerable children. We do understand that the funding is currently to support staff to develop the strategy, and we recommend that some of this funding and further planning are allocated to the sector, particularly at the time of undergoing significant, tremendous change that will impact vulnerable families from July of this year.

The budget addresses some of the key barriers to women's equal participation in the workforce and community and provides funding for the implementation of the women's plan. But there will continue to be gaps that we have aimed to highlight here today. Other measures, such as the announcement of \$1.7 million over four years for more counsellors at the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre and the Domestic Violence Crisis Service reflect the growing demand for these services but do not provide funding certainty beyond 2020 to effectively support women in crisis.

Gender equality is an achievable goal if the needs and interests of women are at the centre of the development of policies and programs. YWCA Canberra hopes to continue to play a constructive role in working with the ACT government to make this a reality.

MS CHEYNE: My question is about the funding of the women's action plan. I think you have mentioned not just in your submission but also in your survey that it is not fully funded. What additional resources need to go into it to make sure it is fully funded and achieving that transparency that you are after?

Ms Crimmins: Let me give an example. There are many aspects. I do not think we have time to go through all of them. I will focus on the support for all the directorates to do a gendered analysis and policy analysis across their directorates. There is not sufficient funding for staff. The office for women should be the leaders in that. They should not be the ones responsible. We see a real gap in funding to provide appropriately qualified, skilled staff in this area based in every directorate. Do you want to add anything to that?

Ms Machalias: The action plan has a decade-long life and we acknowledge that. We are now in year three. But the actions in those plans have not been linked to funding in the majority of cases. The funding that was announced earlier is welcome. It will assist in developing women's leadership, which we are obviously in favour of. But we are concerned that some of the key issues that we see with women in the ACT—some of the ones that we have touched on around domestic violence, homelessness et cetera; those critical issues that are needing to be driven through the ACT women's plan—are not currently resourced.

MS ORR: You mentioned that you wanted to have someone in each directorate. Can you go into a bit more detail around what you think having a person in each directorate would achieve, as opposed to, say, having it imbedded across the responsibility of the directorate.

Ms Crimmins: It could be imbedded but, at the moment, the office for women are not resourced to provide that service. Our key recommendation is to move the office for women under the Chief Minister's directorate. It could then be imbedded across. But we do need to see people employed to support each directorate in achieving this.

MS ORR: Yes, I guess it is always about that balance: do you have one person driving it or do you make everyone responsible for it? I guess your view is that, at this point in time, it would benefit from having a particular office doing it, as opposed to trying to get cultural change across the whole—

Ms Crimmins: No, we are asking for cultural change across the whole government.

MS ORR: Yes, but in achieving that cultural change, you see it as being very much driven from one place? Have I understood that correctly?

Ms Crimmins: Yes. If it were moved to the Chief Minister's directorate, it would have whole-of-government oversight.

MS ORR: As a former public servant, and knowing how the different parts join up, is it that you do not see it being able to be of influence from where it is?

Ms Crimmins: Yes, at this stage. This is not a reflection on the staff—they are doing an exceptional job—but they are just not resourced. They do not have the resources to be able to support directorates right now to undertake that gendered analysis of all policies in each directorate.

MS ORR: I am grappling with this a little bit, and it probably shows. Yes, I get the point of one group driving it forward. But ultimately every directorate has—if you do not want it to become silent; if you want people to take ownership of it—to step up. There seems to be a theme running through.

I just want to unpack this a little bit more. At this time we are seeing more emphasis than ever before put on this area. I think that has been acknowledged within the statement you have made of all the positive things happening. It seems that you are saying you want to see more. Would this be counted best as a work in progress? There is a definite commitment there to see these changes made by the government. It is just a case of making sure that the momentum stays there and continues to unwind. Is that a fair observation?

Ms Machalias: I make the point that it is the third year of the plan's operation and only now funding has been attached to it. That is not best-case from our perspective. Any effective whole-of-government strategy does need to be resourced properly from the outset. To return to your earlier point around the coordination of it, the plan is quite clear in saying that the success of it does rely on all directorates taking ownership. We are not necessarily set on a particular mechanism for that. Our point is that, at the moment, the ACT government office for women is not funded to oversee that in a really strategic way. We are not seeing that clear whole-of-government commitment.

MS LE COUTEUR: There is a lot I would like to talk about, but in your opening statement, Ms Crimmins, you talked about the need for more rental housing. That was clearly heard. You also talked about the possibility of reduction of land tax for community housing providers. I have been interested in land tax issues for so many years. Could you expand a bit more upon that?

Ms Machalias: We have looked at some of the models that are operating on how community housing providers or not-for-profit organisations can run rental tenancy services in the affordable housing space. For me, affordable housing is 75 per cent or less, following the standard national definition.

Some of the tax levers available at the commonwealth level include higher capital gains exemption at 60 per cent. That legislation went through last year. If you are a private owner of an investment property and you give that to a registered community housing provider who is regulated by the national regulator, and rent at 75 per cent, you have a capital gains benefit. There is a tax incentive there for you.

We are recommending that the ACT government also has the power to pull some tax levers to acknowledge and recognise those Canberrans who would like and are able to contribute their property to the affordable rental property market. We are talking about those people in the first income, the bottom income percentile, and possibly those people who we know are really in rental housing stress. That would be our recommendation: that, if you give your investment property to a community housing provider at less than market rent—it would have to be 75 per cent or less to be eligible—you receive some relief. That is the tax lever that we see could be given to those private investors contributing to housing our most at-risk here in Canberra.

MS LE COUTEUR: Absolutely. I assume that would be on the basis that the community housing provider would do its own work to establish that the person was in need. We currently have a system that, if you have your health card—the health card is a de facto—you will get some concessions. If you cannot get a health card—for instance, if you have insecure work which goes up and down, or for many reasons—you cannot access most things. You would see the community housing provider effectively doing the work if people did not have health cards.

Ms Crimmins: Yes, correct. That system is already in place. For example, we had some properties that were under the NRAS scheme. We already have to conduct that for anybody going into those properties. There are clear criteria where you assess their income. There is already a system in place to do that. That also includes that an investor actually has to have their market rent assessed by an independent valuer every two years to demonstrate that they are renting it at below that threshold. So there is already a model in place that would easily support this.

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes.

MS LEE: Acknowledging what you said about your disappointment, in terms of this year's budget, about early childhood, focusing on supporting initiatives and programs for the middle years, the eight to 12-year age group, are there any initiatives in this year's budget that you would see as supporting that age group—or, to the contrary, are there any initiatives that you would like to have seen included to support that age group?

Ms Crimmins: I have not actually seen any initiatives for the eight to—

MS LEE: That is easy, then!

Ms Crimmins: Yes; to be honest, I probably was not examining it at that level. It has been acknowledged in our funding for youth engagement—we have recommended, and it has been acknowledged in the sector—that we need to bring that age down, to start working with 10-year-olds.

MS LEE: In line with what Menslink are doing, for example?

Ms Crimmins: Correct. It possibly needs to come lower, to age eight, and it is part of that early intervention. I know that there is a stream for early intervention programs, and that work is currently going on right now, in consultation with the sector. That is something that we welcome, because it is really important that we have that primary prevention up-front. If we can identify somebody at age eight, earlier on, we know that we have a much more likely outcome in working with that young person and their family, particularly as they get closer to that transition area—and this follows on from our respectful relationship research as well. That is why we say we need to start working with children at a younger age. Those missing middle years are academically acknowledged, so I am hoping that might be picked up in this work that is currently underway.

MS ORR: Housing and education are two of the big themes throughout your submission. We have seen quite big engagement processes recently with the housing and homelessness summit, as well as the future of education project. What involvement did you have in those engagement processes, in the development of those pieces of work to date, noting that they are ongoing pieces of work?

Ms Crimmins: Yes, they are ongoing. We have been involved in both of those. We have been participating in every consultation and every co-design. Our work is supported by other people in the education strategy, through the Children First Alliance. We have been working collaboratively with our other nine community providers in that area. We have presented our recommendations to the education strategy through that forum. We know that that will be released next week, so we are waiting to see the details of that. When the housing strategy is released, we have written some papers, as the YWCA, to that, and we are hopeful that some of our recommendations will be in there.

MS ORR: You have been able to voice your positions on this?

Ms Crimmins: Yes, we have.

MS ORR: In your submission you say you would like to see certain things come out of it. The part I am getting at is that, even if it is not necessarily reflected in this budget, because that work is ongoing and those programs are still coming to fruition, you have definitely had a chance to put forward your position, for it to be considered?

Ms Crimmins: Yes, we have.

MS LAWDER: One of your priorities, and you spoke about it in your opening, is innovative housing models for women, including older women, Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders, and some other groups as well. Some funding has been announced in the budget for homelessness services for older women. Are there any new beds involved in that funding?

Ms Crimmins: Our understanding, from my initial reading, was that there was no accommodation. I have had a very brief conversation, and I understand that at this

stage it will not involve any new beds.

MS LAWDER: No new beds?

Ms Crimmins: That is what I have been advised. But we will fully participate in the co-design and make that recommendation. At this stage I believe it does not involve any new beds; it will be to provide additional wraparound services to those women already in those services.

MS ORR: And this is the money for—

Ms Crimmins: For the older women.

MS ORR: There is also Beryl and there are a few others that are getting funding. With that one particular area, do you see funding going to other areas that also provide services that would support that cohort of people—the ones that Ms Lawder has just picked up on, the older women? Across the board there is quite a bit going on. Do you see any of that also supporting older women?

MS LE COUTEUR: Could we maybe focus on Ms Lawder's question, which was: were there actually any additional beds? Clearly, there is some funding, but are there beds?

MS LAWDER: Obviously, it is positive that there are additional services, but my question remains: are you aware of whether there are any new beds? We have heard for many years about the approaching tsunami of older women's homelessness.

Ms Crimmins: From what we have read, and the opportunity I have had to discuss it with the department very briefly, I will say that at this stage that money is not targeted at new beds, but they will be seeking co-design. We will obviously be recommending that it needs new beds. We also recognise—and we have called for this—that we need to have more wraparound services to support those women.

Again, I will put it in the context of our own lived experience of housing older women. We know that, once we are able to give them appropriate, safe accommodation in which they can stay long term, even in our two group houses, many of them are able to re-engage back in part-time work, in the community, once we have provided a bed.

MS LAWDER: It is hard to keep a job if you—

Ms Crimmins: Yes, so we need to provide the bed—not just a bed; appropriate, purpose-designed accommodation to meet that person's need.

MS LAWDER: Obviously, I have a million more questions, but Mr Wall might want to ask a question.

THE CHAIR: We are pretty much on time, at 11 o'clock, so we might wrap it up there.

MS LAWDER: I can put some on notice.

THE CHAIR: We will suspend briefly for a morning tea break.

Hearing suspended from 10.59 to 11.13 am.

HOPKINS, MR MICHAEL, Chief Executive Officer, Master Builders Association of the ACT

THE CHAIR: Welcome back to the second morning session of the estimates committee community and industry groups public hearing day. Welcome, Mr Hopkins. As you are aware, the hearing is being broadcast and transcribed by Hansard. Can you indicate that you are aware of the privilege statement in front of you and its implications?

Mr Hopkins: Yes, I am.

THE CHAIR: Would you like to start with an opening statement?

Mr Hopkins: I will, thank you. Thank you for inviting Master Builders today to attend the committee. As I am sure you are aware, the MBA is the peak industry body representing the construction industry in Canberra. Our members are small businesses that collectively employ around 14,000 Canberrans.

We were pleased that the construction industry was recognised by the Chief Minister as one of the top five contributors to the ACT economy. Our members are contributing to the ACT budget by paying payroll taxes, rates, land tax, stamp duty, lease variation charges, vehicle registrations and a whole lot more. Of course, they are the members who are building the hospitals, schools, roads and homes that are all going to be funded in the budget.

Our members are also funding MBA Group Training, which is a not-for-profit training organisation. We are currently training more than 200 apprentices, who comprise around 40 per cent of all ACT carpentry apprentices. We are pleased to say that we are also training around 50 per cent of Canberra's female carpentry apprentices at the moment. Our industry is contributing more than its fair share of new full-time jobs, accounting for around one in four new full-time skilled jobs in Australia in the last year.

But contrary to campaigns that are currently being run by others, the ACT construction industry is currently providing high levels of full-time, secure, safe, and well-paid jobs, and it is growing. We acknowledge the efforts of the ACT government to help attract more young people into trades, and particularly to attract more women into trade careers.

We welcome the ACT budget's investment in new infrastructure, skills and land release, which all have the potential to support the continued growth of our industry. But we would like to highlight a number of risks to delivering the forecast budget surplus. The main risk, we believe, is the extra cost that is going to be added, particularly to the price of infrastructure, because of the impact of a number of new laws that are being imposed by the ACT government.

By this, I mean that schools, hospitals and roads all cost more because of the impact of these new laws being created by the government. For example, new laws are being created to mandate union access to building sites; to mandate further training; to mandate facilitated meetings between union officials and employees; and, of course,

to legislate the now infamous union MOU.

We respect the unions' right to lobby for these laws and we respect the government's right to legislate in response to this pressure. But the impact of these laws that we would like to point out on the average Canberran is that schools, hospitals and even houses will cost more. Based on research that has been conducted in other states, the cost of infrastructure could increase by at least 10 per cent, and probably much more. If that increase was applied to the ACT budget, that would be equivalent to more than twice the forecast budget surplus.

We also object to these new laws being proposed under the guise of improving safety, because we do not see any evidence to support those claims. In fact, to the contrary, the minister for safety has confirmed in writing that since the ACT government released the *Getting home safely* report, safety in the construction industry at least has been improving. This improvement has occurred, we believe, because industry and government have been working together to improve safety on worksites.

You might like to know that the MBA and the HIA are continuing this work. We are currently working together to deliver recommendations 10 and 11 of the *Getting home safely* report. This work is being completed by the industry associations, supported by industry experts, at no cost to the ACT government or the ACT taxpayer.

On a positive note, we would like to acknowledge that additional funding is being provided in the budget for new building inspectors and safety inspectors. This is important because a key component of ensuring safety on worksites is having a well-funded, independent WorkSafe regulator. We would support even more funding to WorkSafe in future budgets.

I would be happy to take questions on any of those issues, but also on other issues that we raised in our pre-budget submission, including land prices or land release if that is of interest. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Hopkins. You touched on, obviously, the budget pointing to the construction industry being one of the top five contributing industries to the ACT economy and that without a construction industry, the schools, the hospitals, the roads that the entire community rely on would not have been built. There has been a significant amount of rollover of capital works projects in the budget. What impact is that having on industry locally?

Mr Hopkins: I noticed that that was reported this morning. I think the article was saying that in the current year budget, while there was infrastructure budget announced this time last year of around a billion dollars, a little under half of that is actually being delivered. The MBA and a number other of other industry groups have been calling for a long time for there to be a long-term infrastructure plan. We believe there should be a 20 to 30-year infrastructure plan at a high level and a 10-year plan at a more detailed level. I think having that long-term plan in place would help avoid some of these problems where the infrastructure budget is being underspent.

What commonly happens, and what I am sure is happening at the moment, is that after the budget is announced government departments will be working on designing and

procuring the projects that are listed in the budget. That generally takes a number of months. Industry may not see opportunities to tender on these projects for a number of months into the year. What that means is that there will be, obviously, less than 12 months left to complete everything that was promised in the budget. This approach where we are trying to design, procure and deliver infrastructure, which often takes more than 12 months alone just to build, based on an annual budget cycle, is very inefficient.

Having a longer term approach to delivering and planning this infrastructure would be far more cost effective for government, but it would also be beneficial to industry because it would give industry an opportunity to plan a future pipeline of work and even to skill up and train, or bring in more resources, to deliver this work. They could do this if there was, say, a 10-year forward pipeline of work. It is very difficult to design a major road project when we are only working 12 months into the future at a time.

THE CHAIR: In the article in the *Canberra Times* that you mentioned, the Chief Minister is reported as citing—I will ad lib here since I have not got the quote in front of me—major infrastructure projects like light rail being, I guess, a bit of a drain on the workforce in the construction industry and part of the reason why some of these projects have been held over. What impact has light rail had on the local construction industry? To what extent is there either a shortage or a surplus of labour?

Mr Hopkins: What we have seen with light rail is that it is obviously a very large project in a relatively small jurisdiction at a time when there are a lot of other infrastructure and building projects going on, not just in Canberra but in fact across the whole east coast of Australia—we could argue nationwide.

It means that, without proper planning for new resources and workforce development to deliver those projects, it is going to be very difficult to deliver on all of the promises that are made in the budget. Having light rail under construction at the same time as a number of other projects, without proper investment in skills and workforce development, is going to mean that it will be difficult to deliver on all of those projects, particularly given that other states are also busy delivering infrastructure and it makes it hard for us to import resources into Canberra.

MS ORR: Mr Hopkins, when you say “appropriately trained and skilled up workforce” can you elaborate a little more on what equipping that workforce would look like?

Mr Hopkins: It will mean everything from training designers, engineering designers and architects through to the tradespeople and qualified people that will actually build the projects. What we are seeing in industry at the moment is that while there are probably some parts of industry where there is an oversupply, generally we are needing a lot more trained, skilled people to deliver not just the infrastructure projects, but also the commercial building projects and all the other projects that are being funded.

MS ORR: Can you give me an indication of areas in which you would like to see more? You said that in some areas there is an oversupply of workers and in other

areas you would like to see more.

Mr Hopkins: Trades would be the key area that is being undersupplied at the moment—all trades at the moment. We have particular experience in carpentry trades, because that is what the MBA focuses our training on. The demand we are seeing from host employers at the moment is far exceeding the rate of supply of carpenters. Our intake of first year carpentry apprentices has been increasing and we cannot keep up with the demand to provide trained carpenters, for example.

MS ORR: Are you finding that enough people—sorry, how long is a piece of string?—are putting themselves forward to be trained in these areas?

Mr Hopkins: We are. Education is certainly a competitive area. One of the areas we are competing with is probably a preference towards degrees over trades. But I would be happy to say that any school leaver at the moment considering what they should be doing next year should come and work in a trade.

Like I said in my opening statement, at the moment it is secure work. There is a long-term pipeline of work and you are getting well paid. The key difference between a trade and a university degree is that you do not come out of a trade with a HECS debt. You earn money through your apprenticeship. Our tradies at the moment are some of the most well-paid people in Canberra.

THE CHAIR: Can I go back to the substantive question? The budget also relies heavily on its land release program to deliver the budget surplus. History shows that there has been a pretty poor track record of meeting that delivery and also satisfying the community demand, which has in turn contributed to the increased cost of housing. What impact is that having on industry?

Mr Hopkins: What we see with land release is that there are two quite distinct markets happening at the moment. There is quite a healthy apartment market; there is a good supply of land from government to industry to build apartments, particularly high-rise apartments. I think you can see that in the price of those apartments. At the moment they are probably servicing the affordable housing need of Canberrans.

Contrast that with the supply of land for single detached houses, which we would see as being quite constrained at the moment. In fact, you probably need to cross the border into Googong or other areas to get a healthy supply of land for single houses. I think that is why we have seen the rapid increase in the price of land for single houses. If you went back and compared the land release price at Moncrieff, for example, with the price at Throsby, that is where we saw quite a substantial increase in prices.

MR PARTON: How much of a role do you think that the land supply practices of the last six or seven years have played in the increasing cost of residential land in the ACT? How much of a role has that played?

Mr Hopkins: I think you need to separate out the increased cost of land versus housing. I think the practices of the last five or six years are almost solely responsible for the dramatic increase in land prices. In terms of house prices, in real terms the cost

of building a house has not increased since the 1970s. In fact, because of productivity gains, innovation and other benefits of actually building a house, that is not where we have seen the increase in prices. That comes with the increase in the price of land. It is unfortunate that we now talk about Canberra land prices and compare them to Sydney and Melbourne. We certainly should not have land prices in Canberra being comparable to Sydney and Melbourne land prices.

MR PARTON: What would you see as a sensible mix of land release in regard to units and apartments versus standalone and semidetached houses? What would you see as a sensible mix there?

Mr Hopkins: We would certainly say there needs to be more land for single housing in that mix. That is the most obvious thing. At the end of the day, we need to remember, when we are talking about land release and housing, that our ultimate goal should be supplying housing which meets the needs of the community. Those needs are going to change into the future. Our population is getting older; our families are getting smaller. But that needs to be the ultimate measure.

At the moment, if we have an excess of Canberra families looking for family housing and they are not able to access it because the land is simply not available, the impact of that will be that prices will increase. I think that is what we have seen, and that has a whole range of—

MS ORR: We are focusing here on new builds and land release, which does go to new builds and houses under construction, but we do have a very large proportion of existing family unit homes, because that has been the predominant development model for most of Canberra's history. How much of it is a case of needing to be supplying a new part, as opposed to using the existing housing stock better? You noted that our circumstances will change. We might have two retirees, empty nesters, living in a house, and they want to stay there. They can't move in the area because there aren't other types of housing, and they want to stay living in their community. Certainly, one part of it is looking at meeting a newer supply mix, but what part do you see being getting a better mix across all of Canberra for people to move through?

Mr Hopkins: That really comes to the housing choices policy work which is underway from government at the moment. What we talk about is the missing middle housing. What we have spoken about so far is the provision of single housing and the provision of apartments, but what you are saying in that question is that there is a large bulk of housing in the middle—dual occupancies, townhouses, smaller single houses, larger family units—which at the moment are being underserved.

That is what the housing choices work will unpack. We are very supportive of that work. We think there is a massive opportunity to create more housing, whether it is in new greenfield areas or in established areas, to service that missing middle. At the moment there are a number of reasons why it is not happening. Our planning controls in a lot of cases simply do not allow it. When proposals do come forward, they are often not well received by the community and receive a lot of objections. I would say that the third-party appeal rights that apply to a lot of those projects at the moment are a big barrier for developers wanting to take the risk to deliver that sort of housing.

I would suggest that government look closely at the dual occupancies currently being built on the Mr Fluffy blocks as a really positive example of what could be done if planning rules and government policies support that sort of housing. We are now seeing a number of good quality, well-designed and well-built dual occupancies, and it would be great to see those rules spread throughout the RZ1 zones.

THE CHAIR: What impact are change of use charges having on seeing that redevelopment or the infill, with appropriate downsizing options in the established suburbs?

Mr Hopkins: The best example of that, if we rewind 12 months, is to look at the impact of the \$30,000 lease variation charge that was applied on certain residential leases. Because we were able, after that announcement, to negotiate a transition period, we saw a massive rush of applications come in to take advantage of the previous lease variation charge rules. Now we are seeing that higher charge having the impact of applications basically coming to a halt.

MS ORR: Is that because everyone has already got their application in, though?

Mr Hopkins: Partly, but also partly because that rapid increase, both because of the size of the increase and the short time frame in which it was brought in, has meant future projects are going to be unviable.

MR PARTON: Unviable?

Mr Hopkins: Unviable, until the market adjusts. That proves that the LVC charge has a very significant impact on housing affordability and on delivering this type of missing middle housing.

MR PARTON: When you say “until the market adjusts”, do you mean until the prices go up?

Mr Hopkins: Unfortunately, yes, until the prices go up, and that will flow through. We would be supportive of a review of LVC. We accept that LVC needs to remain, but we certainly think that there are better ways that it can be calculated and applied, and we would strongly advocate that any changes to LVC be transitioned over a period of time so that industry can adjust to them.

MS CHEYNE: Mr Hopkins, you mentioned in your definition the missing middle, larger apartments—maybe three and four-bedroom apartments, if a four-bedroom exists. I know we see in this year’s indicative land release program that there are more units coming on board. Arguably, could some policy settings occur that ensure that when land is released for units, we are stipulating that there needs to be a certain percentage of those larger units on that block?

Mr Hopkins: I think a more effective policy would be to provide an adequate supply of all land for housing and let the market provide the types, sizes and styles of housing which are being demanded. If the land release program was freer in terms of the land it is providing in those greenfield areas, you would see the market adjust. If there was a demand for four-bedroom apartments, for example, they would be provided.

MS ORR: I have a supplementary. It is a bit of a chicken-and-egg type argument that you are making that the market will decide, when a lot the feedback I get from a lot of people—and this is also in my former life as a planner—is, “Actually what we want is not provided, so we have to opt in to what is available.” I talk a lot to people in apartments, in particular to a lot of people wanting to downsize. They want to move into an apartment but they want a larger one because they have a lifetime worth of belongings. They also have kids and grandkids that they want to be able to have come and visit. And the feedback I get anecdotally more than anything is that there are not enough three-bedroom apartments.

We do have minimums within these developments and we are saying, “Do this.” My experience is that it has always been the minimum that is provided; it is never above that. In the sense of the market providing, there do seem to already be disconnects there. Maybe it is more of a comment than a question, but feel free to reply. Ms Cheyne’s point is that we should put some targets in place, and you say, “No, let the market decide.” It just does not quite seem to marry up to me.

Mr Hopkins: I think that is because at the moment we do not have a free market. We do not have a situation where land is being supplied to the same levels and planning rules for apartments as for single houses or the missing middle housing. If we implemented the housing choices work—and there are opportunities to provide those three-bedroom units in established areas—I think you would see the market respond to that. At the moment, unfortunately the opportunities for apartments are generally around town centres or in the city, and that is not where people necessarily want to live.

MS ORR: We are probably going to have to agree to disagree in short on this. As a member for Yerrabi, I live in Gungahlin, and there are a lot of people downsizing to that area because they want to live near their family. I have neighbours who have moved into the area because, to quote them, they are near the grandkids. I think there is quite a bit going on all over the place in regard to that mix. I would question whether the market actually has a really good sounding on what people want in every single instance.

Mr Hopkins: I would not advocate that the market is going to provide solutions for 100 per cent of housing. I think, at the very least, there is still going to be an ongoing need for government to provide public housing and there is going to be a need for community housing providers to provide that gap between public housing and open market housing. And we would definitely support government providing more assistance to those community housing providers. Maybe they could fill some of those gaps that we might be talking about.

MS ORR: You are saying the government should be the one providing the affordable housing because the market is going to be looking elsewhere?

Mr Hopkins: Government is already providing public housing, obviously. With a surplus budget this year and next year, I think there is an opportunity there for government, for example, to provide subsidised land to community housing providers so that they have more flexibility and capacity to provide affordable housing at below market rates. Maybe that is what we will see in the affordable housing strategy when

it is ultimately delivered, but that would be one thing that we would think would have a really effective impact on housing affordability and a really useful purpose for the budget surplus.

MS ORR: That could certainly be applied to greenfields areas where the land has been provided.

Mr Hopkins: Yes.

MS ORR: But would it necessarily give us a spatial equity across the city, because there are not greenfields in every single suburb, so your levers are limited? What would you see as being an option in those areas where we cannot do new land release?

Mr Hopkins: In the established areas?

MS ORR: Yes. We are looking more to infill?

Mr Hopkins: I think it comes back to the planning rules, and I think we need a good, thorough review of the planning rules to see whether it is the planning rules or the third-party appeal rights which are not allowing the type of housing that we are talking about here to be delivered. I think that will come through the housing choices work.

MS ORR: But would you see the market playing a bit of a bigger role in bringing affordable houses into those areas where government has fewer levers available to it due to the nature of the existing development?

Mr Hopkins: Yes. I think if the rules were reviewed you would see the market providing a much greater diversity of housing, and that is going to be diversity in type of housing but also diversity in price, yes. But there will obviously be a natural limit where there will be a minimum market rate at which the market will not deliver housing below a certain price, which is why there is still a need for public housing and community housing.

MS ORR: I guess the big challenge—we might actually agree on this point—is that, in the areas where we do not have greenfields land and we can make those big interventions, we do not have the levers for that. How do we continue to supply affordable housing? It sounds like it is going to have to be a bit more of an effort between the market and the government in those areas.

Mr Hopkins: Yes, I would agree with that.

MS ORR: We have found something we can agree on.

Mr Hopkins: Yes.

MS CHEYNE: Does the budget provide enough in terms of resourcing to improve building quality and safety standards?

Mr Hopkins: As I said in my opening statement, we note that there is funding for two more building inspectors, and that is a very small thing but a useful thing to help building quality. It is certainly something we will welcome, but I know that we are going to have a whole lot of discussion in another inquiry about building quality. I think most of the reforms and most of the improvements to building quality are going to come through a combination of legislative reform and enforcement rather than, necessarily, additional money through the budget, yes.

THE CHAIR: How do you, as the peak industry body, see the enforcement currently around building standards and compliance with the construction code?

Mr Hopkins: I think, both on the enforcement side and the legislative side, much more needs to be done in the ACT. We would certainly support two additional building inspectors. We would support greater enforcement activity being undertaken by government but we would also support legislative reform. I note there has been some movement by government on the enforcement side. There is already a licence exam for C class and there is one being developed for B class, and A class to follow.

THE CHAIR: Is the issue, though, in the C class building licence example, that the licence holder that is required to sit the test is not necessarily the carpenter, the plasterer, the tiler that is actually doing the practical work on the site?

Mr Hopkins: Correct, and that is why we need a more thorough review of building licensing, including trade contractor licensing and even including registration of engineers and registration of building designers and architects. You are right: in big building companies there are many, many people between the trade contractor and the licence holder.

THE CHAIR: I guess in some instances the company holds the licence as well?

Mr Hopkins: Correct; that is right. We would support, for example, the introduction of a supervisors licence so that the building supervisor on site holds a separate licence and is qualified and skilled in building supervision, which might be distinct from the holder of the A class licence.

MS ORR: I am stuck on my favourite topic. You are saying there need to be more building inspections and more on the inspection side. This is, again, more of a philosophical sort of undercurrent. Industry says, "Let industry get on with it. Do not over regulate," and so forth. But if that was the case, if industry was doing what it was meant to be doing, would there be this need for all these inspections? I guess that is the point I am getting to. Where does the disconnection happen?

Mr Hopkins: In most examples, I think, industry does do what it does. I think mostly Canberra has great builders delivering great quality building projects, and we do not have a problem with them. Unfortunately, because we do not have the legislative safeguards, it is too easy to obtain a building licence and not deliver to that same quality, and I think that is where the focus is. It is that small, as it always is, minority of contractors that are letting the rest of the industry down.

MR PARTON: And how does that impact on those who are doing the right thing?

Mr Hopkins: It impacts their business directly. It means that they are having to cut prices to bring themselves down to that lowest common denominator, if you like. We would absolutely, as the peak body for the building industry, support greater regulation to rid the industry of those dodgy operators, to protect the vast majority who are doing the right thing.

MS ORR: There are quite a few people in Canberra who might feel otherwise, but I look forward to attacking that a bit more in another inquiry.

MS LE COUTEUR: We will obviously be asking Access Canberra about the enforcement operations it does, and it will give us an answer about the highest level things. Do they actually do anything more lower level, more cooperatively with your members? Clearly there are building quality problems and clearly builders are not losing their licence in any substantive numbers.

Mr Hopkins: Yes, Access Canberra do. They do a number of proactive and reactive measures. They do a number of proactive education sessions. They often meet with our members and other parts of industry to talk proactively about problems that they are seeing on the ground, and they are also taking action, when they need to in a regulatory sense, to prosecute people. Just generally, what we are seeing is that all that needs to be expanded significantly.

MS LE COUTEUR: Do you think there is a need for more of the higher level actions like licences actually being revoked?

Mr Hopkins: Yes, in some cases. But what we are talking about—

MS LE COUTEUR: There does not seem to be much of that. I have actually looked at some ACAT cases where the licence was not revoked because ACAT said this would have too much impact on the licence holder. I am not allowed to make comments on what I think about an ACAT decision.

THE CHAIR: Consistent within our rules.

Mr Hopkins: What we think we need is a quite thorough root and branch review of the ACT's building regulatory system. That is really what we need, and that would pick up all the issues that we are talking about here, both from legislative and enforcement. We think that the ACT's building regulatory system is a long way behind where it needs to be. It is certainly a long way behind other states. But there is no single solution amongst what we are talking about here which is going to fix all the problems; hence, why we need a thorough review of all these laws and how they are implemented.

MS LE COUTEUR: On another hopefully happier subject, we have talked a little about housing choices and the issues. I would like to talk maybe about the demonstration housing project. How do you think that is going and does it need a commitment of land or something along those lines?

Mr Hopkins: It is early days in that project. It is a project that we are very supportive

of. We note that in the budget there is some funding towards the demonstration housing, and we would support government in hopefully achieving the program's goals. But we would also think that you could probably move through this a whole lot quicker as well, and we would be keen to start looking at some of the planning rule changes and other things that we need so that we can implement the demonstration housing across the whole territory, yes. But we are certainly aware of members of ours and other industry practitioners that have made submissions, and we would support them through that process.

THE CHAIR: Thank you for appearing.

Mr Hopkins: Thank you.

BARKER, DR JUSTIN, Executive Director, Youth Coalition of the ACT
WATTS, MS HANNAH, Director, Policy and Development, Youth Coalition of the ACT

THE CHAIR: Welcome to the Youth Coalition of the ACT. Can you acknowledge that you are familiar with the pink privilege statement that is in front of you, and its implications?

Dr Barker: Yes.

Ms Watts: Yes.

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

Dr Barker: Thanks for having us here today. It is nice to meet on the lovely Ngunnawal country that we are meeting on today.

The Youth Coalition acknowledges that youth is a life phase that exemplifies opportunities for transformation and growth and for new futures, but it also offers a range of challenges that can go in a range of different directions. It is also a period of vulnerability. Young people aged 12 to 25 have to navigate negotiating new statuses and identities, new responsibilities and transitions into adulthood that put them at risk of a range of vulnerabilities.

This ACT budget highlights growth and prosperity within Canberra and it has some positive initiatives for young people. However, as is often the case, young people are often assumed to incidentally reap the benefits of this growth without necessarily having very targeted initiatives to make sure that they come along for the ride for this growth.

The Youth Coalition notes and commends in this ACT budget the new mental health services that support the community who are struggling to access mental health supports in a timely fashion. For young people it is particularly important, if there are emerging signs and people are at risk of mental health issues, to have a timely response to their needs.

We particularly want to acknowledge the assertive outreach program, the youth focused project officer and the funding for headspace. The assertive outreach program is an example of a program that specifically targets young people to help them access supports. It is a move in the right direction: not just creating supports and hoping people access them but actually going out there to help and target the population groups who benefit from these resources. We particularly commend the budget's inclusion for this program.

We note the investment in education infrastructure and the funding for the future of education program. However, we continue to see a lack of investment in community service organisations to be able to collaboratively work with schools. Community services are uniquely placed to best serve the community, young people and families, to help address what we can and do refer to as the social determinants of education. There are a range of urgencies and life pressures outside the domain of education that

prevent people from accessing education and making the most out of these pathways. Providing these supports outside of education is important because you need to do it not only outside the hours but also outside the terrain of education. Sometimes people who have struggled to engage with education lack that trust of the education system, and they may have that with community services, so we need to foster this ability for them to collaborate

We welcome the investment in homelessness services that we have seen in this budget, notably for women and children; the extended hours for OneLink; and the investment in Common Ground at Dickson. These are really welcome initiatives to help with the homelessness problem we have in the ACT. However, there is nothing in the budget to help address youth homelessness. We continue to have at best a haphazard and not strategic approach to preventing youth homelessness. There are no supports for 12 to 15-year-olds who are experiencing homelessness, and we have a lack of investment in programs that invest in reducing family conflict and improving family functioning. This is the strongest evidence, the best bang for buck, and we do not have these initiatives here. We can be stopping the supply of people into homelessness by investing in these initiatives.

Housing affordability and security continue to be areas of profound concern for young people. The lack of action in this budget to address housing affordability is a real concern. The lack of housing options for young people threatens all young people who are transitioning to independence. There is really good research and evidence to say that this prospect of not being able to have secure housing in the future undermines the wellbeing and mental health of young people right now. It changes how they invest in their future. It changes how they spend their money. It affects their wellbeing. There is a very strong narrative at the moment that they are not going to be able to afford to do this, that they are not going to be able to access it. This is affecting young people across the board, except for those of sufficient means.

Youth unemployment and underemployment continue to adversely impact young people as well. In some ways, employment is the bedrock of participation in our society, both social participation and economic participation, and overlaps a great deal with the housing and education issues we have. Without security of employment, including underemployment, people are unable to plan for the future. Here we have these overlapping issues. This is not just the pointy end of young people at risk of homelessness, though this is a particular concern of ours. Young people generally who are accessing this fantastic educational product we have in the ACT are struggling to balance working enough to afford independent living, to be able to meet the costs of living and then meet those educational demands. There is a kind of trifecta of concerns, and the thing that falls down is that pathway to education.

If there are uncertain futures in the shift in the labour market and in the housing market that young people see, people aspire to what is objectively probable. If young people fit into this narrative that this generation are going to really struggle to reap the benefits that other generations have had, it affects their mental health and wellbeing now.

The Youth Coalition maintains that Canberra can be an excellent city for Australians to survive and thrive in. An explicit investment in young people—we are not hoping

there is a trickle-down effect to benefit young people—is kind of symbolic of an investment in the future of our city and our future contributors, consumers and leaders. We would like to see this explicit value of young people recognised in budgets in the future.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We will open up to some questions.

MS LEE: Thank you for your opening statement and also for your submission. You made a number of specific recommendations in relation to youth unemployment and underemployment. In your view, have any of those recommendations been incorporated and are they reflected in the budget? If not, what are some of the lost opportunities you think we are seeing or going to see as a result of them being not included?

Dr Barker: There are some known knowns in terms of underemployment and unemployment. We have some people who are transitioning out of out of home care in the care system or out of juvenile justice for whom we know their trajectories outside into adulthood are problematic. They are over-represented in the homelessness population; they have trouble accessing employment.

These are, for lack of a better term, captured audiences. The state has some kind of responsibility to keep an eye on these people, and we do not have adequate approaches to devising pathways for these people to see a future that ends up in employment. These are particular population groups I think we need to be attentive to. We know they are at increased risk of ending up in unemployment and underemployment and not accessing education.

We acknowledge that there is funding committed to the young workers advice service in the budget, and it continues to be a—

MS LEE: Does that address some of the specific recommendations that you have made in your submission?

Ms Watts: I can talk to that a bit. The specific recommendations that we made in our budget submission were really around looking at some programs that we think might help to address some of these things. The ACT budget is in a position where we have a bit of room to try some new things. Geographically we are small, and we have a community who genuinely, I think, care about the future of our city and about young people. In a budget like this, where we have a bit of room to move, it would be really great to see some projects, which is what we specifically put in there.

The young workers advice service addresses some things that came out of the inquiry into insecure work last year. I have spoken to a couple of people in government in the last week or so about how that service will actually work, and we think that is a really promising thing.

As far as the specific things that we put in our budget submission are concerned, those things have not been met. We will continue to push for an opportunity to work with government to put some programs in place for young people who are really experiencing disadvantage, to have some supports in there.

But also it is about business owners and people who are employers of young people. There are a lot of people who run small businesses in Canberra who really do care about their community. What are the opportunities so that we can work with them to make sure that they are able to support young people who are working in their businesses? In our submission, they are some of the areas where we would really like to explore these opportunities.

MS ORR: That was running through the back of my mind through that whole exchange. You got to it then. Certainly government can do a whole heap of things, but if it is out there in industry, within the employment markets, do you see that as being the biggest focus, particularly in addressing some of the insecure work and getting employers to better understand the issues faced by the youth that you represent?

Ms Watts: Yes, I think so. But also it is one of those things that can be a real tension. If I am a small business owner, I am not necessarily thinking about that. There are other kind of pressures and priorities they have. I think it comes down to finding a balance between what government can do to put things in place to make it easier for small business owners, or for employers to be able to support young people and what responsibility does the community have?

One of our recommendations is around an accreditation program for employers of young people. That came out of talking to a group of young people for the inquiry into insecure work, and that whole idea of community getting behind businesses who support the local community. Those do not necessarily have to be regulatory things that the government imposes on small businesses; it can be a thing that the community lifts up these businesses and these opportunities. But who will start that? I guess that is where we think government has a responsibility to get these things started so that businesses can jump on board with it, so that young people in the community can jump on board with it and move forward from there.

MS ORR: Yes. But would it then be fair to say that it would have to be a joint effort of government and business?

Ms Watts: Yes, definitely.

MS LEE: And community as a whole, I suppose.

MS ORR: I want to go a little bit more to the insecure work and the casualised work that you have been picking up on and the difficulties faced by the youth of our city due to that. Can you elaborate a little bit? Are there any industries in particular in which this happens? You broadly touched on some of the effects of that. Can you go into a bit more detail?

Dr Barker: I think I referred to some of the research we have available. There are changes to the labour market—the increasing insecurity, the casualisation and contracts—which impact people’s connection to community and their sense of belonging to where they are working, because they often have to move.

One of the consequences of the casualisation and the increasing contracts for work in

the labour force for young people obviously means that they have to travel more. There is more uncertainty around their employment and where they live. We are seeing this across Australia, including in Canberra. People cannot commit to a workplace in the same way that they used to be able to, because they are not sure if they are going to be working there for as long. It has tangible effects of making it harder to get a mortgage, to get a loan. I think that people are shifting their expectations of what is needed to be able to do that.

But then there are those real psychosocial harms that undermine the security of people as well. Previous generations have been able to invest in workplace identities and invest in trajectories and pathways to certain types of employment which have become increasingly uncertain across different industries. Perhaps this is less so at the top end of the job market. Someone wanting to be a lawyer may still see that future, but there is still that degree of uncertainty.

We are expecting people to stay in education for longer and have more qualifications. There are concerns in the youth studies space. Previously we had people with no education and training entering the workforce and not being able to get employment. We now have people who are qualified and with experience still not being able to get into the workforce.

This is the marketplace. There are some people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds struggling because of bias based on their name. We get a range of type of ageism. Sometimes we want to employ young people because we can pay them less and expect more of them. Sometimes we will not employ them because we want someone in a different life stage.

The impacts of that insecure work are really quite broad. It gets to the heart of the way we think about young people not investing in their futures and spending too much on smashed avocado and things like this. When your future is uncertain—you do not know how secure these employment identities are going to be and how much this education ensures employment into the future—it really undermines that ability to invest in the future.

MS ORR: You use an example and say someone studying law can still see a career trajectory, a career path. Are there industries in particular where that is not the case? In other inquiries, ACTCOSS has said that hospitality in particular is very insecure. Is that where you see a similar pattern emerging?

Ms Watts: Yes. In the rate Canberra survey that we did, across all age groups up to 21—so from 12 to 21-year-olds—more than 71 per cent of the young people in those age groups who were employed were all in either retail and sales or hospitality. It is a massive proportion of young people employed in these industries where work is insecure.

It is interesting that you mention law. We recently did a consultation as part of a national one and spoke to a young person who has a law degree. She has been volunteering and working casually for over a year and is still unable to get work. She talked about the discrimination that she faces because of her name. She is from a multicultural background. She believes that that has been part of it.

But even really traditionally secure career paths are just not secure for young people. They are really seeing the effects of that. It certainly comes out in all the traditional kind of casualised workplaces. But it is even happening to young people graduating from things that should make it easier for them to get into a long-term job. There are lots of examples where that is just not happening.

MS LE COUTEUR: My observation would be that this is not just about young people; the nature of work, with AI and robots, is seriously changing. What can we do for young people? You cannot say that a lawyer is going to have a job for life. An industry that I know better than others is that of the financial analyst, which used to be a well-paying job for life. It has been outsourced to India. It is no longer well paying; it will soon be done by artificial intelligence. As a society, what can we do?

Dr Barker: It is interesting. As I said in my opening statement, employment participation is about more than just economics.

MS LE COUTEUR: Absolutely, yes.

Dr Barker: It is where we meet our partners and friends; it is where we make a contribution to society. Part of what people are missing is not only that income security but that opportunity to participate and have meaningful labour, and meaningful engagement in the community. There are lots of ways in which young people, and anyone across the life course, can meaningfully engage. But if that also is not paid and is not valued, that becomes a real struggle. In our society we demonstrate the value of someone's work by paying them. Volunteer work is fantastic, but when you are a young person who is struggling, or an older person who is struggling, there is a need for an income as well. So meaningful labour, meaningful participation in the community—there are a range of ways that we can do that.

MS ORR: Again playing the devil's advocate—I did this earlier, so it is not my personal view, but I am just playing the devil's advocate—often, particularly in hospitality and retail, where we do see higher rates of insecure work and casualised work, the point that is put quite often is that people are happy to have flexible working conditions; they are happy to pick up hours when they can and not pick them up when they cannot. Do you have anything to say about that? With respect to the other side of the argument, that is their common point. Would you have anything that you would say to that?

Ms Watts: Yes. If your choice is between having no job and no income and having something that is at least going to give you some cash in your pocket, in your bank account, so that you can pay a bill or put food on the table, of course you are going to be happier to have something than nothing. I think that really comes down to asking, as a society, what do we value? There is a broad range of happiness. I can say, "I wouldn't be happy in a job that is casualised or where my shifts are all over the place," but that is because I have worked for long enough so that I have means to be able to look after myself, and I have connections and things like that, so that I can afford to be a bit choosy with what I take. But if I am a young person who literally cannot afford to be picky with the jobs that they get, of course they are going to say, "Yes, I'm happy to take that shift; I'm happy to do that." But I do not think they mean

happiness in terms of what we might think “happiness” means.

Dr Barker: Happy in the face of a lack of choice. Again, the research shows that young people are packing their lives full of working after hours and studying. Education is more flexible than work these days. You can do a lecture at home; there are a range of different educational alternatives and education is more flexible. But work demands are not flexible. You really have to take it where it is available to you, when you do not have a lot of options.

THE CHAIR: I might change tack a little bit. You mentioned, Dr Barker, in your opening statement the absence of housing or shelter for youth between 12 and 15, I think you said, who become homeless. What is the unmet need there? What is the demand for services for that age group in the ACT? I am guessing it is young people that are becoming disconnected from their normal household living arrangements?

Dr Barker: You are absolutely right. In some ways, youth homelessness is kind of synonymous with family conflict and family breakdown. Nearly every young person who lives by themselves is unable to rely on the support of their family for one reason or another. This often starts to occur in the transitions between 12 and 16, and 12 to 18, with emerging adulthood and independence. I think for about a decade now, back when I was a homelessness researcher, we have been noting the absence of any accommodation available for 12 to 15-year-olds. One of the main ways we gauge demand is by unmet need. In the specialist homelessness data, I will have some idea of how many people are looking for a service based on people who have come to us that we have not been able to service.

If there is not a service for 12 to 15-year-olds, we do not gauge unmet need, so we cannot get a good idea of the number of 12 to 15-year-olds. They are also notoriously difficult to count in terms of the scale of the problem because they want to be invisible. They are trying to avoid the care and protection system; they are trying to avoid a range of different mechanisms that they do not want to be involved in, with police, who will sometimes say, “You need to go back home.” A lot of them are escaping unsafe home environments.

It is really hard to gauge the size, numerically, of the population group, but in terms of the significance of the issue’s cost to the community, it does not take a large number of people who are 12 to 15 to be a significant cost to the community. We know that people who are homeless between the ages of 12 and 15 are more likely to be the people who end up in Common Ground when they grow up. They will have become entrenched into chronic homelessness.

We do not have adequate mechanisms in place at the moment to capture the size of the problem, but we have been speaking to youth workers and we have been speaking to a range of people, and they all see it. They know that it is there and we have been saying this for 10 years.

THE CHAIR: What does a solution to this look like? What sort of model would you be advocating for to provide a roof over the head of a 13-year-old that has an unsafe home environment?

Dr Barker: In some ways they are the best evidenced interventions—they have the best evidence—so it is weird that we do not seem to invest in it, because it prevents youth homelessness. With respect to the best interventions we have, we have them around Australia. In New South Wales we have programs that work with nine to 15-year-olds, so it covers the middle years, as well as up to when you are able to access other homelessness services, to work with families and with young people to do family aware or family focused youth work practice.

There is this kind of false divide of, “You’re a young person. We’re going to transition you into independence and work with you, and not work with your family.” We know that young people who become homeless who maintain some kind of contact with their family have better outcomes than those who do not. There are instances when they should not have any contact with their family.

There are services like the assertive outreach program that we invest in for mental health. Assertive outreach goes into people’s houses and works with the family to improve their family functioning, to help address the needs that are putting pressure on their family and to work with the young person to keep them in the home. That is one of the best interventions we can have.

For those few people that need an alternative, because it is unsafe for them to stay at home and they are not willing to stay there anymore, we need to have a nice, homely environment that works with young people who are nine to 15 to provide them with an alternative. Again, we have models of this that we know are successful in other states and territories where you provide what is almost respite. We know that a lot of young people struggle at home; then they will go out for a little bit and then they will come back home and everything has cooled down. But where are they? Are they on the street? Are they staying with a friend or a family member?

There are services out there that provide respite, and those empty beds are seen as a success sign. You might come and stay with me at my service when you need it, but then you can also work to go back home, and I will interact with the parents to encourage you to spend more time back at home, but you know that this bed is always here for you and it provides you with safety; it provides you with continuity of care. We know that there are models out there of interventions that work with families to fill this gap.

MS ORR: How much of those models are reliant on identifying the people who need the help? You were talking about how it is very hard to know who is out there because they are actively—and arguably for very good reasons—avoiding identifying themselves. It is one thing to provide a service but getting people to use it is a whole other challenge. That is probably a bit more of a comment than a question.

Ms Watts: This is an issue that has come up when we have been talking with youth workers over a number of years, as we said. It is really difficult for a young person to identify that they have an issue and then to not get any support for it. That young person then stops bringing up the fact that they are homeless, for example.

If a young person has contact or a relationship with a youth worker—whether it is a youth worker in a school or a youth worker in one of the drop-in centres, which is

where we hear a lot about this—and says, “Hey, I’ve got this situation going on,” and there is a service that they are linked in with and they get that support, the next time it comes up, they will reach out to that service. They will also let their friends know.

Young people who are in this situation have really strong kinds of connections that they develop with other young people. If we had that sort of service, we would fill it, and it would not be a problem getting young people connected with it.

Dr Barker: One of the important things with any kind of early intervention initiative is identification and response. This comes back to the issue about collaboration with education. If you go into a primary school or a high school and ask the teachers, “Which are the kids that you are concerned about?”—this is pretty informal identification of someone’s needs—they will all know which kids they are. They are probably the kids being suspended; they are probably the kids who have externalising behaviours who are struggling to engage.

There are also formal mechanisms you can use to assess the needs. Again, this is where that collaboration comes in. This is not something that education can deal with. It is something that you need someone in the community sector to deal with because the education system is a mandatory reporter. Sometimes that is why they will not disclose to education, so you need to facilitate that engagement with the community sector, who are able to do this. In education, we will know. My kids could tell me who the kids are in their class who are struggling to engage.

Ms Watts: As we said, this is a problem that has come up for a long period of time. ACT housing is currently doing some research and work on what we can do here. The reason why we really wanted to bring it up is that, as Justin said, there are things we can do about this, and we will be looking to see an investment in it. If we are going to address it then it will need some money in the budget to do that.

THE CHAIR: We might stop there and try to keep things on time. Thank you very much for appearing before the committee today.

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

THE ACTING CHAIR (Ms Cheyne): We now welcome ACTCOSS. The proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and they are webstreamed live. Could you familiarise yourself with the pink privilege statement provided in front of you and confirm that you understand its implications?

Ms Helyar: I have read the privilege statement and I understand it, thank you.

THE ACTING CHAIR: Before we proceed to questions, would you like to make a brief opening statement?

Ms Helyar: Thank you, chair. ACTCOSS has big ambitions for this city and the people on low incomes who live here. We work with advocacy colleagues, decision-makers, and opinion shapers to generate a shared commitment to deliver on our ambition, which is to build a city that is fair and safe, that respects and values diversity, human rights and sustainability, and that promotes justice, equity, reconciliation and social inclusion.

We have seen a growing alignment of our ambition with the agenda set through ACT elections and the investment priorities identified by government and the private sector. We do not agree with government entirely on what to fund and how to deliver, but as you will see from our budget snapshot, the 2018-19 budget has paid attention to many of the issues ACTCOSS and our members identified as priorities in the 2018 ACT budget.

Considered as a whole, the investments outlined in the budget demonstrate that the government has acknowledged the importance of investing in services that respond to people facing difficult circumstances, that provide support to recover and that will contribute to building a safety net that all Canberrans can rely on and trust. They also indicate a willingness in government to invest in infrastructure that improves amenity and livability at neighbourhood level and that grows social participation and civic engagement, including for groups who experience stigma and discrimination.

We commend the government on three major investments: in mental health prevention, treatment and recovery support services; in homelessness services; and in disability support and disability advocacy.

We also note investments in improving education attainment for students not reaching benchmarks, especially students with disabilities; the playgrounds and sports fields; funding for Canberra to become a restorative community; inpatient-outpatient services, hospital in the home, patient navigation and upgrades to hospitals; improved access to justice for disadvantaged groups and the disability justice strategy; a diverse Canberra through grants and policy work with LGBTIQ, multicultural and veteran communities; and the Chief Minister's charitable fund to increase investment in priorities set by the community.

The budget announced this week clearly presented community services as core infrastructure that governments rely on and need to invest in as responsible stewards of social and economic wellbeing. Community services were acknowledged as

significant employers and drivers of both economic activity and opportunity in the city. Our members know they have a vital and unique role in growing the human and social capital on which all successful communities are built. We value government recognising this role and growing their partnership with community-managed organisations who deliver services.

We were disappointed that there was no new funding to implement the industry strategy priorities that the ACT government signed up to in 2016 with the community services industry. But we are talking with directorates about accessing internal resources to progress the planning and implementation of our agreed industry development agenda.

The ACT government has adopted a social investment approach that focuses on addressing unmet demand. This is, of course, welcome. However, addressing unmet demand will only get us part way to addressing deprivation and exclusion and will not make genuine inroads into reducing growing inequality. We need to see further investment. Household-based energy efficiency improvements and low cost transport services are all important budget measures that seek to protect low income households from cost of living pressures. But the quantum and reach of these programs needs to grow.

Digital literacy and access to data are vital to social and economic participation. We saw some investments in the budget in access to wi-fi and digital transformation projects in server systems that have the potential to deliver improved access, amenity and opportunities for community services and low income households. However, we believe further investment is needed to address the digital exclusion that still exists in Canberra.

Most of the corrections-focused investment in this budget is not focused on addressing the social determinants of offending. Ongoing gaps in access to justice, legal assistance, investments to prevent offending and to assist people to access suitable housing and other supports to avoid future contact with the criminal justice system have been highlighted by our members as major concerns.

Most of the health funding allocated in the last four years is for tertiary level interventions and chronic disease management. Community leaders and consumers are looking for more investment in primary care, preventative services, alcohol and drug treatment services and community-based interventions that improve health outcomes and reduce the burden of disease, especially the burden carried by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people living with disabilities, people with enduring mental health conditions, people who identify as LGBTIQ, and culturally and linguistically diverse peoples.

The allocations made in the budget in mental health services and in family group conferencing should provide some pathways away from statutory services and acute responses. The substantial investments in education and health have the potential to improve access and outcomes for people who do not attain the education or health outcomes enjoyed by the average Canberran.

But these positive impacts will only occur if additional funding is spent on improving

diversity competence in mainstream services so that new funding allocations actually deliver for the people who currently do not trust services, lack confidence in the capacity and willingness of services to work with them effectively and who doubt that they will experience positive outcomes from engaging with services.

ACTCOSS members have also said that the specialist targeted programs that genuinely address risk factors and respond to the impacts of deprivation and exclusion need to be prioritised in the allocation of resources. For example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services need to be at the centre of responding to the needs of people from their community and they need to determine the nature and scope of partnerships that will be effective.

The foundation of a comprehensive approach to prevention and early intervention needs to be an increasing supply of affordable housing for the lowest income groups in Canberra—certainly, the 35,000 people living in households that live on less than \$500 a week, but also those households in the next income quintile with less than \$100,000 a year. We note that the measures to invest in affordable purchase are in the budget, but that does not meet the needs of the people that are looking for affordable rental.

We look forward to the ACT government bringing money to the table before the end of this year so that the private sector, community housing providers and government can collectively build enough affordable housing to address the community's needs. Now I am good to take questions.

MS ORR: I want to pick up on some of the comments you made in your opening statement about justice and community safety, because it is actually a theme we probably have not touched on very much today; so we will get a new perspective on the record. You were talking about earlier intervention. Can you elaborate a little on what ACTCOSS's position is and what you see as being the—

Ms Helyar: We talk about the social determinants of offending. They are largely around a history of trauma. They are around exposure to violence, which can be violence in the home, but also violence more broadly. Access to employment, good education attainment, not only at school level but also post school, especially for people who have not had a good experience in school and particularly access to affordable housing and access to housing when families break up or families need time out and a break are all of the kinds of things that either lead people to be more likely to offend but also lead people to struggle not to reoffend after contact with the justice system. They are things in which we see there is still not sufficient investment.

MS ORR: Let me focus a little more on the reoffending side of it. While we can probably say there is always more to do beforehand, once you have reoffended you are known to the government services. What do you see as necessary to support people that reoffend in order to bring it down a bit? Can you give me some examples of the types of interventions that would actually work to help to get a better outcome?

Ms Helyar: The two most important ones are access to affordable housing, particularly if you are a single person. A single income household on a Newstart allowance is a massive issue. We have lots of people leaving custody going into

emergency or transition housing, not into a long-term place where they can have a stable foundation for rebuilding a life; also access to employment.

MS ORR: This is a two-barrel question: within the current justice system and the programs available, are there things that you see that are positive that are going on? What, in addition to that, would you do?

Ms Helyar: Yes, the justice reinvestment stuff has been supported by ACTCOSS and is welcomed. We think the restorative communities work can potentially be helpful in that space as well. Both of those are positive measures. But we still think that even all of those measures cannot deliver what we need in terms of reducing reoffending—without a house that you can call a home, that you can afford to live in and have money left over for being part of the world, and a pathway to a job.

MS ORR: Within the justice portfolio responsibilities, would it be fair to say that you would like to see more focus on supporting the justice area? Rather than the people coming from the prison and going into other parts of government services where they might not be as well known and their history not as well understood, would you like to see more focus from within the justice area?

Ms Helyar: Absolutely, and what we have said for several years now is that we think the justice, health and education sectors are dealing with costs associated particularly with the lack of affordable housing. That is sort of hidden and we do not think that it can be all dealt with within the housing portfolio. Each of the portfolios needs to make a contribution to addressing that issue. Particularly in the justice space, knowing the people, having expertise in what works in terms of post-release support and medium-term reintegration and support is vital. Having that connected to housing would be transformative.

THE ACTING CHAIR: Ms Helyar, in your submission last year I think you proposed that the government should divert \$100 million from government bonds and invest in community housing providers. Why would this be more effective than the current model? Are there any other jurisdictions that we can draw from?

Ms Helyar: There are certainly a lot of jurisdictions that have invested in community housing. I note that \$260 million, I think, was announced by the Queensland government recently, but it is still not enough to fill the gap. But Queensland is a bigger jurisdiction than ours.

The reason we have said that is that we think it is the kind of quantum of investment that will actually address the size of the problem we have. We know it is significant, but we also think that the return on investment you get through government bonds would be matched by the return on investment you would get from stabilising people's housing, which we know has two major impacts.

One, it helps adults get jobs because they do not have to be preoccupied with worrying about just keeping a roof over their heads and their family. They can actually focus on some longer term objectives in their life. But also it helps with education attainment, which we know is a core issue. For children not to be moving schools regularly, not to be uncertain about what is happening, makes a substantial

difference.

The other argument is that community housing is the only part of the housing sector, outside of public housing, provided by government that can guarantee long-term access to affordable rental. We have actually had agreement from the private sector housing organisations like the Property Council and the MBA. They have acknowledged that it would only be community housing providers, either acting on their own or acting in partnership with the broader property sector, who could guarantee access to long-term affordable rentals for that group.

THE ACTING CHAIR: The Chief Minister in his budget speech reflected on Newstart

Ms Helyar: Yes.

THE ACTING CHAIR: He called on the federal government to properly fund that. Just how insufficient is it?

Ms Helyar: As the Chief Minister noted, it is \$400 below the minimum wage, which is set by the Fair Work Commission based on what is required to have a decent standard of living. I cannot remember the exact stats but we can provide you with some information on that. I think it is around \$200 less than what is needed, based on some University of New South Wales research on what is the minimum that you need to actually pay for the basic goods and services in your life.

We valued the Chief Minister and other members of the Legislative Assembly who backed the call for a growth in Newstart allowance. We actually think it would make the most difference to addressing poverty in this city. We abbreviate it as Newstart allowance but there are a bunch of allowances in there, including the widows pension, sickness allowance, youth allowance and a whole bunch of smaller payments.

What we have heard in testimony from people who have lived on that Newstart allowance is that they are forced into illegal and unsafe work to try and get some cash to fulfil their requirements to pay their rent or to meet their bills. For example, an older man talked about applying for 14 jobs a fortnight for two years and getting knocked back. He talked about what that does to your mental health and wellbeing. And it is not only the knockbacks; it is not even being able to afford things like the medicine you need to deal with chronic illnesses. We know that people are certainly having to do things like going without heating and only eating food that they get from food assistance services.

MS LE COUTEUR: Continuing on that theme, this year's budget has seen an increase in the utilities concession and an increase in the opportunities for rates deferral. Do you think these are going far enough, or is there more work that we should be doing in this area?

Ms Helyar: Every time utilities concessions are spoken about in the media, I get phone calls from people who say that it does not touch the sides. The quantum of the concession is welcome, but it is still not actually addressing the gap between the bills and the capacity to pay, particularly for people on fixed incomes like older people and

people of working age that are on incomes like Newstart or youth allowance.

Even people in households with a minimum wage job are concerned. One of the things that we note is that they are not usually eligible for concessions. We have talked in our budget submission, and also more broadly, about having another way to assess eligibility for concessions beyond access to an income support or healthcare card. There are people in jobs who are struggling to meet those costs of living.

We also think there is a responsibility for both the retailers and the government. It should not all be on the government's shoulders. We welcome some of the work by retailers to reduce costs for low income households.

The issue is that often low income people are in houses with very poor infrastructure. That means they have to spend more money on their energy to keep their house at a comfortable temperature. The investment in energy efficiency for both buildings and appliances is absolutely vital as the long-term measure to reduce people's need to spend money on energy.

MS LE COUTEUR: You have talked about other ways of looking at income, apart from the current one, where basically the commonwealth government gives you a healthcare card and therefore you have a certificate of poverty. Could you tell us a bit more about what you are thinking in that area?

Ms Helyar: One of the things that has been done in the UK is that they have said, "No-one should spend more than 10 per cent of their income on their energy." So you kind of set a threshold, and if there is evidence that people are spending more than that, that is considered a threshold for assistance. That might be one way to think about it.

It is the same with the rates, in the assessment of the impact of rate rises in households. For the households that are paying five per cent or six per cent, that will be having an impact on their budget but it may not be putting them in hardship. But there were also some households that were spending up to 14 per cent on just paying the rates. There may be a way of putting some sorts of thresholds in place that allow the government to understand capacity to pay. That is the issue: it is not necessarily what your source of income is; it is the level of income and how it relates to your capacity to pay for an essential service or housing. So it is using that as a different measure of need.

MS LE COUTEUR: One way along those lines which was suggested by one of our earlier speakers, the YWCA, was that possibly land tax could be reduced where a building is rented via a community housing provider at an affordable rate. Would that be the sort of thing you are talking about?

Ms Helyar: There is a whole other issue around the tax treatment of community housing provision. A whole other suite of interventions could be done: recognising who the landlord is, that they are offering at a sub-market rate, and that there could be a way of considering the government fees and charges that are attached to that product. There has been some work done in the housing policy group that includes the private sector and community organisations and professional groups, thinking through what might be reasonable in that space.

MS LEE: Going to some of the submissions that you made in relation to disability, I understand you probably welcomed, as I did, the pre-budget announcement about some funds being available for the transition for people who have been falling through the gaps. Have you been consulted on or are you being consulted on what that might look like? That is number one. Secondly, if you are, could you share some of that with us? If not, what specifically would you like see that going to?

Ms Helyar: We are not engaged in formal consultation at the moment. I would imagine that the government is working with the more direct service provider organisations around that, which is appropriate.

One of the bigger gaps that we have seen is the gap around mental health conditions: the functional impairment associated with living with a long-term mental illness and the misalignment of the planning decisions with the support needs of people in those circumstances. Also, a number of the resources went to the NDIA in the transition several years ago and have not come back out. That is what people say.

There has been some work, and certainly the commonwealth budget included measures around increasing access to mental health recovery support, which goes some way to dealing with the issue, but we think that is going to be an ongoing issue and it will be important that some of these resources are used in that space. We also would be interested to see how much the measures around mental health services that are in the budget pick up.

MS LEE: I think we all would.

Ms Helyar: Yes. Considering those two things together will be important for people living with a long-term mental health condition.

The other issue is for children and young people who are considered to have got their allocation according to early intervention and planning rules and are getting reduced plans associated with that, when their families still see a need for them to get access to resources that sustain the gains from early intervention and protect people from falling behind further on in their development.

MS LEE: You may remember SHOUT last year and the welcome news that they received this year. This morning we had some evidence from Epilepsy ACT, who seem to be in a very similar situation.

Ms Helyar: Yes.

MS LEE: So there are still instances of organisations or support groups that previously were funded by the ACT government under the office for disability who are now being cut off and are not able to transition to the NDIS.

Ms Helyar: Yes. Thank you for that reminder. We consider that community development money, and there is not sufficient community development money in the NDIA provisions. We have been talking more about the need for investing in community development.

It is not face-to-face, one-on-one services. It is more about building the capacity in the community to provide protection and support peer guidance and advice that are valued by people but not able to be imagined in an individualised funding agreement or a marketised model. We did some work in our paper on choice and control that we published last year—I think it was in the middle of the year—where we talked about the problem with a marketised approach and what that meant for the broader social infrastructure that actually creates a community in which people can live a life that they value and can participate in fully.

MS LEE: Epilepsy has appeared before us, but there must be other organisations who are the same.

Ms Helyar: Yes, there are a number of organisations that are struggling to retain that community development peer support role. We see that as vital. One of the issues that the disability sector has talked about is this: quite apart from the NDIS, there are a whole bunch of obligations that the government signed up to as part of the national disability strategy around the accessibility of the community. There are big gaps in that. Often groups like Epilepsy ACT, TADACT or the other groups that have struggled to sustain their viability are expert reference groups and are really vital to understanding what is working well and not working well in the community.

MS LEE: When there was the announcement with SHOUT, the ACT minister for disability acknowledged that SHOUT deserved funding—and there was no doubt about that—and not that it had been funded in the wrong market but that it should have been better placed, been funded under community services as opposed to a narrower scope of disability. You have just talked about vitality and how it is so important for these services who are community development or engagement focused. Would you say that this is another example of where they fall into that category?

Ms Helyar: Absolutely. We have talked about core social infrastructure being the next area for government. Once we have filled some gaps in the service system, if we are going to go beyond that, we need to address some more fundamental gaps in the core social infrastructure of the city. We have talked about that for some time and have welcomed the investments in this budget that go to addressing some of those gaps. But we see there is more that is needed and we will continue to be pushing for that.

MS ORR: I have a quick question. I just want to clarify something so that I have it right. We heard from Epilepsy ACT this morning.

MS LEE: We heard from them this morning, so it was timely.

MS ORR: They spoke about how the transition to the NDIS has been quite difficult for groups that previously have been classified as one thing but might be seen as something else under the NDIS. They said they are fast coming to the view that perhaps they sit better within a health service rather than a community one.

Ms Helyar: Yes.

MS ORR: It goes along the lines of saying, “Where do we actually start to fund these groups that are falling through the cracks and where does it come from?” Just very quickly, what is your view on how we can better help to point people in the right direction to get the right thing? Everyone says they want to have sustainability and a long-term ability to keep going, but we still have this uncertainty around whether they actually fit and who they should be approaching. It is one thing to say that it should come out of community services, but if it is a health service then it is probably better over there so that the community services can be funded. Unfortunately, we do have a finite amount of money.

Ms Helyar: Yes. It is a bit like our housing argument. Housing is not just the job of the housing directorate. Housing is so fundamental to a good life—and is a protection from demand for services—that all portfolios need to have a role in that. I think we would put the same argument around community development: we have got to the point now where a lot of ACT government is based on state jurisdiction responsibilities, which are largely around service delivery, but actually local government responsibility is around creating a viable and well-supported community, and core to that is the social infrastructure that you would fund with community development money. I think that in each of the portfolios they need to be funding community development as well as service delivery, because community development protects people and provides informal support networks that reduce demand for the state government type funded services.

That would be our argument: that the ACT government is starting to fill some of the gaps around the state government funded responsibilities, but those local government responsibilities need to be not just in EPSDD or city services but in Health, Community Services and places like Education and JACS as well. Yes, I think we think differently about the health dollar. It is not just about high-level specialist health interventions; it is about the kinds of interventions that create a community in which demand for health services can go down because we are responding better and providing the informal infrastructure that supports people.

MS LEE: Obviously, the government are trying to work out buckets of money, but the people who are relying on these services do not care where it comes from.

Ms Helyar: No, they do not.

MS LEE: They are not going to go, “Oh, my God; is it health?”

Ms Helyar: But I think there is a value in aligning it sometimes with where the downstream costs are, because that creates an incentive around maintaining it. The downstream costs on lack of access to peer support and community development around illnesses are in the health system, so we need to incentivise investment in the health system.

MS LEE: That makes sense.

THE ACTING CHAIR: Thank you very much.

Ms Helyar: Can I just say a final word? In our budget estimates material we put in

some questions, and we would welcome you asking them in your engagements with officials.

THE ACTING CHAIR: I like how you say “some questions”. There were three pages.

Ms Helyar: There are only 32, and they are divided by portfolio.

MS LE COUTEUR: That was very handy, but it is not quite the output classes. It is very good.

THE ACTING CHAIR: We will take note of that, Ms Helyar.

Hearing suspended from 12.48 to 1.45 pm.

ALTAMORE, MR ROBERT, Executive Officer, People with Disabilities ACT Inc

THE ACTING CHAIR: Before we start, there are a few housekeeping matters I wish to draw to your attention. I am sure you are familiar with them. Today's proceedings are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. They are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. If you take a question on notice, it will be really helpful if you say that you are taking it on notice. Before we begin, I just want to check that you have previously been given or have had read to you the privilege statement.

Mr Altamore: Yes, I have.

THE ACTING CHAIR: And you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Mr Altamore: Yes, I do understand the privilege implications of the statement.

THE ACTING CHAIR: Before we proceed to questions, would you like to make a brief opening statement?

Mr Altamore: Yes, thank you. People With Disabilities ACT is a peak body for people with disabilities. We are a disabled people's organisation, managed and controlled by people with disabilities and operating for our benefit. We represent people with disabilities and we try and inform the community on disability issues and advocate from a human rights framework for the removal of barriers and for our access to all aspects of community life in Canberra.

People With Disabilities ACT invites this committee and the Assembly as a whole to view the budget through two lenses, or prisms if you like. These are, firstly, the commonwealth disability strategy and, secondly, the parliamentary agreement. In respect of the commonwealth disability strategy, there are six activity headings. I will just go through them and talk about the particular budget initiatives which make up those headings.

The first heading is inclusive and acceptable communities. This is an area where we feel the budget misses out a little. There are things in the Labor-Greens parliamentary agreement relating to accessible housing and also to measures to make the environment more accessible, including a body to coordinate access issues in Canberra. These were, again, not included in this year's budget, and we draw attention to their omission as two aspects for attention over the next 12 months and the coming year.

The second area is rights protection, justice and legislation. In this regard we warmly welcome the ongoing commitment to the ACT disability justice strategy as a major fulfilment of ACT responsibilities in that area of the strategy.

The third area is economic participation, employment. The budget contains a partial implementation of the recommendations of the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services inquiry into employment insofar as these relate to the public service in the ACT. They do not deal with all

aspects of these recommendations. In particular, we note that the recommendation for internships is not implemented in this budget. Again, PWD ACT conducted a forum last year to consider the report of this inquiry and the government's response, and there was strong support among those present for the full implementation of that committee's recommendations. Again, that is a thing on which we record our disappointment that it was not implemented.

The fourth area is community support. In this regard we welcome the ACT government's pre-budget announcements about the commitment to assist people with disabilities who have difficulty accessing services. I think it is called the transition implementation support program. This is the funding for people who are having difficulty accessing services in the transition to the NDIS—people with high and complex needs. We welcome this, and we also welcome the increased funding for individual advocacy and for two staff positions in the office for disability to address NDIS transition issues.

I will now go to the sixth area, health and welfare. Again there are some initiatives here which, if implemented well, will benefit people with disabilities, such as the funding for chronic disease. We welcome the funding for SHOUT. SHOUT is very important to us as an organisation because it is the underpinning of all we do. We have our office space there and they provide so much admin support for us.

Going back to No 5, which I missed, education and skills, we welcome the funding for students with special needs. Basically, our assessment of the budget which we gave to our members was that we welcomed initiatives but some areas were missing.

Just going back to the third item in the strategy, which is economic support, we have recently learnt that the Victorian government is investigating ways of implementing a strategy for economic participation of people with disabilities. We did not know about this when we did our budget submission late last year, but it seems to me that an initiative like this is worth further investigating in the ACT context. With that comment, I conclude my opening statement and I would welcome questions.

MS LE COUTEUR: One of the comments you made in your survey, among key comments, was the fact that the parliamentary agreement item about accessible housing continues not to be implemented. I was wondering if you had any views as to what is the best way to implement that. Do we need to change our building regulations? Given it is not happening, how do you think it best could happen?

Mr Altamore: I need to actually, before I do that, take one step back and thank you for reminding me. I did note that this was a question asked of Yvette Berry at the ACTCOSS budget committee lunch last Thursday, and the minister did say that there was a commitment for all new housing to be compliant with access standards. I have sought information from Ms Berry's office on this but they have been unable to provide it yet. I need to actually, in fairness to her, acknowledge that. We keep raising this issue because PWD ACT is participating in the affordable housing consultations as a means of reminding people there that it is not enough for housing to be affordable; it has got to be accessible and livable.

People have got to have access, they have got to be able to live in the house and it has

got to be able to be visited by their friends, and they have got to be able to visit their friends. We are talking about accessibility and ability to visit. Basically when we wrote to the minister and Mr Barr about this he sent back a letter saying, “We are waiting on national initiatives.” I think the ACT cannot just sit back and wait for the national response. There are things we can do locally. There was a commitment to a housing access round table in the budget agreement. Maybe that can be a start.

We basically need to get the disability community and the builders, maybe the housing and building developers, engaged together. If we can get some engagement among the housing developers and the housing providers, with people just there together, that, I think, could be a real force for moving things along, regardless of what happens while the ACT government waits for whatever might emerge from the national consultations.

MS LEE: I have got a follow-up to Ms Le Couteur’s question. In terms of accessibility, you have mentioned that PWD gets about two requests per month on access issues. Can you elaborate on what types of issues they are and where you direct them to?

Mr Altamore: Basically some of the requests we get are, “Where can I find accessible accommodation?” It is a very hard one to answer because there is actually no answer in Canberra. There is no central place to go. And the other ones are basically general questions on access. “What are the standards for access?” We give them information on the standards, where they can find the standards documents.

Basically, access questions are very hard to answer in Canberra. There is no central collating point. There is no overarching body. It would not answer the access inquiries of individuals but we have been asking for some time for an equivalent to the former access and planning advisory committee which Brendan Smyth instituted, which used to exist and which was a body which oversaw major development applications and provided advice on their accessibility compliance.

MS ORR: Just as a supplementary question on the access, I know there is access to public transport standards, access to housing standards. My understanding is that a lot of those are done federally. What role do you think the ACT can play in supporting information dissemination and what role do you think the federal government can play, given that they do hold quite a lot of these policies?

Mr Altamore: Basically, the ACT government needs to ensure that it complies with those standards; for example, in access to public transport. We are very hopeful that the light rail infrastructure will be fully accessible. Again, this is a matter where we have been in contact with light rail but nothing concrete has happened yet. We have been assured that the light rail system will be accessible, but the disability movement nationally had a very bad experience in Queensland with the trains. You may be aware of the media coverage of that incident.

MS ORR: Maybe for the record you could just briefly explain what it was so that we are all on the same page?

THE CHAIR: Yes, please.

MS ORR: Just for the purposes of the record and so that we all have the same understanding, if you could just briefly fill us in on that incident?

Mr Altamore: Basically, the Queensland government ordered a series of new trains which they acquired delivery of late last year and early this year and were going to use particularly with the Brisbane system and to the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games. There have been access problems with those trains to the point where discrimination complaints are being lodged et cetera.

MS ORR: I can understand from that why you would want to make sure it is not repeated here.

Mr Altamore: It would be very, very regrettable.

MS ORR: My understanding is that there was a commitment made as part of the light rail agreement that it would be accessible and meet all disability standards. It is certainly something we can keep an eye on.

MS LEE: In your opening remarks you spoke about some of the budget initiatives that you welcomed, including funding for SHOUT and funding for students with a disability. Have you been consulted by the government on how those initiatives will roll out? As we know, we welcome some announcements and initiatives, but sometimes the devil is in the detail. Do you have any idea of some of the detail there? If not, what would you like to see come out of the detail?

Mr Altamore: First of all, in relation to funding for SHOUT, that is just a matter of funding for SHOUT's operations. We were not consulted over that; probably we would not be, but we welcomed the funding.

In relation to education, no, we were not consulted on the funding initiative there. However, People With Disabilities ACT are a very resource-poor organisation. While we would like to work in the education space, we have not had the resources or the expertise to do that. But we do contribute where we can. We did contribute to the consultancy last year on the assessment of student needs which was conducted by Graeme Innes and people from Deakin University in Victoria, I think. I will stand corrected on the tertiary institution which supported Graeme Innes in that role, but we did contribute to that.

We would like to be consulted on how these things are implemented. I guess the one you really want to ask about is the measures for chronic disease that Health Care Consumers have been given funding for—health literacy for people with chronic disease. We worked closely with Health Care Consumers, and I hope we will work even more closely with them over the next 12 months. It is under the ILC program, funded by the NDIS. We have been funded for a health and disability project which very much involves Health Care Consumers.

While we were not consulted on the development of that initiative, we look forward to working with Health Care Consumers on its implementation so that people with disabilities also benefit from it. Many people with disabilities also have chronic health

conditions.

MS LEE: SHOUT was in this position last year, and we heard this morning from Epilepsy ACT about some risk of these organisations who were previously funded under ACT disability not getting the funding under the NDIS. We are seeing the risk of them falling through the cracks. As a peak body, are you in touch with either organisations or individuals who are supported by these organisations? What are they doing about them and how are they faring?

Mr Altamore: We are in touch with them as part of a sector. As a community sector we work closely together and we have interactions with them on a regular basis—some more than others. We are aware that there are still organisations facing this funding risk. Beyond that, though, you would need to talk to those organisations directly. For example, I do know about some of them. I know about Radio 1RPH. We are still facing that. I know about TADACT, which is something which concerns a lot of our members. So those issues are still there, yes.

MS LEE: Is there anything in the budget that you see as promising for these groups or, on the flip side, that you would like to have seen to assist these groups more?

Mr Altamore: People With Disabilities ACT does not normally advocate for other groups in its funding. However, we would support the call in the ACTCOSS submission for the ACT government to find ways of supporting these valuable organisations which tend to get lost in transition. I remind the committee of the work done by ACTCOSS on its lost in transition project. The stories were published last year, I think. I remind the committee and the Assembly that there is still a need out there in the sector.

MS LEE: ACTCOSS gave evidence as well, so that was very helpful.

MS ORR: You mentioned in your opening statement that you support the ongoing commitment to the justice strategy.

Mr Altamore: Yes.

MS ORR: Would you be able to outline for me some of the benefits you see that strategy and that piece of work bringing to your membership?

Mr Altamore: The justice strategy is a strategy which is under the auspices of Advocacy for Inclusion, so we need to acknowledge that from the outset. Our members are also people with disabilities. The justice strategy is a recognition of the fact that people with disabilities are over-represented in the justice system and that disability is a characteristic which disadvantages people who are interacting with the justice system and prevents people from achieving good outcomes through their interactions with the justice system, whether those interactions are as victims of crime, as defendants in criminal proceedings or as parties to civil litigation or administrative review litigation.

In that sense, insofar as the justice strategy seeks to address those disadvantages, potentially it has great benefits for people with disabilities. Again, it depends on how

the strategy can be implemented, how the government responds to the needs and the recommendations of the strategy, and how the government responds to the strategy action points.

THE ACTING CHAIR: I want to expand on your comments about the lack of provision in the budget for the employment of people with disabilities and initiatives to promote the employment of people with disabilities in the private sector. What sorts of things do you have in mind that should be in there?

Mr Altamore: The first thing that comes to my mind is the Victorian economic participation strategy initiative. The second thing that comes to mind is the number of recommendations in the inquiry report which relate to private sector employment which perhaps the government has not been able to address, and which need to be addressed. I want to draw attention to the fact that the Canberra Business Chamber are now actively engaged in this initiative and we hope to work closely with them. I think business engagement is key to the success of these matters. The ACT government needs to do all it can to support any business community initiatives to promote the employment of people with disabilities. There could be things it could do in terms of its tendering processes and other initiatives.

I am sorry that I cannot be more precise on that on the spur of the moment. The ACT is in a good position, maybe through the office for disability, to trawl over what is going on in other states and in New Zealand, which is a jurisdiction that we might learn from, and see what is happening.

THE ACTING CHAIR: In your opening statement about that Victorian initiative, you said you were not aware of it until after you had put your budget submission in. For the record, are you able to tell us a little bit more about it?

Mr Altamore: Unfortunately, I do not know as much about it as I should. Do you want me to take that on notice?

THE ACTING CHAIR: We could probably find it for ourselves. It was just in case you knew some things that were particularly attractive about it that we could follow up.

Mr Altamore: What attracts me is that it is the first time I have actually seen a state government do this and say, “We want an economic participation strategy for people with disabilities.” It fits appropriately with the implementation of the third action area of the commonwealth disability strategy.

Maybe I should have taken you back one step. The commonwealth disability strategy is a document which the ACT government signed on to through the COAG process as Australia’s response to the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. We have the convention, which is the starting point. The Australian government implemented the commonwealth disability strategy, which all state and territory governments have signed up to.

MS ORR: Given that this is a Victorian study that we have been talking about, and given that this is the first time it has happened, would it be fair to say that one of the

requests coming out through this process of appearing before estimates is that the ACT government consider looking at something similar here?

Mr Altamore: I am not clear on what you were saying.

MS ORR: With the Victorian study that you have referenced, as it is something that is quite new, is it fair to say that it is something you would like the ACT government to look at? We cannot really fund it in a budget if we have not had the benefit of knowing about it.

Mr Altamore: Yes, of course. I am not being critical of the fact that it has not been done. I am mentioning it as a way forward, because I believe these processes are as much about ways forward as about what is there, what was done and what was not done.

MS ORR: Thank you. That is all I wanted to clarify.

THE ACTING CHAIR: Thank you very much for appearing today, Mr Altamore. If that extra information on the work in Victoria is easily accessible to you, that would be gratefully received, ideally within five days. Equally, we can have a look for ourselves, if it is not easily to hand. We thank you for your appearance today.

Mr Altamore: Thank you very much for the opportunity.

EVANS, MR JACK, Representative, Owners Corporation Network

MAKEHAM-KIRCHNER, MR ADRIAN, Director, Owners Corporation Network

THE CHAIR: We welcome the Owners Corporation Network. Do you have the pink privilege statement in front of you?

Mr Evans: Yes, that is correct.

THE CHAIR: Could I confirm that you have read the privilege card and that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Mr Evans: That is correct, yes.

Mr Makeham-Kirchner: Yes, I do.

THE CHAIR: Before we get to questions, do you have a brief opening statement?

Mr Evans: My name is Jack Evans. I am here in one sense as a substitute for Gary Petherbridge, who is the chairman of the Owners Corporation Network. As I think most of you would be very much aware, the Owners Corporation Network is in a sense a peak body for owners of strata properties in the ACT. Membership is usually through the various owners corporations being members of the Owners Corporation Network. I am not directly an official of the network, but I do work closely with Gary on a number of matters. We are both residents of the same complex and we have done quite a bit of work together on that. As he is overseas at the moment, he asked me to stand here for him. Adrian has provided a great deal of assistance in putting our submission together. Perhaps you might like to say a few words on that before we go on?

Mr Makeham-Kirchner: Just briefly I will introduce myself. I am the director of Economic Intelligence. It is a small micro Canberra consulting entity. I work either directly or through other private sector corporations dealing with public sector, private sector, for-purpose sector kinds of activities and mostly in the space of applied economics, statistics, systems analysts, analysis and strategy.

My interest with the Owners Corporation Network happened when, through a friend, Gary was referred to me. He had been set a challenge in some of the discussions around the unit title changes that occurred. He was asked to lift the level of the analysis to do things like comparing apples with apples, looking at the whole system. He was challenged on demonstrating whether it was an equitable change or an efficient change. The onus was put on the Owners Corporation Network. It was just an opportunity really to help pull together an argument that would help the Owners Corporation do that.

Mr Evans: I might start with the substance of our concerns. The genesis of everything relates very much to the change that was made to the way in which rates were calculated for strata properties. The change was made in the 2017-18 budget. I will not go into what the changes were, but they were a part of what was explained by the justification at the time of a concern that, compared to freestanding properties, single dwelling properties, units, based on their improved value, were not contributing

equitably to the overall revenue generation from the rates tax.

I am somewhat sceptical—it is perhaps the right word—as to whether this was a genuine concern that related to a major issue of equity or whether it was just a basis for justifying what really was a grab for cash. I am doing work which will be submitted to the public accounts committee review of the rates determination methodology. But that is an issue for another day and another committee. What, to me, is clear is that the policy approach that was adopted for last year's budget, in terms of the way the value-based charge is calculated, has basically created a great number of, as I understand them, unforeseen or unexpected consequences.

I would like to dwell on three areas in that regard. Firstly, I refer to the treasury release of their modelling, which happened in April this year, which reported that 41,000-plus strata properties suffered great increases in the extremes of over 55 per cent and also observed that 4,300 properties did not suffer any increase in rates or actually their rates went down. I find that disturbing: the policy objective as stated was to charge strata properties more on so-called equity grounds and 10 per cent of the target paid no more or even less.

Secondly, the change in methodology has created a whole new category of inequalities. This is as a consequence of the way that the overall value-based charge is determined, meaning that as the size of a strata complex increases the overall VBC consequently grows. That is then charged back at the aggregate rate to individual properties. You have a situation where, say, a one-bedroom strata unit in a smaller complex has the same or similar AUV as another strata unit in a much larger complex. They may well have the same overall improved value too, but the one in the larger complex will, because of this aggregation, end up paying a sizeable amount extra in terms of rates cost.

We have made quite a number of representations, including to members on the committee. In a sense this is probably one of the most disturbing, at least to me, consequences of what happened in last year's budget. To some degree, I see this having been addressed in the way the rates charges have been proposed or structured for this year's budget. Even then, I still find that there has been a further unjustifiable and inequitable bonanza created with these changes for the largest, most valuable single dwelling properties in the ACT.

This is because the VBC, the value-based charge, for the top brackets of AUV above the \$600,000 has been reduced to 0.57 per cent below that which applied in 2016-17. The properties that did not suffer the massive increases in rates in 2017-18 were the single dwelling properties, compared with strata properties, which suffered these rates. This year they will lose the \$100 concession that was so generously provided by the government to strata properties in 2017-18.

All this means that, for single dwellings which have an AUV of \$880,000 or more, their rates, subject to the AUV not changing, will come down this year. Slightly under that \$880,000 figure, the savings on the top VBC charge more than offsets the \$62 increase in the fixed and other common charges and the increase in the base VBC charge, which together add \$87.50 to the average rates. So that means that, to actually recover that from the top charge, your AUV needs to be \$879,553.

Having said that, what am I looking for in this exercise? I accept that there is probably no practical option at this stage to propose changes to the 2018-19 budget, though I do wonder how well the benefits of those on the top end of single dwellings will go down in terms of other quarters. To me, the focus is very much on the PAC review into the rate-setting methodology. I hope that the government will take notice of things like the issues we have submitted here today, to look to develop a better structured set of arrangements which do deliver equity, not erode it. Thank you.

MS LEE: Thank you very much for your comprehensive opening and for your submission as well. You mentioned in your opening that there were some 41,000 people who were seeing an increase in rates, on average, of about 55 per cent.

Mr Evans: No, maximum 55 per cent.

MS LEE: Maximum 55 per cent. Given that huge increase, have there been any changes to the government services that you have seen in the budget?

Mr Evans: Personally I would not say I have seen any, no.

Mr Makeham-Kirchner: I think if you look to some of the submissions that were made to the PAC inquiry as well you will see that they outline quite extensively a lot of the services that are undertaken on strata title blocks that are not services that the government are required to provide.

MS LEE: And on that, what has happened to strata fees in the same amount of time that the rates have gone up?

Mr Evans: Obviously they are varied. Generally, you can expect the strata fees will increase at or around the rate of inflation. The circumstances can vary from complex to complex. For example, I will use my own complex of Landmark. Last year we did not increase our rates at all. We held them constant.

MS LEE: Strata rates?

Mr Evans: Yes—strata rates. But this year we are facing quite a sizeable increase. It all depends on what stage the complex is in, what the sinking fund requires in the way of support. Each case is different.

MS LEE: Sure. And in terms of the increases in the rates that you have seen, does that get passed down, if you are a landlord, to the tenant?

Mr Evans: Obviously it increases the pressure on the landlord in terms of their receiving a remuneration that they are happy with from their investment. Whether it is strata charges or government rates, it all adds to the cost side of the owner's equation. The only way they can relieve that pressure if they are not prepared to take a reduced return, is to look to increase their revenue stream; that is, their rent.

Mr Makeham-Kirchner: I add to that. When you were reflecting on that you were looking a lot at the value-based charge. If we look at all the taxes charged to rateable

properties, you see that almost all components of that have actually increased as well. If you are a landlord it would be the general rates. If it is in a unit title it would be the change in the valuation methodology on the general rates, the land tax, plus the change in the valuation method from the land tax, the fixed charge—

MS LEE: Double whammy.

Mr Makeham-Kirchner: the safer families levy. I think that is it for that. There are other taxes on land. The others are on improved value.

MS ORR: Just clarifying: the strata levies are set by the owners corporation for each building? That is my understanding.

Mr Evans: That is correct.

MS ORR: It is based on their budgetary requirements for things like maintenance of the building, paying the fees of the company doing their accountancy—all those things that go to the running of the building. Is that correct?

Mr Evans: That is correct. Yes.

MS ORR: So they are quite different to the services and the things that you would expect to get, say, from the rates, which is quite a different proposition. Is that fair to say?

Mr Makeham-Kirchner: There are all-site utilities as well. These would otherwise be main road kind of utilities, and those various bits and pieces that are under the ground.

MS ORR: Like what?

MS LE COUTEUR: Like what? And I do live in a unit complex.

Mr Evans: One example is garbage collection. I will quote the one I know best, which is the one I live in. We actually do the consolidation from the individual units into garbage collection, local rooms in each of the buildings. We then do the consolidation from those rooms into hoppers, which then are collected by the ACT government contractor. The alternative would be each individual unit having their own ACT government issued rubbish bin and trying to put all 282 of them out on the footpath.

MS CHEYNE: Could they just take them down to the hopper themselves? It has certainly been the case in many units I have visited.

Mr Evans: Yes, you could. You take them from the unit to somewhere, whether that is to, in our case, a room in the basement of the building or to a general hopper, if you have a single building. Our complex has eight buildings. That is why the extra step is in there.

MS LE COUTEUR: Nonetheless, I think for everyone in the ACT there is some

initial process whereby you take your rubbish somewhere. There may then be a couple of processes in that, depending on where you live. Eventually the ACT government collects.

MS LEE: Yes, but a household of four people is different to 220 people.

MS LE COUTEUR: Not necessarily in terms of the amount of effort per person. I am not seeing the thinking that unit body corporates have to do proportionately more work for their rubbish collection.

THE ACTING CHAIR: Is there another example beyond rubbish collection that you could give?

Mr Makeham-Kirchner: I think this is partly why, when the onus was put back onto OCN to look a bit bigger, we started to look at the purpose of taxation. If you look at the general rates and the land tax system generally, it is designed traditionally to fund municipal services, which might be local roads, local infrastructure and all these other various things. You could probably babble about it, unit complex by unit complex, to work out who gets better average services, but if you look at the system as a whole, what is the purpose of the rates-raising task?

THE ACTING CHAIR: I completely appreciate your point about municipal services if we were a council, but we have both territory and state government responsibilities, so rates pay for things that everyone uses, like roads.

Mr Makeham-Kirchner: And the grants commission recognises that in the way it transfers funds to the ACT as well. I think it is in the order of an additional \$100 million for local government functions. There is a philosophical dimension to the argument if you want to look at what is actually being funded by the rates component. The change in the rates component is designed to fund the forecast change in conveyance duty. That is the tax reform task. What is the tax bucket left after those things have happened, and how does that get distributed back across the services that the ACT government provides?

Obviously, the commonwealth government provide a very large and growing proportion of the ACT budget as untied GST revenue. In addition, they pay specific purpose payments for health, education and infrastructure services. In addition, we get the ACT municipal services additional untied grant and the standard local government transfer as well. If you are looking at funding the local equivalent services out of the local equivalent tax, if the local equivalent tax starts to get well and truly ahead of the local equivalent services you could cynically say that you are raising too much. But that is a tax mix question as much as what you are actually getting out of the services that are being funded from the tax.

MS LE COUTEUR: I think we are talking about two things here. We are talking about what rates you pay for, which is an issue. But we started this discussion on whether or not owners corporations should provide so many services internally that they should not pay as much in rates. That is where I am not really convinced. We have talked about garbage. We usually talk about driveways and landscaping, all of which a single residence has to provide as well.

Mr Evans: Another factor in terms of what the government provides is public access through the road systems, footpaths and the equivalent.

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes.

Mr Evans: Again, to take our example, it worked out that we average about the equivalent of one linear metre of footpath and one linear metre of road per unit. That compares with, say, single dwellings, which may be 20 metres in terms of the length of their street frontage. Therefore, the demand on government services must be greater.

MS LE COUTEUR: But people who live in body corporates still use other pieces of roads and walk along the footpaths, not just the ones immediately adjacent to them, the same as people in single residences.

Mr Evans: Accepted. Yes, that is right. But in terms of the facilities immediately beneficial to them, there are differences. The garbage one, I admit, is probably the best example of where what a lot of the strata properties have to do does reduce the demand on what the government services then provide.

Mr Makeham-Kirchner: If you look at the genesis of this aspect of the policy in the budget papers, it was not really a part of the taxation reform discussion. It has been referred to as being, as far as is pointed out, part of the bucket of funds for territory services. All of the argument on equity and efficiency has been linked to the comparison of the improved capital value of properties in different environments. So in relation to that debate around equity and efficiency—and that was set as the bar for us in the discussion with government—the lens through which they are looking is that high level of equity and efficiency. There is even a notion of whether or not owners corporations offset government expenditure to a significant degree that has not necessarily formed part of that discussion. It has been much more about what is the implied value of the property and the relative cost of the tax, based on that implied value. We are just trying to engage with the way the government has set the framework for the debate.

MS ORR: I am trying to follow the thinking that you are putting behind your arguments. In relation to the garbage, I can see how your thinking goes. I am just not sure if it equates to a strata area being that much materially different to any other property that has to have the garbage taken away. Just based on what you have said, Mr Makeham-Kirchner, it has been a very detailed discussion and I am trying not to make it any more confusing than it has already been in the detailed questions. My question is about the concept—I am just not following this part of it—that if you are going to be paying X amount then you should have X number of services. Given that it goes much broader, in the services that you do receive, than just rubbish collection, and given that so many other people across Canberra get the same services and have the same issues, I am just not following your line of argument.

Mr Makeham-Kirchner: That is why I was trying to make the observation that that part has not formed part of the priming of the debate. The debate has been about equitable and efficient, and that is where, in the submission, we have gone to look at

the various criteria for what that would actually mean back to the taxation review document, to the review of rates that was undertaken in Tasmania, and a few other productivity reports, to understand what that actually means in reality. In table 11 of the document, we do an assessment of the change against those criteria, which would be better criteria than looking at whether or not somebody gets exactly the same amount of garbage service or not. At this point it is not obvious that the equitable or inefficient argument that has been proposed is actually sustainable.

Mr Evans: The argument about the delivery of municipal services is, in a sense, a secondary argument. The critical argument is this question of equity and fairness. The government have set the benchmark where a unit in the city that is worth \$500,000 is paying less in rates than a house out in Charnwood. We think it is more complicated than that simplistic analogy.

If the government really believes that is the right way to go and that is the right benchmark to apply, maybe the answer is to stop charging on the basis of unimproved capital value and start charging on the basis of improved value. Then you would remove this inequitable arrangement with the methodology that was introduced in last year's budget, in terms of how strata units are charged, and charge every property on the same basis. We would have a situation where if I had an apartment in Barton or a house in Charnwood worth \$500,000, my rates would be the same.

MS ORR: Okay. I think there are a few things there I am not sure I quite agree with, but noting that we only have two minutes left and we said we would get to Mr Parton, I will pass to Mr Parton.

MR PARTON: Thank you. Adrian, you were talking about the owners equation earlier on and you mentioned a raft of fees and charges that have increased. For me, the core question out of all this is: does owning an apartment in Canberra as an investment stack up? Are there decent yields and capital growth in owning an apartment in the ACT? Are we are seeing and hearing anecdotally of investors throwing their arms in the air and selling? What is going on?

Mr Makeham-Kirchner: I suppose I can hit the technical part. There are two parts that you are talking about. If you look at the publicly available price path information, we created the index in the report, setting it at around 2012 to look at the relative price increases, just in case there is a wealth counterfactual. Some people will argue yes, but their wealth is increasing and that is okay. What is very clear is that the index for unit dwellings is flat, so capital growth does not seem to be occurring in that market. Detached dwellings seem to be going up, and the wedge between the two is growing.

In terms of the charges, this is partly why we are challenged to look at the whole system, to compare apples with apples. You look at the whole land intervention model. What we have been talking about, really, in a lot of the debates is just the valuation charge and the rates equation. If you add together the various things like the fees—actually, I will not go back to the development side. If you just look at the rates and the land tax, the components within those, and still have the presence of a conveyance duty, albeit smaller, if you were a logical investor it would be difficult to make a decision to buy here now.

MR PARTON: Is that being reflected by people within the owners corporation? Are you getting feedback that for some we have moved within a margin that is not really comfortable enough for them to remain in their investment—or not?

Mr Evans: I would say—and this, I would emphasise, is very much limited knowledge on my part—that it is at the rumbling stage at the moment. We had a general meeting in the grounds at our complex several months ago, on Saturday morning—

MR PARTON: Out by the big skip bin.

Mr Evans: Not quite.

MR PARTON: Don't start that again.

Mr Evans: The skip bin is usually pretty smelly by then. The turn-up was pretty impressive. There were a lot of people there who were investors and were expressing concerns and saying, “We have problems in terms of how much it is costing us and what we can reasonably expect to get back in terms of rent.”

Mr Makeham-Kirchner: I suspect that is also the people who are currently invested.

Mr Evans: Yes.

Mr Makeham-Kirchner: For people who are making new investment decisions, that is where it is hard to see the logic.

Mr Evans: Yes. I cannot comment on that.

MS ORR: Just as a supplementary to that, Adrian, you said that this was the theoretical argument: that if you follow X, Y and Z, this is the outcome you will get. Mr Evans, you have spoken quite a bit about the anecdotal evidence from your own experience. I am just wondering about beyond that. I am happy to put on the record that I live in an apartment, like many other people, in a unit complex.

THE ACTING CHAIR: I think all of us here do.

MS ORR: Yes. I think Mr Parton does not but the rest of us do. My experience in my building at the moment is that we are receiving flyers from real estate agents saying, “There is huge demand. Are you interested in selling? We have people asking.”

MS LE COUTEUR: Of course real estate agents are going to say that.

MS ORR: Of course they are going to say it, but there is a difference between saying it and actually doing letterbox drops consistently all the time.

Mr Evans: It is called marketing.

MS ORR: We also have a situation where things that are going on the market, and there are quite a lot that have been going on the market, are selling within weeks.

Mr Makeham-Kirchner: All I can really say is that sometimes when you look at indicators, you look at the canary indicators. The lending data seems to be going backwards quite dramatically. With the approvals data—I am just trying to remember if it is quarterly or monthly—approvals for units are higher than for houses, and that is probably reflecting the relative supply position. But the lending ones certainly are down. The price index historically, from at least 2012 till now, is flat.

I say logically, because if you are making an investment decision—Caroline may have a different view; I acknowledge this is her field—you want to be able to make a rate of return on something. If the price is not going anywhere, the initial entry cost is high and the ongoing operating costs are increasing as well as there being an additional increase from the valuation, it would be very hard to find someone who would say voluntarily, “I will pay all that right here.”

MS ORR: Just quickly, to the best of your knowledge, though, is that an ACT-specific trend or is it happening across Australia in other jurisdictions as well?

Mr Makeham-Kirchner: The ACT market is the relevant one for this tax; I have not really looked at the other ones. There are different market dynamics, different demands, different populations and those sorts of things. I do not know of any other jurisdiction that is doing this kind of change.

MS ORR: I was referring more to the growth in units and the other factors that you pointed out, whether there is any experience in other jurisdictions that you are aware of that would contextualise it more.

Mr Makeham-Kirchner: Not off the top of my head. It is all the same datasets, but I only analysed this one.

MS ORR: That is fine.

THE ACTING CHAIR: We need to finish there. Thank you very much for appearing today. I do not think you took anything on notice, so you are off the hook there.

Mr Makeham-Kirchner: Some of it was a bit technical, so if you have any follow-up questions, I am happy to help.

MS LE COUTEUR: Talking about the technical side, it was very impressive.

Mr Makeham-Kirchner: Thank you. When you get set a challenge, you like to meet it.

ROWLAND, MS CAMILLA, Chief Executive Officer, Marymead Child and Family Centre

GARVAN, DR JOAN, Paediatric researcher, Marymead Child and Family Centre

THE ACTING CHAIR: Good afternoon. Before we start, can you familiarise yourselves with the pink privilege statement and confirm that you have read the statement and that you understand the privilege implications?

Ms Rowland: I have read the pink statement and the other associated documents that come with it. Thank you; I accept those.

THE ACTING CHAIR: Dr Garvan, for the record, have you also read the statement and do you understand it?

Dr Garvan: Yes, I have.

THE ACTING CHAIR: Before we begin, do you have an opening statement?

Ms Rowland: We do. I will speak to our budget submission that we put in, in a little more detail. Joan is also going to talk about some of the underpinning research that goes behind that as well. This is our second budget submission around the PAIRup project. The difference between this one and the first one is that we updated the research information for this year. We have greater stakeholder commitment to this, a broader range of stakeholders that we have actually connected with and, furthermore, it is actually slightly different in that we are recommending a pilot for this particular project.

For about two years we have been in development with a group of stakeholders around meeting a need in the ACT. That need is for a parenting-mentoring service for parents of zero to four-year-olds that goes beyond what the MACH nurses do, which is obviously early maternal and child health. It is very much focused on the physical health of the baby and the initial physical and mental health of the mother.

This is a service that goes beyond that. We are one of the few jurisdictions in Australia that does not have this service. At the current time, the ACT government does have the child and family centres, a centre-based service, but not an outreach service. This is the provision of an outreach service that includes both phone lines and outreach mentoring. I would also like to say that not only is this for mothers of babies of zero to four-year-olds and the babies themselves, but it is also for fathers, where required.

Who has been involved in this? We certainly had the Women's Centre for Health Matters, QE2, the MACH nurses themselves, ACT Parenting Group, PANDSI and, of course, we have also had a couple of representatives from the Indigenous community who are workers in this area.

MS LEE: Just on that, can I just interrupt, sorry? Did you have any sort of consultation from any of the multicultural or CALD communities?

Ms Rowland: Not specifically; however, there certainly has been in some of the

meetings that we have held. For example, at one of the meetings we held with the Women's Centre for Health Matters, we had a couple of women from the multicultural organisations, yes.

So the "why" is that there is a gap. We are finding more and more women coming with mental health issues, with babies and with young children, accessing secondary and tertiary services in organisations like Marymead. This is where our interest was piqued initially, as a child, youth and family centre. We are probably the largest child, youth and family provider in early intervention in the ACT and the surrounding New South Wales region.

It came to our attention because Joan Garvan and other stakeholders were saying that we really are finding a gap here. Paediatricians such as Sue Packer also said that we are finding increasingly that mothers are having issues with their mental health, with domestic violence and with depression. All this, of course, feeds into their needing to access secondary and tertiary help. Basically we were asked, "Marymead, what can you do?" So we formed this group. Joan has done some research behind this. I will ask Joan to speak about some of the research that goes behind this.

Dr Garvan: There are a couple of opening comments I want to make. The ACT government is innovative and takes the lead often in policy. But from my point of view, I think we are falling behind in this area. I see it as a gap. Marymead is providing an opportunity for leadership.

I have categorised the research under the headings of "Prevention and Early Intervention", "Strengthening Families", and "Community Development". They are the three aspects that come out that are directly related to this project. At beyondblue and the Murdoch Children's Research Institute, it is well known that depression is a serious health issue for women after the birth of an infant. One in 10 women experience depression during pregnancy. One in seven women, or 16 per cent, experience depression in the first year after the birth.

There is a spike in depression at 12 months and another spike at four years, which clearly falls out of the maternal and child health area. More recently, there has been research to show that two in every five mothers with depression, in the first year after the birth, have experienced domestic violence. In the ACT we have had those two recent cases of women with children who have been murdered.

The Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence found critical links between violence and marriage breakdown and homelessness. There is a spike in domestic violence during pregnancy and there is a prevalence of violence to children in those early years. Research backed that up. There was a recognition by the royal commission of the early years and important welfare services. Really interestingly, after the royal commission they followed up with an inquiry into perinatal mental health. The report is due in the next week or so. It is clearly looking at those early years support services. I am very keen to see that report.

Locally, the Australian Women's Centre for Health Matters have done a research project into maternal health in those early years. They found low consumer satisfaction in that postnatal phase and support in the ACT. That was substantiated

again by that Victorian royal commission, in a submission made by the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation.

Dr Tim Moore from the Murdoch Children's Research Centre—all this research on baby brains is very prevalent these days—is arguing very strongly for a holistic response to supporting children at early years. Importantly, this includes support for young families, that first 1,000 days movement, which is an international movement. In the ACT, the Australian early development census found that there has been a decline in child outcomes over recent years. The ACT population health strategic framework identified the social determinants of the health approach to policy and practice and emphasised prevention, early intervention and health promotion. On that aspect, that is a lot of emphasis on prevention.

In terms of strengthening families, my background is in sociology. Across the sociology research it is shown that women hold families together. This is contributing to social capital. I think that is a given. These days women are trying to do it all. They are working and holding families together. So there is a lot of stress on them. I think that depression is, importantly, connected to that. They see that their benefits, their superannuation, are going to be affected, their career is going to be affected, and they are trying to hold things together. I am sure that is a contributing factor.

The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth did a really significant study *Better systems, better chances*. In their findings they argued that effective prevention and early intervention is possibly the most promising strategy for changing the trajectories for children. This is, again, followed up and strengthened by the first 1,000 days movement. Interestingly, in Australia and often in other places around the world, there is an emphasis on nutrition in that movement. An Aboriginal-led project in first 1,000 days is taking a holistic approach to this in strengthening families and promoting community development. I see that as a leader.

The Women's Centre for Health Matters recommends improved home visiting schemes for new mothers and systems to better identify the needs of new parents. That is local research. Other local research, parenting programs in the ACT, recommended greater investment in providing support to parents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Aboriginal families, and support for young parents.

In terms of community development, the Benevolent Society and Families First in New South Wales and Queensland have been running programs along the lines of PAIRup for quite some years now. They have been evaluated by the University of New South Wales and found to be benefiting parents and good for the volunteers who are paired up with the families. It is also about community development.

Ms Rowland: Those are skilled volunteers. We met with the Deputy Director-General of the Community Services Directorate about this proposal initially. There was great in-principle support for this. We also met with Minister Rachel Stephen-Smith at the time and she was very interested in this. This was about a year and a half ago. We have since met also with the health minister's adviser on this. I think there is probably some recognition that it actually crosses over both directorates in terms of portfolios because it is both early intervention for the child but also primary health prevention

for the mother or, in some cases, the father.

We have also sought to put in for the ACT health promotions grants for this project as an 18-month project to at least pilot it or trial it. The amount sought is \$480,000, which we believe is very cost effective when we measure this against other projects and other jurisdictions. It is basically an outreach home-visiting service. This is what the demand is, anecdotally as well; this is what people are wanting, which is how it is different from the child and family centres.

There are some people who do not want to go to what appear to be government institutional centres, not that there is anything wrong with the centres, but there is a lack of anonymity. It is very centre-based and appointment-based, whereas if people are allocated mentors, clinically trained volunteers as well as supervisors in their home, which is an individualised support, it also enables us to work with some really complex families that we are not going to get to at centres. We can actually go to their homes or to places of their choice.

The reason we wanted to present on this is that we have had good, significant stakeholder support, and to a certain extent government support, but we do not seem to be going anywhere with our budget submissions around this. So we were a bit surprised and disappointed that it has not got beyond this point. We really wanted to emphasise with our stakeholder group that has been involved in this how important this actually is as a strategy. We are very aware that there is a 10-year early intervention strategy that is currently being developed across JACS, education, Health and Community Services.

But what we have been told at the consultations is that it is not actually about new money or new programs at this stage. What they are hoping to do is migrate existing providers for the first few years to sort of have that evolutionary basis in terms of what programs might exist. In the meantime, while that strategy is being developed, while there is potentially money in a few years' time, we actually have a whole cohort of families that are really starting to hit that secondary and tertiary level. That is the end of our presentation.

THE ACTING CHAIR: What sort of government funding do you currently receive?

Ms Rowland: At Marymead?

THE ACTING CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Rowland: To do this type of work or any work?

THE ACTING CHAIR: Give me a little breakdown.

Ms Rowland: Marymead has almost 20 programs. We have a budget of around \$15 million, now coming up to around \$16 million. Most of our early intervention money in the ACT is actually provided by the commonwealth government.

We have \$5,000 from the Community Services Directorate to run the grandparents group. We did have \$24,000 until last year and we now have \$5,000, which is a

separate issue. We have funding from ACT Health around circle of security family counselling, which is significant. We also have funding to do CASP, which is the old home and community care funding, where we work with children and young people with disabilities. That helps fund kids' companions and a whole range of other disability support services.

We also have funding that comes through from time to time with fee for service. We are the only organisation that does emergency crisis accommodation for children where there is a family breakdown. I am not talking about out of home care; I am saying separately from out of home care. We generally do that on a fee-for-service basis to different government departments.

From a commonwealth level, we get funding from Attorney-General's. We do all the supervised contact in the ACT for the Family Court and the separated families counselling. We get funding from DSS for a whole range of counselling programs and early intervention programs. Probably one of the highlights for us is the early intervention mental health program for children which is funded by DSS, called new horizons. That is an outreach service that works with the schools, the health providers and the families, for children from zero to 18—our youngest is four years old at the moment—who have emerging mental health issues. They are not at that secondary and tertiary chronic stage. It is about building resilience.

We have significant New South Wales funding now to do a whole range of early interventions as well as out of home care. And education. We have just been funded to coordinate the whole in home care child care in the ACT.

THE ACTING CHAIR: Could you state again for me—I missed it—how much you are seeking with the—

Ms Rowland: It is \$480,000 for an 18-month pilot project. And we compared that with other similar projects across Australia.

THE ACTING CHAIR: It is not just a pie in the sky figure; it is an informed figure?

Ms Rowland: No, we have got a fully funded costing spreadsheet that goes behind it, and how many FTEs and what the operating costs are.

MS LEE: Can I confirm that basically the feedback was: “We are just not starting new programs now”? Is that what you said earlier?

Ms Rowland: Yes. Essentially what we have been advised in consultations is that the existing funding in early intervention will continue with existing providers for the next few years while the new early intervention strategy is being developed and rolled out. They are not talking about open tender processes or processes at this stage to invest in programs like this.

MS LE COUTEUR: Has the situation with early intervention got worse with the NDIS? I am also on a different inquiry looking at that, and that is the impression I am getting. Is this partly a response to changes that have happened with that or is there an existing lack anyway?

Ms Rowland: We presented to the NDIS inquiry recently.

MS LE COUTEUR: I do remember this.

Ms Rowland: To answer Tara's question as well, which is about funding, about 20 to 25 per cent of our funding is NDIS funding. We are specifically working with children and young people and their carers on a whole range of different disability services. We have actually noticed that the funding and the plans that come through on the NDIS are specifically for the child: therapies and supports for that child. It is not around services for the carer or the parent. We have complex families. That is where we are noticing—to answer your question, Caroline—that families who have never been part of out of home care or care and protection are starting to fail. I am assuming they are failing.

MS LE COUTEUR: The NDIS would be focusing on the child much more than the family?

Ms Rowland: Correct.

MS LE COUTEUR: That is clearly the message. The other place where it would seem that possibly you could be funded would be the family safety hub. I assume that if things get bad enough you are getting to that level of problem.

Ms Rowland: Yes. I have sent the proposal to the coordinator-general for the family safety hub and my understanding is that they are more of a coordinating agency, not a funding service delivery agency. I am happy to be corrected if that is wrong.

MS LE COUTEUR: You are probably correct. This is eminently sensible. I have been listening to a lot of NDIS stuff.

MS LEE: I want to go back to the early intervention mental health services for children that you spoke about. It is sad and extraordinary that you are working with someone as young as four. There have been some initiatives announced in this budget for mental health services. Are you satisfied with some of the details that have been announced, or do you think that there are still gaps and you want to see more in that space, or—

Ms Rowland: We see gaps. We understand what is being funded and where the priorities are. And we do believe there are still gaps that need to be considered. I have made an appointment to see Minister Rattenbury to talk about particularly the new horizons early intervention program for children with emerging mental health issues. But I had not—

MS LEE: As you mentioned, that was actually funded by the New South Wales government.

Ms Rowland: It is funded by the commonwealth government from DSS, for the ACT and surrounding Queanbeyan, out to the Braidwood region. I think that programs like new horizons for the early intervention for children also work with the parents as well.

And there could be scope for this within that, because this is an early intervention mental health measure for mothers as well. That is where a lot of the issues come in relation to domestic violence, mental health.

MS LEE: And you said that you work with schools with that program as well?

Ms Rowland: Yes, we do.

MS LEE: Is there more or further support that we should be giving our schools, school leaders and teachers to identify and deal with emerging mental health issues, especially in our younger children?

Ms Rowland: The way new horizons works—and there are a few of these new horizons-type projects in Australia, but we are obviously the only one for this region—is that it works with the child and it is a continuum of care. It also works with the parents. We work with the child and the family wherever they are at. Often it is working with the teachers, around a specific child, in the context of their situation. We might also do some skilling and education with the teacher around this and how to work with this child.

At the same time, we often work with a health practitioner. And the beautiful thing about this program is that it is not narrowed down to a few short months. Sometimes we work with a child for up to a year, building resilience, building coping strategies for the family. What is really interesting is that we have found, having delivered this now for over three years—and we were asked to present at an international mental health conference a couple of years ago and we were able to tell them this through our information—that 90 per cent of the children have a parent who has experienced their own mental health issues.

To more specifically answer your question, we would see that any further funding that we could access to provide more support to the schools would be really fantastic and very valuable.

MS LEE: You talked about some of the gaps that you see and you wanted to let the minister know. Are there some specific gaps that you wanted to share with the committee as well and that you wanted to raise?

Ms Rowland: In terms of the mental health side? One is the fact that this new horizons project is a project; it is not ongoing. It goes for a certain number of years. It is not recurrent service delivery forever. I really think that the ACT government needs to pick up and run with and expand on this type of service. There is not any other service quite like it in the ACT.

In terms of mental health for mothers, in relation to the PAIRup budget submission, we certainly see that, even if there was an opportunity to work with mothers who are starting to experience mental health issues, that could be an avenue to support a similar program to this. Often the mental health issues do come out—in terms of people's exhaustion and having gone through childbirth—in those first few months.

MS ORR: Can I clarify just quickly: you mentioned that you had been involved in

conversations about the early childhood strategy that is currently under development, and through that it had been indicated there would be project funding, but it is an ongoing conversation that is—

Ms Rowland: What we have been advised as of this week—the community consultations took place this week—is that the aim of the ACT government is to have the strategy developed by the end of August, and from there they will have an indication of what the steps will be in a 10-year plan. What we were also advised is that in the short term there is not additional funding committed to initiatives. It is about utilising existing funding and existing contractors who provide that and potentially, over time and over years, changing what they may deliver. But that is the short term.

What we would say is that this program is needed now and that the longer we leave it, the greater impact we are going to have on access for people, leading to secondary and tertiary inappropriate hospital admissions. That is the biggest primary issue that we are concerned about. There is family breakdown. It is not just the hospital admissions of the mothers who are not coping; it is the family breakdown and domestic violence that we are very concerned about.

THE ACTING CHAIR: Thank you very much for appearing today.

Ms Rowland: Thank you.

THE ACTING CHAIR: It has been very helpful. We now are suspending for 15 minutes for afternoon tea. We will resume at 3.30 pm with the Belconnen Community Council. Thank you, Marymead.

Hearing suspended from 3.14 to 3.29 pm.

HYDE, MR GLEN, Chair, Belconnen Community Council

HAAS, MR DAMIEN, Deputy Chair, Belconnen Community Council

THE ACTING CHAIR: Please be aware that today's proceedings are being recorded and broadcast, and they will be published. Could you please take a moment to familiarise yourselves with the privilege statement that is in front of you. Could you please confirm that you have read it and that you understand the privilege implications contained within it?

Mr Hyde: I have read the privilege statement and I am quite fine with it, thank you.

Mr Haas: I have read the privilege statement and I understand it.

THE ACTING CHAIR: Thank you. Before we go to questions, do you have an opening statement?

Mr Hyde: The Belconnen Community Council welcomes the opportunity to comment on this year's budget outcomes. Thanks to the committee for the opportunity to hear from the people of Belconnen. The 2018-19 budget has provided significant amenity and funding for infrastructure that is greatly needed in the Belconnen district.

Our budget submission, which was provided to the Chief Minister and Treasurer in February, was warmly received by all Ginninderra and Yerrabi MLAs who spoke with us. It represents the important social and community values that the people of Belconnen want to see from their government. Additionally, it provides some enduring infrastructure that binds and secures our future as the jewel in Canberra's crown.

Our roadways have been in dire need of upgrading to protect and ensure the safety of road users, cyclists and pedestrians in our suburbs. The burgeoning suburbs to our northern and southern borders are of great concern to our residents and business owners in relation to the pressure on current resources such as schools, shops, parking, playgrounds and green spaces.

The excellent work done by our former chair, Ms Tara Cheyne, has cemented those needs in the minds of government. That many of those items have been delivered on in this budget is not lost on us. Similarly, the duplication of William Slim Drive and the increased amenity that this will bring to our people in Giralang and Kaleen is, in our view, due to the work done by Ms Suzanne Orr over a number of years to highlight the need for better connections between Gungahlin and Belconnen through this busy corridor. Our deputy chair, Mr Damien Haas, has also campaigned long and hard on the issue and it is a testament to their efforts that we have a result in 2018 rather than a date in the future.

We thank the government for hearing our concerns on roads and the safety of our people but feel there is more to be done. We value the government's support and we will continue to talk with government to ensure we convey our district's needs, to maintain and improve the amenity for our current residents and businesses. This will be an increasing challenge, given the expansion to our south-west at Ginninderry and west Belconnen, as well as the possible infill at the Ginninderra field station in the

north.

In relation to health services, tomorrow marks the opening of the UC hospital. This facility will deliver benefits not just for the good people of Belconnen but for those in the territory more broadly. The government's commitment to improving emergency services at Calvary hospital, the investment of Moran health to offset aged and specialty care services in the UC precinct and more childcare places puts Belconnen in an enviable position. Yet there is more to do in health services, and the 25-year contract for services that should be the business of government is but one.

Transport options for our district rated highly in our people's feedback over the last four years. We have previously missed out on a number of network upgrades. However, in 2018-19 we hope—at least I hope, as a former transport officer—we can positively influence change. We have a network consultation process about to commence, with the excess bus hours being made available with the light rail network coming online. We think this is a perfect opportunity to make changes in our district, and in particular in west Belconnen. If people continue to have to drive to and from work rather than take advantage of an enhanced bus network, we have failed on the government's target to reduce emissions and promote active travel.

We salute the government on the Belconnen bikeway project. It picks up on our request to revive the old busway and provide a community facility. The flexibility of the stakeholders to take on the community's concerns about the route and the need to build a facility behind the Belconnen Arts Centre have been embraced by government and delivered in this budget. We will have a purpose-built facility that connects our district, town centres and centres of excellence like no other in the territory. We believe this is highly commendable.

Finally, I would like to mention the increased public amenity of the upgrading of the Higgins ovals. This will bring the western suburbs of Belconnen greater facility and amenity and, as Deputy Chief Minister Yvette Berry said, "We can't wait for a decision on the Kippax group centre proposal, so I want to commit us to improving sporting amenity here in Higgins."

We look forward to assisting the government and the Belconnen community to progress the issues that are important to our residents and business owners in the years to come, and we thank the committee for its indulgence.

Mr Haas: I have some comments as well. I do not have a written speech but I have a few dot points. I would like to tie them to the budget submission that the BCC made, with page numbers for your convenience. First of all, generally the BCC are pleased with the budget allocations for Belconnen, especially the town centre improvements that Glen mentioned, particularly on Benjamin Way. That is something that is long overdue. Also, the tying up of the Lake Ginninderra boardwalk or the shared zone has not yet been determined.

I would like to speak to some of the recommendations from the BCC budget submission. Page 4 refers to the improvement of local bus services. We think that is a vital thing. We are hoping that the TCCS bus consultation regarding network 19 brings improved local bus connections with the rapids that have been introduced

across the ACT. We would particularly like to see an ACTION bus connection to Strathnairn. We are aware that the private developer of Strathnairn has an arrangement with the BCS to provide bus services from the outset, but we think that an ACTION bus service would be a good idea, connecting to the Kippax bus station.

On page 5 of our budget submission we talk about light rail. We would like to see light rail stage 3 go to Belconnen from Civic—preferably to Kippax, as shown in the light rail master plan, but initially at least to the Belconnen town centre.

On page 12 of our budget submission we make reference to a shared path from Lawson to the Belconnen town centre. We would like to see some budget allocation placed towards that. We understand it is not in this year's budget, but we would like to see that made available in some way in future years. We think it is vital. There is no estate development plan for the part of Lawson between where it is currently being built around the substation and down to the lake. We would like to see a shared path around Lake Ginninderra. Even though that is not in the Ginninderra electorate, it is in the Yerrabi electorate, and Belconnen crosses both electorates. We hope that is not a problem when it comes to finding some funding.

On page 11 we talk about roads around Kuringa. We would like to see the ACT government start some preliminary talks with the CSIRO and the co-developer that they partner with on the redevelopment of the field site. We would like to see the Barton Highway connected to Kingsford Smith Drive by rerouting Kuringa. We think that would provide a lot of benefits to people coming off the Barton Highway, residents currently in Belconnen and new residents that will be attracted there.

On page 13 we talk about promoting pop-up markets and pop-up festivals. Currently, the remand centre site on the corner of Cohen and Lathlain has been rehabilitated and is entirely vacant. We would like to see some form of event—either regular or semi-permanent—there, until that land is sold off by the Suburban Land Agency, which we know from the budget papers is in the forward land sales.

One of the things that has become clear over the last year is that we feel there is a need for a town centre coordinator, maybe not just for Belconnen but for each town centre, similar to what the now defunct In The City operation did—not an authorising body but somebody that coordinates events and logistics not just for government but for large private events and functions that are going on. We think that is something that is worth exploring.

THE ACTING CHAIR: Mr Haas, you mentioned in your comments that you are aware of the updated indicative land release program. What views does the BCC have about some of the land that is being proposed to be released? I note that something that has been on the forward program for many years now looks like it is going to happen very soon—the car park across from the Belconnen community centre. I would appreciate your comments on the timing of that and the appropriateness of land release generally but especially in the town centre.

Mr Haas: Certainly, the LDA, the Suburban Land Agency, could work better with community groups to identify what their views are.

THE ACTING CHAIR: There is no LDA.

Mr Haas: Sorry, formerly the LDA, now the Suburban Land Agency. We think they could work better with community groups to figure out a way forward for land release. The particular block that you are referring to, while the current Belconnen Community Service building is occupied we feel the sale is a bit premature. It is a heavily utilised community centre with no large on-street parking nearby. We also understand the other large parking site on the other side of the community bus station is also likely to be redeveloped soon.

We understand the need for redeveloping car parks for better economic use and better use in the town centre. There are better ways that the car park can be used, but timing is crucial. One of the things in our budget submission and also in the Belconnen town centre master plan is a multistorey car park for people who work in the Belconnen town centre. So maybe instead of selling it off for a commercial use that could be a use with associated retail; I do not know.

Mr Hyde: As part of our budget submission on page 7 we talk about the appropriate consideration of land release timing, which covers off that site and a number of other sites that the community values quite highly. The old health centre area is another one of those now defunct facilities that we see some urgency around. We understand the government would like to maximise its utility in that site, but more consultation with community, particularly with residents who live directly adjacent to it, would probably fill out our requirements around an appropriate use.

THE ACTING CHAIR: The Belconnen town centre master plan intimated that Lathlain Street could be better utilised and almost made the main street in Belconnen town centre, particularly with the repurposing of all the sites, including the remand centre and what is nearby. But I note that a lot of that land release has been pushed back quite a few years. Do you see any problems with that or do you support that?

Mr Haas: I know there is a desire in marketing to create main streets and have precincts and a focus on certain areas. But although there is quite a bit of land there to be made available for residential purposes and reconverted commercial, the momentum is probably between Benjamin Way and the University of Canberra. There are residential, retail services and community facilities.

While there will be a lot of residential and there will continue to be commercial along Lathlain, I am not really sure it is ever going to be a main street, except that it is going to be heavily congested as more people move in, unless better public transport is provided. We think a focus on all areas of the town centre is important, not just on Lathlain Street. I understand that Suburban Land Agency focus will be there because that is where they have a lot of value in those blocks for the territory.

Mr Hyde: The other consideration in all of that is we talked through the Belconnen town centre master plan consultation period of how we saw the town centre from top to bottom in 10 years time and 20 years time. We do not know the future of the bus depot up in Josephson Street; we do not know what use that area might be converted to if the depot moves to Gungahlin, for instance. So if those sorts of things fell into place there was some contemplation that we might be able to use the Lathlain Street

front as a way to draw people to the west of the town centre.

While we are not opposed to that sort of thinking, there are a lot of ifs and buts that need to occur. We will be mindful of the time frames but, of course, we need to have a facility there, whatever it is, that best suits the needs of residents and business owners.

Mr Haas: The other thing I will observe also is that the University of Canberra has its own master plan, which is now late. They have already discussed residential components between their campus and the town centre. We are aware there are plans for light rail coming through that part of Canberra—not exactly sure where—at some point. When you have a large academic campus with a residential component with its own retail and Emu Bank section 200 and all these things occurring, it is really hard to say where the main street will be. I think there will be multiple main streets, which is not necessarily a bad thing.

MS LEE: In the interests of time and given this is Ms Orr's electorate, I will give her the opportunity first.

MS ORR: With the bike path through Lawson that you are asking about, does any of that abut onto or is it included in the defence portion of land?

Mr Haas: If you look at Ginninderra Creek there is already a shared path that goes along Ginninderra Creek on one side. The defence land is on the other side of that creek. We would see the initial Lawson path coming down from where the current residential development is to the lake and then heading into the town centre. But ideally, we would like to see a complete ring around Lake Ginninderra.

I guess step number one is to let the people of Lawson have a method where they do not have to drive out of Lawson. Currently, that is it, and we think a shared path would be a really a nice thing. There is already a shared path that goes under the Lake Ginninderra bridge where Ginninderra Drive is. With a couple of trucks of asphalt and some rollers we could have a shared path.

Mr Hyde: We could connect it very quickly.

MS ORR: Are you two offering to do it if we give you the asphalt?

Mr Hyde: It would not be the first time; I am very good at paths at golf clubs.

THE ACTING CHAIR: As you have mentioned, the Belconnen bikeway is a big budget item for this year. What impact does the proposed KFC site have on the delivery of that bikeway?

Mr Haas: I think there are some concerns from stakeholders around the Emu Bank component, anyway, in terms of all the entrances, exits and extra traffic. Certainly, the existing fast-food takeaway outlets generate enormous amounts of traffic—people drive in, and then drive away and they do not actually get out and walk around and make it a precinct. The KFC does not really add anything except more traffic.

The reason the initial proposal was rejected by ACTPLA was that it was not a

restaurant; it was just a takeaway facility with a drive-through. They then added some seats out the front. It was still rejected, and we understand no decision has been taken yet as to where it will go, even though ACAT has indicated that it will be built.

We think the KFC needs to be relocated to an arterial road, somewhere in the services and trades area. That corner block, as it says in our budget submission, we think would best be suited to expanding the skate park and maybe putting some other facility there. Certainly, as more tall buildings go up, there is a greater need for green space. I think some form of multipurpose park similar to the one in Crace, which has a small handball court, would be a better facility for that corner.

Mr Hyde: Given what we have already been able to demonstrate with traffic along Emu Bank, any sort of traffic impediment for pedestrians and cyclists that would be presented by a fast-food restaurant is just an encumbrance on the safe movement of people and cyclists through that area. So we would be violently opposed to it.

Mr Haas: Under the precinct code that is currently in draft form it would not be permitted. Certainly, that is the feedback reflected by the community in all the consultation for the 2016 master plan. It is an inappropriate development for that site for a number of reasons, including traffic affecting the bikeway.

THE ACTING CHAIR: From your understanding of the development application and plans that were released for that site, would it make putting the path for the Belconnen bikeway through there as currently proposed impossible?

Mr Haas: It would make it very difficult. It would add extra cost to the territory government in having to factor in the entrances and exits for all the people who are going to get their fast food. The entrances and exits are directly opposite Canberra's busiest bus interchange—the 300 route. I do not understand why it was permitted; it should not have been. Under the precinct code that is currently in draft form, it would not be allowed.

THE ACTING CHAIR: In terms of amenity in Belconnen—I am thinking about things like bins, seating and playgrounds—are we meeting what people are requiring and are there things we need to be doing more of? I know of a certain complex where apparently a lot of rubbish is left outside its bus stop. I have had numerous people contact me about it so it is front of mind for me at the moment.

Mr Haas: Certainly, there are opportunities to improve the amenity of local parks, and rubbish collection is one of them. We would really like to see a dog waste bag dispenser. We would like to see more dog parks. We would like to see things like the Bigbelly solar bins trialled in Belconnen. We have a problem with ravens feeding themselves from bins. The ACT government takes the bins away, people cannot find a bin so they just drop the rubbish. I think there are a number of reasons.

You need to do some granular investigation on each rubbish dump site and figure out why it is occurring. That is another good reason why there should be a town centre coordinator to coordinate some of these local service issues.

Mr Hyde: Those are the second most popular complaints we get through the council.

If you look at the amenity of John Knight park, you have an educational facility there and the skate park next door. People who transit through that area have no problem finding a bin, but once you get past there it is a bit of an issue, particularly for people who transit from the interchange through to there and then into John Knight park and then further afield.

THE ACTING CHAIR: And also to the bus stop below Wayfarer, which is very popular.

Mr Hyde: Yes, correct. Our message is that we are getting there. We can do more, and we are happy to work with government on identifying those areas where we can do better.

THE ACTING CHAIR: Thank you very much for appearing today. I do not think you took any questions on notice, so you are off the hook.

Mr Haas: Thank you to the committee for hearing us today.

ARUNDELL, MR LEON, Chair, Living Streets Canberra

THE ACTING CHAIR: Thank you for appearing today, Mr Arundell. Please be aware that the proceedings today are being broadcast through a variety of media and are also being recorded and will be transcribed and published. Before we begin, could you please confirm that you have familiarised yourself with the pink privilege card in front of you and that you understand the privilege implications?

Mr Arundell: Yes, I have done that.

THE ACTING CHAIR: Excellent. Before we proceed to questions, would you like to make a brief opening statement?

Mr Arundell: I would like to start with this handout, which I hope some of you will have. I did not bring enough copies.

THE ACTING CHAIR: That is all right; we will share. We are very environmentally friendly.

Mr Arundell: It shows the importance of four particular modes of transport: public transport, walking, cycling, and travelling as car passengers.

Since 2004 we have had government targets for walking, cycling and public transport. From this, you can see that public transport since 2001 has increased from about seven per cent to about eight per cent. The 2011 target was nine per cent, and in 2012 Chief Minister Katy Gallagher committed to 10.5 per cent by 2016 and 16 per cent by 2026. As you can see, we are still well short of the 2009 target, let alone the 2016 target. Public transport patronage is flat, pretty much; it is increasing slightly. The projections in the budget for ACTION bus patronage are for it to increase by approximately the same as the population is increasing, which means that we are nowhere near achieving the sorts of gains in public transport that the Chief Minister committed to. Also, about 90 per cent of the people who use public transport walk to and from bus stops. About 10 per cent use private vehicles to get to or from bus stops.

The second most important part of the active travel component is walking, which has been, broadly speaking, increasing over the years. It is about five per cent now, compared with about eight per cent for public transport. So it is comparable. And if you combine it with cycling, which is about three per cent now, the number of people who walk or cycle to work in Canberra is approximately the same as the number of people who catch public transport.

Since 2011 we have had increases in the mode shares of walking, cycling and public transport. At the same time, counterintuitively, the proportion of people who drive cars to work has gone up. The explanation for that is the number of people who travel as car passengers. You can see that that has been progressively declining since 1976. So the decline in people travelling as car passengers has exceeded the gains in walking, cycling or public transport, with the result that there are more cars on the road now rather than fewer. That has implications for our greenhouse emissions, for traffic congestion and for air pollution, not to mention travel costs.

What did we get in the budget? We did get footpath network upgrades. We got \$22 million for active travel projects, plus about \$10 million for other things, and we will get about 30 kilometres of new footpaths in the next year. At that rate, we estimate that it will be between 30 and 40 years before every street in Canberra has a footpath which will make it easier for people to walk to public transport or anywhere else, and make it easier for kids to cycle to school. It will also mean that there will not be so many places where they cannot do it without going on the road.

In one suburb that I walked around a couple of years ago, I found 150 places where nature strips were obstructed and about two places where footpaths were obstructed, which meant that you had to go out onto the road if you wanted to get past. Canberrans do seem to respect footpaths when it comes to building their gardens over them or parking on them—generally speaking.

In our new suburbs, the best news in recent years was the change in the Territory Plan to make it mandatory for all new streets either to be woonerfs, which are pedestrian friendly, or to have footpaths. But our existing suburbs have about 1,000 kilometres of streets that do not have any footpaths.

We will be spending \$10,000 per year per public transport commuter over the next four years. In the same time we will be spending approximately \$500 per pedestrian and cyclist. So we are spending 20 times as much on public transport per person who uses it, compared with walking and cycling.

We do have commitments from the government to invite people to nominate missing footpath links and footpaths that need upgrading and to prioritise them. As far as I know, no invitation has gone out and there has been no useful form of prioritising the projects that come up. In relation to the 2011 exercise, I was quoted in the media as saying that it was riddled with errors, which was probably an understatement.

THE ACTING CHAIR: You are referring to the election commitment about prioritising the top 100 footpaths?

Mr Arundell: I do not remember it mentioning a particular number. I understand there were 700 footpath projects that had been nominated, even though there has not been, to my knowledge, an invitation. I decided to work out how we should prioritise walking and cycling projects, and it was not as easy as I thought. After six months of working on it, I came up with a rationale and a way of doing it, which I can advise people on if they want to know.

We still need a plan to make walking safe and convenient on the 1,000 kilometres of streets that do not have footpaths. We can do that by giving them footpaths, which is easy but will cost hundreds of millions of dollars, which is the equivalent of less than two years of spending on public transport, or we can reduce speed limits to the point where the streets become safe enough to walk on. That will work particularly well for cul-de-sacs, where cars do not have enough space to get up to high speeds anyway.

I think it is time for me to stop talking and let you ask some questions.

MS LE COUTEUR: There are a lot of things I would like to talk about. Let me go to

the last one you mentioned, which I was not going to talk about, about—I am not sure that we should use the word “alternative”—another way of addressing the footpath problem being speed limits in suburban areas. Would you like to talk more about that? Personally, I have found that suburban footpaths are usually pretty narrow. If you are walking with someone else, if you have a small child and a pram, they are often not suitable. Could you talk some more about the pluses or minuses of going down the speed limit approach?

Mr Arundell: When it comes to footpaths, the old standard was 1.2 metres and the new standard is 1.5, but either way you are better off with a 1.2-metre footpath than with no footpath at all.

As far as speed limits go, I have done an analysis of pedestrian deaths in the ACT. This has come up in the media, with states like Victoria and New South Wales having a spike in pedestrian deaths this year. Broadly speaking, we have reduced the average number of pedestrian deaths over the last 20 years from about three per year to about one per year, and that seems to have coincided with the introduction of 40 kilometre per hour speed limits around shopping centres. Since we introduced those speed limits, we have had three pedestrian deaths, and none of them were in shopping centres. The only road that goes through the middle of a shopping centre that still has a 60 kilometre per hour speed limit is the one that is going to have about 10,000 light rail commuters crossing it every day. I hope they survive. There is something you can do about it. To my mind there is evidence to show that reducing speed limits has saved pedestrian lives in Canberra.

MS LE COUTEUR: That is very positive. That is great. On the same lines, we have started funding better crossings at schools and ways for kids to get to schools apart from driving. Has this made an impact, to your knowledge, as far as getting kids walking is concerned?

Mr Arundell: I do not know what the impact has been, but about 10 years ago, when I was in Pedal Power, I came to the conclusion that if we were to provide every child with a safe way to walk or cycle to school, and all of those paths would connect up, the whole of Canberra would be safe for everybody to walk and cycle.

MS LEE: I have a supplementary; it is sort of a long bow but it is still a supplementary. Ms Le Couteur earlier raised the width of the footpaths. Some of the footpaths have metal frames around them. Presumably, they are to stop bikes going straight through, especially at intersections. Do you know the sort of metal frames that I am talking about?

Mr Arundell: I think they are designed to stop cars driving on the paths. But it is arguable that they are not more of a hazard for cyclists in particular than the cars would be.

MS LEE: Yes. Have you had any feedback, or do you have a view, about the challenges or hazards they may create for people who have mobility issues, people who are on a scooter, in a wheelchair or even on a walking frame?

Mr Arundell: I have not got experience of those things but for some years I carried

my kids around in a bicycle trailer. The walkway between my house and the preschool had some metal poles in it that were so close together that I could not fit the bicycle trailer through. So there are issues like that. It seems that there are some cases where you create a chicane for pedestrians and it forces people with pushers to go off the footpath because it has been added after the footpath was built.

MS LEE: Yes.

Mr Arundell: They have to go off the footpath and then off on the other side just to get through, which means you are making their journey longer. The main reason people do not walk is because it takes too long. There are things like that that encourage people to drive cars.

MS LEE: So you would say that that now needs to be looked at?

Mr Arundell: It is something that—I think the standards have improved over the years but there are still some legacy obstructions on footpaths that really need to be fixed up.

MS LEE: I will pass my substantive question to Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: That made my coming down worth while. Thank you for coming here today. I think there was an election commitment from Labor to upgrade footpaths and to prioritise upgrades and missing links. Do you have your own kind of prioritisation of missing links?

Mr Arundell: We have been trying to get that. The government have offered us the GIS information to do it because they are not prepared to do it themselves. I did a map of one particular suburb some years ago. I highlighted the streets that did not have any footpaths, and it was about a third of the streets. They are the ultimate missing links—you cannot even get from your front gate to anywhere without—

MS LAWDER: To the bus stop or something.

Mr Arundell: There is no footpath to take you anywhere. There are about 1,000 kilometres of those streets, according to our best estimate.

MS LAWDER: So it is going to take a long time at that rate?

Mr Arundell: At the rate we are going, it will take 30 to 40 years.

MS LAWDER: That would mean we would miss—there was a 2026 target.

Mr Arundell: A long time beyond 2026, yes.

MS LAWDER: Yes. Do you know from your exploration of the topic whether there was a particular point in time—a particular decade, for example—when streets started not having footpaths included?

Mr Arundell: When I was growing up in the 1950s in a country town there were

footpaths everywhere.

MS LAWDER: I guess I am referring to Canberra more specifically.

Mr Arundell: Yes. I think it has happened all around Australia. If there was a car in the family, it was usually used by the father who would take it to work. Shopping was done on foot.

MS LAWDER: With a pram.

Mr Arundell: You had to have a local shop nearby and it had to be within walking distance or you did not go to it. It was in the 1960s when we started to design suburbs on the assumption that people would be driving places rather than walking. I would say that any suburb almost anywhere in Australia that has been designed since the mid-1960s probably has a lot of streets without footpaths, except for Canberra since we changed the rules here.

MS LAWDER: Finally, just to cover off something else you said, you said that 1.2 metres is better than no footpath at all.

Mr Arundell: Yes.

MS LAWDER: But I guess you are in favour of the 1.8 metre wide paths?

Mr Arundell: 1.5?

MS LAWDER: I think there is a new municipal standard coming in of 1.8 metres for the shared paths.

Mr Arundell: Yes, shared paths.

MS LAWDER: Community paths.

MS LE COUTEUR: Footpaths have always been bigger.

Mr Arundell: Yes, and I think that it is better to have a wider one than a narrower one. When you get traffic congestion like you get in places such as the walkway over Parkes Way, which has a whole lot of commuting cyclists and a whole lot of mostly motorists who probably park over the other side and walk across it, you need to have enough width to accommodate them. I note that in the Belconnen bikeway there is a plan to have Canberra's first real separated pedestrian footpath. Pedestrians will be able to walk along it without fear of being knocked over by bicycles.

MS LAWDER: It is a common complaint, I think, isn't it?

Mr Arundell: Yes.

MS LAWDER: On both sides; cyclists and walkers.

Mr Arundell: Yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes.

THE ACTING CHAIR: Ms Orr, did you have any questions?

MS ORR: I think most things have been covered. It was quite a comprehensive submission.

THE ACTING CHAIR: That concludes the evidence from Living Streets Canberra. Thank you for appearing today.

OWUSU, MR FRANCIS, Chief Executive Officer, Kulture Break
TSIRIMOKOS, MR ARCHIE, Board Chairman, Kulture Break

THE ACTING CHAIR: Could I confirm that you have read the pink privilege card in front of you and that you understand the implications of the statement?

Mr Tsirimokos: Yes.

Mr Owusu: Yes.

THE ACTING CHAIR: Fantastic. Do you have an opening statement before we go to questions?

Mr Owusu: I am the CEO and founder of Kulture Break. It is interesting to note that, when we walked in here, the first thing you said was, “Is he going to dance?” One thing I have to say is that for the last 16 years Kulture Break has been known for dance. Kulture Break is probably less well known for what it does in other areas, such as leadership, mentoring, mental health, I guess justice, and also skills and training.

In my opening statement I want to highlight some of the other things that Kulture Break is more known for. This is an opportunity for us to explore and get some answers as to what opportunities lie ahead for us to get a foothold into getting adequate funding for Kulture Break to continue its work.

Kulture Break delivers outcome-based programs. If you look at the things we have been doing for the last 10 years, particularly recently, in regard to mental health, you see that thousands of young people have benefited in their mental health outcome from their participation.

A few weeks ago I went to Civic during the school holidays and met a guy called Dominic. My mobile phone was not working. That is one of the big issues in contemporary life! I went there and he saw my name—Francis at Kulture Break. He said, “Kulture Break?” He started with the same thing, dance. He said that he had gone to Canberra high. He said, “I was very suicidal. I was going through a real dark time as a 15-year-old. When Kulture Break came to my school in year 9, year 10, it impacted me and changed my life.” He said, “Now I’m 20 and I’ve not since then had those symptoms of suicidal thoughts or been depressed.” He attributed that to Kulture Break.

It goes to show—he is not dancing now—the impact Kulture Break has had and is having on the mental health of our young people. It is more than just dance. It is about providing them with an outlet to increase their self-esteem, their confidence. It gives them a voice. It improves their mental health outcomes, their physical health outcomes and other areas.

The challenge we have had in engaging with government seems to be around securing funding. We get acknowledgement for the work that we do. What we do not get is the funding for the outcomes that we produce. We seem to go on a merry-go-round for many years. Government seems to fund in silos whereas Kulture Break takes a whole-person approach to solving some of the issues that we have in our society.

The difficulty is this: when we go to the arts, the arts will say, “We think it’s education”; education will say, “We think it’s health”; and health will say, “We think it’s arts.” And there it goes—the merry-go-round. The challenge for us, with the release of the latest budget, is again that unfortunately to date we have not been allocated funding towards our programs.

We are looking for answers as to why, despite the fact that we are now one of the largest providers of youth engagement in the ACT, with over 8,000 participants weekly, we are struggling to secure the funding to meet those outcomes.

MS LEE: How are you funded at the moment?

Mr Owusu: At the moment we are self-funded. We provide fee-for-service for our programs. Kids come to our programs after school and they pay fees to use our programs. We also have had support from local businesses and corporates that provide some funding for us. The government has provided some funding. We currently have a three-year agreement with the ACT government in the arts. But primarily, since its inception, \$290,000 has been allocated to us through government funding in the last 16 years. Over 16 years, that is an average of \$18,000 per year. Compare that to the outcomes we are producing. For instance, it costs \$170,000 per year to have someone incarcerated.

Two of our programs are man up and ladies first, which are risk intervention programs for young people from 12 to 17. We have documented reports of at least six gentlemen who have said, “If it wasn’t for your program, I would be in jail.” On that alone, it is saving at least \$3.6 million per year on what could have been.

The challenge always for us is getting that messaging across and getting that cut-through. We have the cut-through in terms of the outcomes, but we are not getting the cut-through on things that support those outcomes.

MS LEE: In the current term you were saying that you have three-year funding from the ACT government.

Mr Owusu: Yes.

MS LEE: Where are we in that cycle at the moment?

Mr Owusu: It is the first year.

MS LEE: This is the first year?

Mr Owusu: Yes, the first year.

MS LEE: And how much is that funding worth?

Mr Owusu: It is \$35,000 per year.

MS LEE: Per year?

Mr Owusu: Yes.

MS LE COUTEUR: Could you repeat that please?

Mr Owusu: That is \$35,000 per year.

MS LEE: You mentioned the early intervention programs man up and ladies first.

Mr Owusu: Yes.

MS LEE: Can you give us a little more detail on that? Who gets involved, and do you work with Bimberi as well, by any chance?

Mr Owusu: That program started in 2009. It was to address the issues facing young people today, particularly boys. Fatherlessness is an issue there, and mental health. These days I think a lot of young kids, because of our modern society, go to school, go home and are usually on devices. They are isolated. What the man up program does is bring these young men together and provide social skills. We are a mentor and also we address their physical health by providing dance as the outlet.

We find some of these kids, these young men, have never had anyone talk to them about how to groom themselves, put deodorant on, how to speak in public or have never had someone support them with their issues. That man up program is about providing those kids with those social upskilling skills. It is like big brotherhood support for those kids.

One of our guys, Gus, turned 18. He is one of our young guys. What I love about the group is that there is this diversity of cultures and also the diversity of the kids. Gus has Down syndrome. He had a birthday on Tuesday and all the guys celebrated. The mentor said he had never seen a guy with a bigger smile on his face.

Those are things you see in the community. They provide this young man with this sense of belonging, this sense of identity, this sense of acceptance that is a challenge for people who have come from disability backgrounds.

MS ORR: You said you were receiving \$35,000. What program is that funding in? Where is it coming from?

Mr Owusu: Where is it coming from? That is coming from the arts portfolio. One of the things that we have been trying to, I guess, engage the government on is to recognise that education and health are really where we are involved, where the majority of our work is. We are inundated weekly with requests from parents.

We had a mother of a 10-year-old boy send us a letter, which I have given you copies of, pleading with us, "Can you help my son?" Another guy called Jack, who is 14, two weeks ago tried to commit suicide. His parents contacted us, "Can you provide some help for our son?" We are in this impasse where we are getting a little funding to provide arts and dance. The majority of this was from education and health. We are not getting any support there or funding.

MS LEE: Is that \$35,000 for a specific program—one of your programs—or is it just general?

Mr Owusu: It is specific for one of our programs.

MS LEE: Which one is that?

Mr Owusu: The \$35,000 is allocated to our Elevate Academy program, which is providing training and mentoring for young people interested in music and dance. We are using that as seed funding to develop Elevate Academy's mandate, which is providing higher education pathways for young people who are creative minded to go to CIT and also the University of Canberra.

MS ORR: Have you had a look at health and education? You have noted in your submission that there are different areas and that it is not always clear where to apply. But from what you have just said it sounds like you have a pretty good idea of what your programs speak to. Have you had a look and is there anything where you could see that in the existing program grants and those sorts of things?

Mr Owusu: We have applied and we have been successful on and off over the years with one-off funding in health, for instance. Our program was partnered with the fresh taste health initiative and lasted for two years. And we had seed funding for that.

The difficulty is, as I said, that these are the small grants funds and we always seem to be searching for that little pocket of funding. I know we missed out on the recurring funding for health this time around. We put in a fund grant for a program called active kids to get kids to use dance in schools as a way to get healthy and fit, to address the obesity epidemic that we are facing. Unfortunately, we were unsuccessful on this occasion but there are some pockets.

What we are looking to do is address generational change. Funding with one-off funding grants, things like that, do not really address that. They might provide an injection but we are looking to get funding to support generational change that we are trying to make and are making in young people.

MS ORR: I am not as familiar as I think some people might be with the programs you run. You have indicated how many people engage with the service. Can you run me through—

Mr Owusu: Some of the programs?

MS ORR: Assume I know nothing and, yes, run me through.

Mr Owusu: Yes. Some of our main programs that we mentioned, man up and ladies first, are intervention social skilling programs. We also have one called “iinspire leadership”, which we launched in 2016 in response to the fact that the ACT currently now does not, again because we were on a grant for two years, have a local leadership-based, school-based program.

In consultation with the Education Directorate we came up with the “iinspire leadership” program which is about giving kids a voice and supporting their inclusion and wellbeing. In a sense it provides a social change project. They come to conferences, we upskill them with leadership skills, they go back to their school and devise a leadership program, a social change program, and they lead that exchange.

In the two years we have done that, we have had 900 ACT school students involved in that program. Unfortunately, in 2018 we did not run it because of the funding. We self-funded it for the first two years and we said this year we could not do it.

MS ORR: You said you are currently offering a fee-for-service as well?

Mr Owusu: Fee-for-service model.

MS ORR: Help me piece together the bits here. If you are running fee-for-service, does anyone participating in a program have to pay or are there some things that are run for free because of grants?

Mr Owusu: Our man up and ladies first programs are free because we do not want to put a restriction on anyone wanting to be able to participate. Our program “iinspire leadership” is fee based but it is wholly subsidised. We subsidise our programs up to 53 per cent of what it would normally cost because our social inclusion plan enables us to go and reach more students by keeping the cost as low as possible. The issue of funding becomes an issue because we are keeping costs very low in order to get greater inclusion. It means that we find the sustainability of these programs a challenge. Our “iinspire” is fee based.

Our programs that are run after school, our dance classes, are fee based. Our other programs, like every chance to dance, which is curriculum based, address health and the arts curriculum and provide a resource tool for teachers to help support and further the arts curriculum.

We were approached by the Education Directorate on this. I have been delivering professional development under the old model which was called every chance to learn and became every chance—every chance to dance was modelled on that—since 2008. There is a lack of resources support for teachers to deliver arts curriculum.

We devised a curriculum for that. That is online and is a resource tool for teachers to be able to deliver it. That is fee per school based but it is also heavily subsidised. Pretty much all of our programs run at a subsidised rate, by some 53 per cent.

Mr Tsirimokos: Just on that, what that really means is that the organisation is subsidising these activities by its other activities. It is really about robbing Peter to pay Paul, if you like, within the organisation to make sure it happens.

MS ORR: The government funding that you indicated that you would like to be able to seek would be, I guess, to reduce that need and to further subsidise programs. How do you see it being applied to what you are doing?

Mr Owusu: For 16 years we have relied on goodwill, and it has got to the point where it has become really difficult to rely on the goodwill of people volunteering.

We said robbing Peter to pay Paul. It is getting more and more challenging.

What has been our strength is also our weakness. We have been, to date, for 16 years less reliant on government funding, and that is how we have survived, because of the goodwill, but it is getting more challenging now going forward with the climate, with the influx now.

It was so much easier when we had a few hundred kids. Now we have 8,000. Trying to now service that is where we are saying that we need to actually engage government, and it needs to engage with us, to help us subsidise that gap so that we can continue to provide that at that rate.

MS ORR: Do you have a permanent base or do you have different places where the programs roll out?

Mr Owusu: We operate Canberra wide. The majority of our operations are still in Tuggeranong. We are in Erindale College. We share with Erindale College. We entered into a partnership arrangement with Erindale College where we had town businesses donate resources and did up their dance rooms and the drum rooms in exchange for allowing us access to that space, and part of that has given us a building. We have a building in the college. It is part of the college which we use for our administration.

On the north side we are currently based in John Paul college, using their resources after school. We do not yet permanently have our own base, a permanent base, but we deliver out of those two mainly after school and then in schools during the week.

THE ACTING CHAIR: We are over time but, just to finish, you did touch on the fees for service? You said that they are heavily subsidised. To give me a dollar figure that I can picture in my head—you said 53 per cent is subsidised—what is the total cost of running it? I am sure I can work it out with percentages but what are you charging versus the total cost?

Mr Owusu: For example, for some of our programs which I have mentioned, like dance nation, we charge kids 150 bucks for two terms to do the program. It is approximately \$7.50 per child per week to do it. Our current cost to run that is \$17 per week per class. You can see that there is already a \$10 difference in that. It would normally cost, say, \$175 per term which, times two, is \$350. We are providing it at \$150. You can see we then have to find that money somewhere else to make up that shortfall.

THE ACTING CHAIR: We have run out of time. Thanks very much for appearing today. I do not think you took any questions on notice.

DONOVAN, DR BILL, Chair, Policy Advisory Group, National Seniors Australia
McLEOD, MRS JUDY, Member, Policy Advisory Group, National Seniors Australia

THE ACTING CHAIR: I welcome the representatives of National Seniors Australia. Thanks very much for appearing today. The proceedings today are being broadcast live through a variety of media and are also being recorded and will be transcribed and published. Could you confirm that you have read the pink privilege card that is in front of you and that you understand the privilege implications of the statement?

Dr Donovan: Yes.

Mrs McLeod: Yes, I have.

THE ACTING CHAIR: Before we begin, would either of you like to make a brief opening statement?

Dr Donovan: Sure. I chair a policy advisory group in the ACT for National Seniors. By way of introduction, I will give you some gratuitous advice, as I did last year when I came here. Last year I talked about seniors on mobility scooters beeping around the suburbs. When you deal with National Seniors, when we ask them, what you find—and you would know the data about seniors—is that more and more are living and retiring in Canberra, and it is putting huge pressure on the government resource base in health, housing and aged care. I suppose the advice is that you ought to make it easier for us all to retire down to the coast so that you can shift the cost to the New South Wales government.

Seniors are a huge percentage of your population. We are dealing with everyone over 50. I suspect some of you are close to a senior age, too—maybe not, but close to being seniors in work.

MS LE COUTEUR: Some of us may already be seniors, speaking personally.

MS ORR: We will all be seniors one day, if we are not now.

Dr Donovan: It raises the point that every year you have a huge increase in this aged population, particularly in the retired and people growing older. We have just done a review for National Seniors on aged care, which covers most of the issues relating to the federal government, but some are local when you deal with the retirement villages, hospital in the home and so on.

We are finding that members are getting older and older, needing more and more services and putting huge pressure on the system. That has a consequence, as we said in our submission, for the budget. Like everybody on fixed incomes or nearly fixed incomes, they are under enormous stress and pressure because of rising costs in the ACT from budgetary things, in terms of housing, rates and various expenses that everyone has to pay. We know a lot of the issues dealing with aged care are federal, but some of them relate to this government. We have asked repeatedly for something to be done about it. It is probably very hard to do so because it is such an expensive area to work on.

The second issue that people are more and more concerned about is that large numbers of seniors are looking to change their housing arrangements, and we need more and more housing that is suitable for seniors to retire into, rather than the six-storey blocks of flats that adorn every roadway in Coombes, Ngunnawal or wherever. It is not what people want to go into. Every senior we have talked to wants to move into a three-bedroom single-level townhouse without a garden and which is designed properly with respect to mobility issues. It is about time that the government looked at design laws for housing for seniors and made available something much more appropriate.

I have included in your page what we liked about your budget, what we did not like about it and what we saw could be applauded for the general population. Whatever you do for the general population impinges on aged people because we are mostly grandparents and parents of the younger generation, anyway, so all three generations are usually mixed up in an aged person's family. Do you want to say something, Judy?

Mrs McLeod: Yes. We have a group called PAG, the policy advisory group, and I am a member of that, and a past president of National Seniors, and I enjoy working for seniors.

Following on from what Bill said, one of the concerns we have is with respect to utilities. I know that in the budget you allowed for an extra \$50 to be returned to us, but we would like to see some control over the actual heating—the energy costs for the house, which are quite substantial in Canberra. We on fixed incomes find that to be the case. With utility prices, there was no sort of subsidy in the budget or anything that could possibly ease the stress.

I realise it would be hard to discriminate within your budget between seniors and others, but there are those on fixed incomes that these price rises have really affected. With the general rates, they did have a slight cherry in that you do not have to pay them until you have sold your house, but that still does not take away from the fact that there are some people paying up to \$200 each fortnight on their rates, to stay where they are; yet the value of their house does not get them something in a retirement village. When you downsize you have to be able to find something that is suitable, but if you get over that, it has to be in the right price range, and that is a big issue. Bill mentioned the cost of general services, but I would like to stress that point, especially as, since the budget, we have heard about our energy prices going up again, and there is no help in that area.

Leading on from that, there is the accountability of retirement villages. Do you want to speak on that, Bill?

Dr Donovan: I have put it there. The committee might want to ask questions on it. That can be dealt with by way of interaction between us rather than us talking. Some of you might have read our original submissions, and you have in front of you what—

Mrs McLeod: Perhaps I would just add one of the things that really concerns seniors. We get a lot of people at meetings; we get up to a hundred at these meetings. People

come along and talk about issues of concern. One of the concerns is how ACT public servants generally talk to seniors or communicate with them. There is quite an age discrimination, and we were hoping there would be something in the budget towards training of staff, and towards trying to cease this age discrimination. Our experience is that it used to just be in the health system. If you are waiting over there in accident and emergency, you certainly get put off to one side and other people get put through. Now they find it quite discriminatory in how they are talked to. What they are saying is that they are not given equal rights, if they come in to discuss an issue to do with housing or something like that. We were really hoping that there would be money to help with training. It is really about combating age discrimination; that is why we wanted to make that point.

THE ACTING CHAIR: We will go to questions, starting with Ms Orr.

MS ORR: I want to pick up on what you were saying about downsizing, because we have heard quite a bit about housing today. We have also had conversations on downsizing. In your view, and from what you hear, what is it that seniors are looking for when they are downsizing?

Dr Donovan: We put in a detailed submission to the housing review. The trouble with providing people with what they want is that it is always a lot more expensive, both for government and for us, than the commercial side want to look for. The Mr Fluffy thing has been great for downsizers because they have often built two single-level places on one block with small amounts of ground; but, because of the economics of it, a lot of developers put four or six units on blocks. Even if they only put two on, they will be two-storey, which is not what people over 70 or 80 really want for the future. It does not allow them to age in place in the longer run.

They desperately want, as I said earlier, single-level townhouses. They might or might not be part of a body corporate, but that is what they are looking for—smaller places. When my wife and I went to look at retirement villages, we were expected to move into a small two-bedroom unit. That is what everybody could not understand—we were older people and that is what we should like. We both have cars. Even though I am nearly 80, we are both still heavily involved in the community. We need to get around; we need to be able to get in and out quite easily. We need to have a house that in the long run will be easy to adapt to, rather than be a burden on the community by moving into an aged-care facility.

That is a general issue. The designers have put together what suits aged-care people, but it has never been brought into any form of regulation in the ACT, as we understand it. That really ought to be looked at in a lot of the developments that are being done.

MS ORR: To summarise, there were a couple of issues there. Single level is obviously very important, for mobility issues, I would assume?

Dr Donovan: Yes.

MS ORR: You were talking about being able to age in place. Is this a universal design? Is this what we are going to—

Dr Donovan: That is right; where the doorways are wide enough and high enough and you have grab rails built into bathrooms as part of the system.

MS ORR: So it is those universal—

Dr Donovan: You have non-slip floors and so on.

MS ORR: So they are the things you would like to see put into—

Dr Donovan: Yes. In the modern age, of course, they need to be wireless oriented so that everything can be operated, including the little button that you press when you have an emergency. A lot of the houses, even the new ones, are insulated so well that often the telecommunications do not work in houses as there is a magnetic shield—not that that is important, but it has happened in some places we know about.

MS ORR: You also mentioned a small garden?

Dr Donovan: Either nothing or a small garden. A lot of people like to garden, but they only want a very tiny courtyard that takes an hour a week. Seniors that have big houses in older suburbs report to us that it is a three or four-day-a-week job to look after the garden. Not only that; you have the complete recycling of maintenance to do. If you are old enough to get support from the federal government, that is fine, but if you are not, you are doing it all yourself. It is not only a bind but an inhibitor to doing anything else.

MS ORR: The other part was being able to age in place, to stay within your community.

Dr Donovan: I think all the surveys that have been done show that something like 75 per cent not only want to age in place but want to die in place. That is not the reality at the end, quite often, because people have to go into palliative care or into aged-care accommodation because their partners or the community cannot support them, so they have to. That is largely a federal issue; it is not an ACT issue, except with respect to the pressure on retirement villages, which is your issue.

MS ORR: I want to get a better understanding of the aversion to apartments per se. Some of the things that you have listed would actually fit quite well into apartment living, in that they would not have a yard to maintain. The part that you live in would be on one level. Quite a few of them would have lift access. I want to get a better understanding of why that is not seen as a—

Dr Donovan: That seems to work quite well in retirement villages like Kangara Waters, which has three-storey blocks of units, good lift systems and good security systems. But if you are living in a private development, you are usually living with a whole lot of renters who have no respect for either the property or the people in it, and no community develops there. Isolation in old age is probably the second problem after health. Everybody over 50 talks about their health, and it is a priority as well, but the other one is isolation. Single people living in a unit or a flat want some sort of community sense from it, and you do not get that in commercial residences. They are

tending to move. In Belconnen, for example, where I live, they want to move as close to the Belconnen town centre as possible, but they have 20 storeys, and, as I say, they are mostly rented out to uni students, they have Chinese landlords or whatever.

THE ACTING CHAIR: Politicians.

Dr Donovan: You've got one?

THE ACTING CHAIR: Yes, but it is on the ground floor.

MS LEE: She is neither a uni student nor a Chinese landlord.

THE ACTING CHAIR: It has an 80-square-metre courtyard, so I think it is exactly what many seniors are looking for.

Dr Donovan: I will see you later to put in an offer!

THE ACTING CHAIR: Yes, I will take you on a tour!

MS ORR: I live in an apartment building too, and my neighbours are seniors. They have retired to an apartment for access and all these sorts of things. I know them. We are social. But it is good to understand the other points regarding where you are coming from, because there is always going to be a range of—

Dr Donovan: But you know that younger people are all looking to move into apartments, aren't they? They do not want any land. Even with children, they often do not want anything to look after. They are so busy with their family lives and everything that they just want somewhere to lay their head and survive till they go to school or to work. That is the first foot on the ladder for a lot of them. I can understand all of that, but it is a different issue with seniors. That is all.

MS ORR: I completely take your point about isolation and wanting to feel part of a community.

Mrs McLeod: There is an enormous growth of units around the place, and every time you see them, you think they are not going to be occupied, and they are.

MS ORR: I can only speak from my own experience, but we have quite a diverse group of people living in my apartment block. I will leave it there.

MS LAWDER: In your opening statement and in your submission, you talked a bit about bill shock with respect to utility charges, but you did not make any mention of rates. Do National Seniors have a view on concessional rates for seniors?

Dr Donovan: There is a divide of opinion between people that are more or less on fixed incomes and others that are self-funded retirees. Philosophically, we as seniors see the good, if you like, of the public policy of changing from stamp duty and other charges to everybody who lives in things paying for the services they get and we all need. Philosophically we see all that. But people then argue that with people, particularly pensioners, on fixed incomes, it is a massive cost for their daily fees, the

rates they are paying for their houses. A lot of them live in older established suburbs like the northern suburbs of Watson, Braddon and so on—housing in very expensive places. They are very well off capital-wise, but they have no income to live on. It is almost forcing them out of where they would want to stay.

Mrs McLeod: Where they thought they would die.

Dr Donovan: Yes.

Mrs McLeod: Well off asset-wise.

MS LAWDER: Asset rich.

Mrs McLeod: Yes, but it is who they leave it to who will benefit rather than them surviving. They do not really have the option of moving because of the cost of the next step, and it is not where they want to go anyway. As I say, when I go, I will be happy because I will have obviously lost the ability to think about anything anymore; I am not going before.

MS ORR: You said that they cannot move. Is this because there is a lack of options for them to move? You have said they want to move out of the big houses, and the upkeep is huge on them.

Dr Donovan: The lack of options for them is massive. Retirement villages have waiting lists, pretty well—one that is any good, anyway. I am not going to talk about the quality of some of them; that is not an issue. But it is an issue for accountability purposes. We have asked for the last three years for the government to implement the laws that they brought in, the revision of the Retirement Villages Act, and make owners accountable for their finances, budgets and everything to members who live in them. That has not happened; it is something that we think should happen.

MS LAWDER: Can I follow up on something you said about perhaps a divide of opinion between pensioners and self-funded retirees? What I have heard often is that self-funded retirees feel pretty much the same about those increases. It is rates, electricity, the car, water and everything going up. People feel that they have been fiscally responsible through their career and are not taking a pension, if you like, but all their charges are going up. What did you mean when you said there is a philosophical divide between those two groups?

Dr Donovan: It is not just between the two groups. There are a lot of self-funded retirees who are almost on fixed incomes too. A lot of business people have retired. And there are a lot of people who are on pensions who are well off: commonwealth pensions, for example, if you take that as one form of pension.

I am just saying that when we deal with it in a policy sense for National Seniors, we understand that you have to get revenue from somewhere. The ACT has to get enough revenue to pay for what we want in our lives. That is the big issue for those who set budgets or the alternative budget setters: to come up with the income.

Every state has been arguing about changing away from various forms of duty, stamp

duty and everything, but they have not been prepared to take the risk. This government has done it. It has become unpopular by doing it, but we can see that it is something that is a long-term good.

As I say, there is a dichotomy between various forms of seniors. You cannot just consider them as one or the other of self-funded retirees. And probably you are talking to two people who personally are able to cope with the shocks, both Judy and I, because of our personal circumstances and so on.

Nearly everyone that talks to us has major problems. I was talking to a National Seniors branch on Thursday. At morning tea, I sit down and I have a queue of 20 people wanting to tell me their stories and their problems. They say, “I said I was coming here today and they all told me what to say.” A lot of it is not repeatable. Unfortunately, politicians and public servants do not have a good rap in the community.

We must say that in the two years since the last election, both sides of politics have been great to deal with. We used to have trouble getting access to even the minister for aged care in the past government, who would never see anybody, whereas the current minister, the people in the opposition and the federal Labor Party have all come to our meetings. We have talked. There have been good vibes from the politicians who have come to our meetings. We had Andrew Leigh there yesterday, and we are having the minister from here.

Mrs McLeod: Mr Ramsay.

Dr Donovan: Mr Ramsay is coming out to talk to our seniors. And there has been a quantum shift in the type of people occupying your seats and how you deal with the community. That is a good thing. It does not help with the budget, but it is a good thing.

Mrs McLeod: We actually had Andrew Barr come and speak.

Dr Donovan: We did, yes.

Mrs McLeod: There were some people on the committee who were quite outspoken about a mistake being made in doing that, but he really increased his popularity. Everyone thought he was great after that, just from hearing him talk. But once again, he was talking to the group as a whole. With this discrimination within it, it is and it is not there. I believe that when you turn 80 you should get everything—everything: no wrong or discrimination at all, get everything. You have done your bit for the community.

I also am concerned about people in the suburbs. Higgins is one that was quoted to me in the last week. These people have been registered for a unit in a complex there where the school used to be, and it still has not really come out of the ground. By selling their three-bedroom house in Higgins, they will just break even to go into a one-bedroom unit, I think. To them, with a family, they are quite upset about it, but they also feel they have no choice, because if they do not do it now, it is not going to get any cheaper. There is the question of whether the balance will be the same in 12

months time. That sort of thing is of concern to us when you have people making those sorts of decisions.

THE ACTING CHAIR: Ms Le Couteur, do you have a question, remembering the time?

MS LE COUTEUR: I was going to ask—you maybe cannot say anything more—how you would better implement the accountability for retirement villages. I know that is becoming more and more of an issue as more and more people live in them.

Dr Donovan: It just has not happened. A lot of people have said a lot about accountability in retirement villages from one side to the other, but if the owners choose to continue the old practices, nobody is pulling them up for it. We get repeated stories of certain retirement villages that are awful; we get other people where the sun shines out of the retirement village operators.

Just to generalise, there is no benefit in being not-for-profit as distinct from profit. Quite often the full-profit ones are better managed with better accountability and are better run than the not-for-profits. It quite surprised us as a policy group to get that feedback, because we thought it would be the other way round. You would think a church-run organisation or another philanthropic one would deal better with their clients, but that is not the case. That is what we are finding.

MS LE COUTEUR: So you go to Access Canberra and they cannot help? Or is the issue that you go to ACAT but then you cannot afford to go any further?

Mrs McLeod: No. One of the things is that there are different contracts, I suppose, with each village, so when you are trying to find one that is suitable—we offered members the opportunity to come on a bus and go to several of them. We did one a day; then we would go for lunch and have big talks about it. The difference between them in those contracts, the difference in the exit strategy, was, I found, quite alarming.

As you were saying, I worked hard for my dollars and I do not wish to lose them simply by having to move out of one of these at the end. It is just that I feel that there should be uniformity in them, in what you get. I am not saying they will all be the same in the views, positions and that—they can have their variations within and their layouts—but with the actual contracts and the financial side it would be a great thing to have a bit more control. That was one of the issues.

Dr Donovan: Sure.

Mrs McLeod: We now say to members that we do not give members advice; we put information in front of them, because it is a very careful area.

MS LE COUTEUR: I appreciate legally why you do that.

Mrs McLeod: We say to them, “Don’t just think you have read the contract. Take it to someone and get advice once you have decided where you want to go. And take the other contracts too. Get advice on them all.” It is significantly different. People should

not just think, “I like that. Go with that one”.

Dr Donovan: You might be interested, in dealing with your electorates, that we have established in Canberra a fully funded financial information desk. It is an online and telephone service for all seniors who want advice about retirement villages, financial contracts or anything to do with money—wills, powers of attorney, family trusts, you name it. If you ever want to refer anybody that comes to you to somebody who will give you unbiased information, they are our employees, but nevertheless they are meant to be independent. To answer your question, I think Basil said that 90 per cent of his clients deal with retirement villages rather than other aged-care issues.

MS LE COUTEUR: I believe that.

MS LEE: You have put here that you are disappointed that there was no needed major increase in disability parking spaces. Are you talking in terms of pure numbers? There is a set minimum percentage when it comes to public areas and public buildings and stuff. Is it your opinion that perhaps, with a growing ageing population, we need to review that minimum?

Mrs McLeod: Our members relate to their individual actual experience, and I can support them as far as Jamison is concerned. If you have to go there, you have to be there by eight or you will not get one. There are all sorts of things like that. But then we have members who tell us that out in Gungahlin there are so many of them that people are really annoyed because they are taking up all the spots. People come up and say, “What are you going to do?” There are the ones there, and at the doctor, I guess, but it is mainly people who just cannot get them. It is also the enforcement of it. You see people get out and run inside, but you would not dare say anything.

MS LEE: Last year the fine was increased quite significantly in an attempt to try and stop that.

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes. It is about \$600, from memory.

MS LEE: Yes.

Dr Donovan: It is a question. Obviously, with the demographic, the number is going to continue rising repeatedly, as well as the need to have them in the right places.

MS LEE: Yes. It is the right places too, isn't it?

MS ORR: If I am not mistaken, there is funding this year for better policing to make sure that people who are using them are the appropriate people.

Mrs McLeod: Yes. That is one of the problems. The police told me that you just need to get the number off the sticker. It is so small I have to get my glasses out and peer. By then, I am fearful someone will be punching me, so I do not get out.

MS LEE: I ask because it was raised in the Assembly only last year.

Mrs McLeod: It is a concern. We got one today. I told you where my secret one was.

Dr Donovan: Because Judy has one, and she had to be dropped off, I had the sticker. I parked in the last available spot over in the carpark and started zapping off to here. A fellow gave me an earful: “How dare you.” I said, “I have just dropped off someone that does have mobility problems, but it is not me.” Nevertheless that is a problem.

Mrs McLeod: It is a problem. When you look at hospitals, at Calvary it is just impossible to get a park. I am a great user of the Belconnen community car to get to medical things, because the main public hospital is absolutely hopeless. You have to park so far away; then you get there and you cannot breathe, you go into the heart specialist and all the usual things happen. So I go in the community car, and that is the only way. I say to people, “Get the community car.”

To get a community car now, you have to have an ACAT assessment. We have been told by members—that is a federal issue, I realise—that if you ring up for an ACAT you have to say you need it now, that you have conditions that require it. Otherwise they have this habit of people saying, “How are you?” You say, “I am good, thanks. How are you?” Then they say, “What are you ringing us for? You do not need an ACAT assessment.” You get caught out very easily on that.

THE ACTING CHAIR: We are quite over time, so we will have to finish there. Thank you very much for appearing today.

Dr Donovan: Thank you for listening; it has been great.

Mrs McLeod: And thank you for your help with the budget. I know we have finished, but I will just say this at the end. I have been with National Seniors for a long time. Only over the last three or four years have we had the recognition and the opportunity to get a submission in and to have follow-up. Thank you for that.

LEONARD, MS CLAIRE, General Manager, Cystic Fibrosis Association of the ACT
MINOGUE, MRS TANIA, President, Cystic Fibrosis Association of the ACT

THE ACTING CHAIR: Welcome. These hearings are being broadcast live and are also being recorded and transcribed. Have you familiarised yourselves with the privilege statement and do you understand the privilege implications associated with it?

Ms Leonard: Yes

Mrs Minogue: Yes.

THE ACTING CHAIR: Before we proceed to questions, would you like to make a brief opening statement?

Ms Leonard: Yes, thank you, and thank you very much for inviting us to attend the estimates again. We really appreciated the action that happened on hospital in the home as a result of the appearance last year—we think the results that have come through in this year's budget are fantastic.

We would really like to follow up on that by moving through to the Canberra Hospital cystic fibrosis clinics in particular. The position we are coming from in relation to the clinics and funding is that they are under-resourced versus the national standard of care for cystic fibrosis by a very significant amount. We have currently in the ACT perhaps more cystic fibrosis patients than people realise—53 adults are being treated at the Canberra Hospital and 40 children either in full-time care or shared care with New South Wales hospitals. Additionally, there are 20 children in the ACT with cystic fibrosis that are treated outside the ACT because the clinic does not have capacity to treat them here. These are pretty significant issues for the care of our community in this territory.

It all comes back to, unfortunately, funding and the allocation of resources within the Canberra Hospital, which is of course all based on where the hospital and ACT Health can allocate that funding. We have some paperwork—I will not bore you with the numbers at the moment; you can go through that at your leisure. But, in essence, if I use the paediatric clinic as an example, there should be a 0.8 FTE specialist consultant, respiratory physician. We have none.

The consultant physician who looks after children with CF in the ACT is a visiting medical officer. He is not employed by the hospital, so he bills the hospital back for his time. He is a private physician who otherwise works through John James and his private rooms. This is a fairly fundamental issue for children with CF in the ACT.

If we then look at the nursing staff that look after children with CF, a clinical nurse practitioner or clinical nurse specialist tends to hold together all of the activities around a specialist clinic. They are the ones who coordinate the care for all of the children. The nurse who looks after the CF kids in the ACT is there for 0.25 of her time. It is recommended in the national standard that there be two FTE nurses, in that range. The nurse we have is one of the outpatient nurses; she is not actually employed

to look after CF children even at that 0.25. So again, we have a huge gap in care for kids.

What we have allocated, however, is 0.2 of a psychologist in the paediatric centre. We have no psychological help for adults with cystic fibrosis in the ACT, unless they are an inpatient being treated in hospital on an admission, which means they are extremely unwell. That is probably not exactly the right time to be getting them into psychological help; you really need it outside that framework. There is one full-time physician at Canberra Hospital for adults, and there is 0.75 of a nurse.

All of the other services required as part of cystic fibrosis care are not funded within the Canberra Hospital. They have no allocation for funding at all. The people who provide the services—dietician, pharmacist, physios—come through the units in the hospital, but they have no dedicated role with CF. They do it because they have an interest in the area and they do it to help out. If one of them is away, there is no-one to backfill. Again, this impacts patient care.

The issue we have is that we are already under-resourced. The population is growing. Why is it growing? Because treatment for CF is getting better and people are living longer. We have more adults, they are living longer, they are living healthier, which is great, but they still have significantly declined health in their 30s and 40s.

As we look forward about five years—we have some numbers in the paperwork we will give you—we are going to have a leap of about 40 people with CF added to the numbers we currently have that will require treatment within this territory. That takes the standard of care numbers into a whole new bracket. Unfortunately, we only have three copies of the standard of care document in our office. We can provide more; we need to get them down from Sydney, but we will give you the three we have. That document has all those ratios. There are set ratios that are nationally approved by the thoracic society and the college of physicians that tell you how we should be managing treatment and care of people with CF.

That is what we are putting to you—some issues for consideration. Something else to look at is that the better care you provide for treatment and so forth in clinic and ongoing care, the less hospitalisation you get, thereby freeing up beds and the issues that relate around those components of the health system as well. That is where we are coming from.

THE ACTING CHAIR: With those figures you were giving us, I appreciate there is a national standard, but how do we compare to other jurisdictions?

Mrs Minogue: In comparison to staffing levels in other clinics across the nation we are significantly understaffed.

THE ACTING CHAIR: In terms of other areas of health that we hear about, sometimes there is a shortage nationwide and that is why things cannot get filled. But if other jurisdictions are doing better, that is pretty indicative.

MS LE COUTEUR: You gave us lots of figures. Can you give us the source for the national figures as to what we should aim for, and how did you get the figures for

what we actually have in the ACT? The reason I ask for the ACT one is that I am envisaging that we may talk about this with ACT Health, and they may say they are spot on or they may say they are not.

Mrs Minogue: The patient number figures prior to 2018 have come from the cystic fibrosis data registry, and the FTE for care has come from the national standards of care document, which was worked through in 2008 and which has been authorised by the thoracic society and the college of physicians.

In terms of what is happening at the Canberra Hospital, we have spoken to both the doctors that currently lead the clinic teams for the adults and the paediatrics and the nurses, and they have come back to us with the numbers of what they actually have in clinic.

MS LE COUTEUR: Do patients end up supplementing the Canberra Hospital with private medical help or is it just not available here in Canberra for love or money?

Mrs Minogue: A number of patients seek private medical help through a respiratory physician and psychological care. They also have care through their GP.

Ms Leonard: The reason we are here is to flag that CF ACT also fills the gap in there as well. In terms of providing medication, we provide vitamins over and above what is provided through the system and we can provide assistance with nebuliser parts, fitness programs and so on. We fill a little tiny bit of the gap there but not as much as we would like to.

MS LE COUTEUR: And you are regarded as part of the health system, not part of the disability system?

Ms Leonard: Who? CF ACT?

MS LE COUTEUR: Yes. There are two strands of funding: through the NDIS or the health system.

Mrs Minogue: Cystic fibrosis is not recognised as part of the NDIS. Those with cystic fibrosis are not recognised, so very few get support.

MS LE COUTEUR: That is what I thought.

Mrs Minogue: They have to be critically ill to be considered for the NDIS, but that does not cover the majority of patients.

MS LEE: How is Cystic Fibrosis ACT funded currently? Have your funding concerns, issues or whatever changed before and after the NDIS? Even though it is not recognised—and I am aware of that—you clearly are still in talks to try and get some assistance from the NDIS.

Mrs Minogue: Yes, absolutely. We are in talks with the NDIS to try and get some support there, but that is a very slow and long process. So Cystic Fibrosis ACT is mainly and predominantly funded through donations and fundraising events.

MS LEE: Like the Santa Shuffle?

Mrs Minogue: That is right.

MS LEE: One of the things you talked about was the disappointment about not moving into Canberra Hospital. Can you explain why that is such an important thing for the committee and also to put it on the record?

Mrs Minogue: Currently, the adult cystic fibrosis clinic is held offsite at the west Belconnen health centre. Because cystic fibrosis requires a full multidisciplinary team and a number of tests and exams, I guess you could call them to check their health level; some of the equipment required to do that testing cannot be moved. Therefore having an offsite clinic facility does not work. It means multiple appointments and multiple trips to get the full required care that is needed. So it just adds further stress.

Ms Leonard: It also leads to noncompliance as well which, again, has a negative impact on people's health. If they have taken time out of work to go to the clinic and then they have to trek to the other side of town to Canberra Hospital, they are going to make a decision, "Am I going to do that?"

MS ORR: I noted in the survey that you did for the estimates committee that you did not make a pre-budget submission to the ACT government. Is that correct?

Ms Leonard: That is correct.

MS ORR: I want to get a better understanding then about the move of the centre from Belconnen to the Canberra Hospital. Is this something you have been in discussions about or that you have raised outside the budget process?

Mrs Minogue: Our members have raised with us the concerns and the difficulties and the impacts. We have also had discussions with the CF respiratory team, a nursing team, and they have issues as well with it being offsite. I know they are currently having discussions about getting it back on site.

MS ORR: So it is an ongoing thing?

Mrs Minogue: Yes.

MS ORR: So maybe next budget. I just wanted to make sure I had that correct.

MS LEE: How are the preparations for the Santa Shuffle coming along?

Mrs Minogue: The Santa Shuffle is coming along really well. I notice you have not registered yet.

MS LEE: I never said I would do it; I go out there and support and say, "Hey, well done," wearing my big coat.

Mrs Minogue: Perhaps you can encourage some colleagues to join us and register.

Ms Leonard: We are doing a follow-up thing with crazy Christmas jumpers at the Shuffle this year, too. So we are going to release that this week.

MS LEE: It sounds fantastic. Thank you so much.

THE ACTING CHAIR: Thank you for appearing today. The committee's hearing is now adjourned. I thank all the witnesses who appeared today for their contributions. The secretary will be providing all witnesses with a copy of today's transcript when it is available.

The committee adjourned at 5.21 pm.