



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL
TERRITORY**

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

(Reference: [Inquiry into annual and financial reports 2018-2019](#))

Members:

**MS B CODY (Chair)
MRS V DUNNE (Deputy Chair)
MS C LE COUTEUR**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

TUESDAY, 5 NOVEMBER 2019

**Secretary to the committee:
Dr A Cullen (Ph: 620 50136)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

APPEARANCES

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate	1
Community Services Directorate.....	1

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 4.14 pm.

Appearances:

Ramsay, Mr Gordon, Attorney-General, Minister for the Arts, Creative Industries and Cultural Events, Minister for Building Quality Improvement, Minister for Business and Regulatory Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

Whitten, Ms Meredith, Deputy Director-General, Workforce Capability and Governance

Community Services Directorate

Evans, Ms Jacinta, Executive Group Manager, Inclusion and Participation

THE CHAIR: I declare open this afternoon's session of the first day of public hearings of the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services into the 2018-19 annual and financial reports. I acknowledge that we meet on the lands of the Ngunnawal people. I pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging and the continuing contribution they make to this city and this region.

On behalf of the committee I thank Minister Ramsay and accompanying officials from the Community Services Directorate and Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate for attending today.

I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations entailed by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the privilege statement on the table. Could you confirm for the record that you have read and understood the privilege implications of the statement?

Mr Ramsay: Yes.

Ms Evans: Yes.

Ms Whitten: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Minister Ramsay, do you have a brief opening statement?

Mr Ramsay: No, I am happy to go straight to questions.

THE CHAIR: Minister, you have been doing a bit of work on veterans grants programs and assisting veterans in a raft of different ways. I have read about a program to support veterans travel. Can you expand on that?

Mr Ramsay: Very delighted to. It is great to be able to talk about a number of the things going on in the veterans space. Significant work is happening in relation to some national work still being undertaken around concessions. That is something we are looking at in conjunction with other ministers at the veterans ministers council.

The good news for ACT veterans is that we have announced that for the next two

commemorative weeks—the week of Remembrance Day and the week of Anzac Day next year—we will provide free public transport to all veterans and current serving members. That is from Monday, 11 November to Sunday, 17 November and then next year from Saturday, 25 April to Friday, 1 May.

We know at those times that significantly more veterans are involved in a range of commemorations and special ceremonies, especially here in the nation's capital. We know a number of people travel to the ACT for that time. We believe it is a particularly important time to encourage veterans and defence members to be out on public transport and making it easier for them. Both CSD and TCCS have worked together on that, and Minister Steel and I have worked together on making that happen.

Happening alongside that is that this year for the first time there will be an ACT-specific veterans commemoration event on 10 November at the National Arboretum. That is a specific initiative that has been led through the Veterans Advisory Council under the leadership of Brigadier Alison Creagh. We are trying to make sure that we foster social inclusion and recognition of our veterans.

On that day at the arboretum we will be announcing the new membership of the advisory council. We are changing the name and changing slightly the focus of the Veterans Advisory Council. It will become the ministerial advisory council on veterans and their families, acknowledging the important social connection that goes with the families of veterans. All of that is part of fostering that sense of social inclusion and engagement as part of the overall work of the government in the area.

THE CHAIR: How will veterans know about the free public transport? Sometimes it is difficult to get messages out.

Ms Evans: That is right. The minister mentioned that TCCS and CSD have been working together. A range of media releases will be made now that the minister has made that announcement and the website will be updated. We will go out through all the channels we have available to us to the veterans community. The Veterans Advisory Council will certainly be putting out that information broadly as well. We have a Facebook page for the minister's advisory council, so the information will go out on a number of channels.

THE CHAIR: I assume public transport includes light rail and buses?

Mr Ramsay: That is right. If anyone presents any evidence of having been in or being in the Defence Force that will be sufficient for them to receive free travel.

THE CHAIR: So they will not necessarily need a MyWay card?

Mr Ramsay: That is right. They can simply show their white card or their gold card or anything that has that evidence. We will be speaking to public transport drivers and the officers across TCCS so they are fully aware of that.

THE CHAIR: As to the Remembrance Day event for our ACT veterans, will they have a specific invitation or will it be open to all serving and previously serving

members of the Defence Force?

Ms Evans: It is a public event so anybody is welcome to attend. There will be parking as always at the arboretum and there will be a shuttle bus between a number of locations. The event will commence with a smoking ceremony. There will be opportunities for veterans to view the Turkish pine forest and there will be a commemorative wreath-laying element to the day. It is broad and it is a real opportunity for the community to engage but is particularly focused on veterans and serving members of the Defence Force to be recognised for their service.

THE CHAIR: And their families?

Ms Evans: Their families are very welcome. It will be a broad approach. We hope to build on that from year to year. Hopefully it is a great success and then the Veterans Advisory Council will be able to think about what might enhance the event.

MRS DUNNE: During the budget reply, my colleague Mr Hanson asked whether there would be details on some of the programs in your portfolio area, Mr Ramsay, of veterans and ageing, such as reports from the advisory council meetings and the outcome of community engagements. Will you make available the minutes or reports of advisory council meetings? If so, when will that happen?

Ms Evans: The advisory council minutes are not released per se; certainly, a number of updates are provided. With respect to the minister's engagement with the community around the age-friendly city plan, all of those project pieces will be made available publicly. That is community consultation across four or five different forums that can be made available on our website. In terms of the actual advisory council minutes, part of their terms of reference is that they are not publicly available; they are a document between themselves and the minister. However, as to the outcomes of those council meetings, certainly we can make a summary available if that is required.

MRS DUNNE: You have a specific arrangement that the minutes are not available?

Ms Evans: We do at this time, yes.

MRS DUNNE: Would there be anything to stop a more general communique about decisions made?

Ms Evans: No, not at all.

Mr Ramsay: No, there is nothing that stops a more general communique. I will refer to one of the things that I seek to do through the Assembly, in ministerial statements and at times like this, and especially with the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing. A key focus of the work that is happening at the moment is the development of the age-friendly Canberra plan, arising out of the age-friendly Canberra vision. That is the key focus of that work and those consultations at the moment. That will clearly be made public as those consultations continue.

MRS DUNNE: What is the time frame for that?

Mr Ramsay: The plan is intended to be released in April next year. We have had three community consultations so far. The consultations are focusing on each of the four areas across the vision. We have had the first three. We still have one to go, which will be in early December. The listening report will be produced by the consultant out of that and provided to me, I anticipate, either very late this year or very early in 2020.

MRS DUNNE: This is a consultation run by a consultant. What is the relationship between the ministerial council on ageing and the consultation?

Ms Evans: The relationship is that the person who is providing the consultation is an independent person; however, they are someone with a rich and long-term engagement in the community sector. In terms of the role of the ministerial advisory council, they have come to each of the meetings to provide facilitation for the table groups. They are the ones who are actually receiving the first drafts of any of the responses and assisting the office for seniors to look at how that might develop into an action plan.

Mr Ramsay: It was the previous Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing, under the chair of Fiona May, that led most of the work that became the vision for our city, the age-friendly Canberra vision for our city. The term of that particular advisory council ended. A new advisory council has been appointed under the chair of Professor Diane Gibson. With that changeover and the nature of the consultation, it has been important to have a consultant who is able to work through and produce that listening report back to government. It will be considered by the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing, then go back to government, before the plan is endorsed by government early next year.

THE CHAIR: What is the advantage in becoming an age-friendly city?

Mr Ramsay: There are so many, and I will table for the committee's information the age-friendly Canberra vision. The advantage of an age-friendly city is that an age-friendly city is a city that is good for all ages. With a particular focus on "age-friendly" often meaning "older-Canberrans-friendly", we know that a city that is inclusive, that has good facilities and that is respecting the rights of older Canberrans is also, by its nature, a city that respects the rights of younger Canberrans. It is something that is fostered.

There are particular things that we look to in terms of the values and the practicalities of being an age-friendly city, in that it fosters that strong sense of belonging. A phrase that I use regularly is that we are strong when everyone knows they belong, they are valued and they have the opportunity to participate. An age-friendly city brings those particular flavours to the way that we live in relation to older Canberrans. It also helps to change the dynamics and some of the language that have happened over time. Historically, we have had—not just in the ACT but more broadly across Australia, and I think beyond—a deficit language in relation to older people. We talk about the "problems" of ageing and the "difficulties" of things; we talk about the "struggles".

One of the important aspects of being an age-friendly city is that it helps to frame the

language and therefore the thinking in a different way, in what is recognised as more of a strength-based approach. We are affirming the importance, the value and the contribution of older Canberrans. Therefore we can be fostering a city that continues to do that in a very positive way.

There are other advantages that come into play as part of an age-friendly network. There is a global network. One of the things that we do as part of that is to learn from each other. One of the areas that I am seeking to learn from is Rotorua, which I will be visiting in the near future. It is a dementia-friendly city, and I will be seeing what we can learn from there. The work has been primarily led from beyond government and into the city as a whole. As a dementia-friendly city, Rotorua may have things for us to learn from in our particular setting.

MS LE COUTEUR: I had a look at page 24 of the CSD annual report, and it is very depressing. It says that only 64 per cent of people think that Canberra is an age-friendly city for seniors. It is quite different from what we have just been talking about. Do you have any specific ideas as to why we are so negative about Canberra as an age-friendly city?

Ms Evans: Certainly, we are very aware of that. Those strategic indicators on page 24 provide only two years of information. The reason is that we have changed the terms of the indicator. With respect to what we were measuring in the past two years, the survey included everybody from 18 years of age right through; anyone who picks up the phone and answers the survey from 18 years old.

We know that about 71 per cent of people over 60 think that we are an age-friendly city, so we are a lot closer to that stretch target, which is the 80 per cent. We are closer for older people. With people who are younger, perhaps they do not have that same perception; perhaps it is not on their radar and it is not something that they are really thinking about, whether the city is age-friendly or otherwise.

It is important to note that, while we are aware of those figures, the minister's vision for the city is one important piece in moving towards a more age-friendly city. We have those principles that we are working towards. The action plan will enhance people's understanding of what it is to be an age-friendly city and what we need to do to continue to move towards our target of 80 per cent.

MS LE COUTEUR: In recent months, since network 19, the major comment that I have had from people about age-friendly or otherwise has been that, with the reduction in local buses, they are finding it a lot harder, or impossible, to catch a bus. I do not want to prosecute the whole question of whether or not that was a good idea. That is clearly not your domain. My question is that, given that there are a lot of older people who are finding the changes generally more difficult, are you talking to Transport Canberra or Minister Steel about how we can make our public transport system work better for people who cannot easily get to a bus stop?

Ms Evans: Certainly, that is very much what we are doing. Through the forums that the minister spoke about recently, we have worked through three themes. The fourth theme is "a city for all ages" and the key principles there are that the city services meet the specific needs of older people, and that older people are consulted about

options around transport, housing and other community needs.

As we move into the fourth forum that the minister will be hosting in early December, we are hoping to get more information and feedback about that particular theme. That will be through community members, through older people themselves and through government.

Having done those four forums and having the facilitator work through preparing the listening report, at the same time the office for seniors is having individual meetings with each of the directorates and putting to them that these are the principles we are working to; this is what we know about what older people are telling us, including about transport; and what the actions are that they think will make Canberra a more age-friendly city.

I am very confident, in the conversations I have had with the other directorates, that they are genuinely looking for ways to support this vision and the plan going forward. They are particularly aware that infrastructure, transport and the way people can access buildings and programs are what older people are asking us to address through this next action plan.

MS LE COUTEUR: I am glad they are aware. Is it likely that they are going to be taking any action as a result of this awareness?

Mr Ramsay: Indeed. Obviously, the work that is happening from the vision to the plan at the moment is turning high-level principles and values into specific action steps. It is that plan that will have very specific steps that the government is committing to. That is why we are doing this work in these two stages.

The first one is to ensure that the values and the direction are the ones that we heard very clearly from the community. These 12 principles across the four areas came not from the government to the community but from the community to government. That was an important part of that process. Again there is the same process happening at the moment in turning it into the plan. It is a matter of making sure that it is very clear, as we hear from the community, that we take specific steps and that we are committed to it.

One of the things that is important about the particular vision and plan is that, although it is being led through the work here, through CSD and through the work of the ministerial advisory council, it is a whole-of-government approach. I refer to the meetings with TCCS, and with officials from the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate on a lot of the work that is happening in the area of employment matters for veterans. There is a whole range of things where the work of the office for seniors and veterans is whole-of-government leading work rather than particular portfolio work. It does mean that it will be flowing through into particular actions. Those particular actions have not yet been determined because we are in the process of listening, and translating that listening into steps.

MS LE COUTEUR: One other specific comment I have heard is from carers, who feel they are not mentioned in the plan. Many carers are in fact elderly or they are caring for someone who is elderly. Will that be addressed?

Mr Ramsay: It has been pleasing to have Carers ACT already very strongly involved in those consultations. Certainly, we acknowledge that a lot of carers are older; not all, but a lot of carers are older. This is not aimed at being a carers strategy; this is aimed at being a document that works to ensure that we have an age-friendly city. That includes being friendly to those people who are carers and who are older. It is not simply a matter of aligning the two, because we do not want to say that all carers are older, or that all older people are carers. But there is clearly an overlap.

I am very confident, having been able to listen in on the consultations that have happened already, that the voice of carers has been well articulated and well heard in those consultancy forums. I have no doubt that the things that come out in each of the 12 areas will well cover appropriate care and strategies for older Canberrans who are also carers.

MS LAWDER: I want to ask about preventing and responding to elder abuse and OPALS. Do you have any statistics about the number of calls that were taken during the year?

Mr Ramsay: I note that that is one area that straddles between this portfolio obviously and the Attorney-General's portfolio and so—

THE CHAIR: You can wear both hats.

Mr Ramsay: I know, but the officials who work with some of the details—

MS LAWDER: I am referring to page 32.

Mr Ramsay: Yes, that is fine, and there is information. I was just going to say that there is probably also more information that can be given tomorrow morning as well. But sorry, go on.

Ms Evans: Thank you, minister. Basically I do not have the number of calls available but we can certainly make that information available. But what I would say is that we have a range of ways to support older people in respect of any risk of elder abuse or in fact any allegations of elder abuse, OPALS being one of those providing information, referral and legal advice.

But also we have got a range of other supports in the ACT. ACT Policing have their seniors liaison unit. They also provide a point of contact for older people in terms of elder abuse. Senior Relationship Services, through Relationships Australia, is actually funded through the Australian government's Attorney-General's Department and they provide frontline services to older people in terms of elder abuse.

At the last hearings I think we discussed the fact that the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal are providing hearings at Canberra Hospital in terms of guardianship arrangements and then making sure that people can access services where they need them. And those hospital hearings have been really beneficial.

THE CHAIR: That had just started, I think, maybe at estimates or maybe the last

annual report hearings?

Ms Evans: I think we did touch on it last time. The Human Rights Commission have services through the victims support service.

Specifically through the Community Services Directorate we have got a number of grant opportunities where we focus on elder abuse. There have been a number of grants. In the 2018-19 grant round Legal Aid received money to provide support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members and advice around elder abuse. There was also \$10,000 for ADACAS to look at individual advocacy and community education in aged care and just in the community.

There are a whole range of supports and services. While I do not have the number of phone calls for OPALS, I assure the committee—

Mr Ramsay: And we can certainly provide those.

MS LAWDER: How can we get the numbers?

Mr Ramsay: That is fine.

MS LAWDER: I do not have to ask that tomorrow. You will be able to take that on notice?

Mr Ramsay: I will take that on notice and we will get that through from Legal Aid.

Ms Evans: Yes.

Mr Ramsay: The other thing I think, just in terms of the work especially through the OPALS line, is that one of the important initiatives that have happened with the OPAL service is that Legal Aid is doing a lot of the outreach. There are a number of times when, specifically rather than it simply being a phone call, one of the officers working on OPALS will head out and meet people in what is classed for them as a safe space, whether it is a library or community centre or whatever it might happen to be.

The other thing has been the production, I believe—probably, Ms Lawder, you are aware of this—of the bookmarks that have been provided. Again, they have been very helpful so that when people are out and about they can leave those bookmarks, which becomes a less threatening way of being able to get the information about elder abuse or about the services that may well be available to people.

The other thing—and this probably will be touched more on tomorrow—is that as Attorney-General I have asked the Justice and Community Safety Directorate to do some work on a specific elder abuse criminal offence and what that may look to. And we will be commencing consultation within the next few weeks, both broader community consultation and targeted specialist stakeholder consultation, around what that might mean.

I have mentioned in committees before that one of the difficulties around elder abuse

is that there is a World Health Organisation definition that lines up pretty well with what the Californian criminal code is but the Californian criminal code is not necessarily something that sits completely comfortably with an Australian jurisdictional code. Therefore the reports on what is elder abuse and the reports of what police might class as elder abuse and the reports of what the courts might see as elder abuse are all slightly different at the moment. And I think one of the advantages of having a stand-alone criminal definition of elder abuse will help us in a range of ways. When you see the statistics that will be coming through from OPALS they are based on a broad understanding of elder abuse, which may not be at all criminal as such.

MS LAWDER: Would those figures, when you are able to provide them on notice, be broken down into different types: physical, sexual, financial, emotional reports?

Mr Ramsay: There is some level of breakdown. And certainly to the extent that OPALS, operated by Legal Aid, breaks those down we can certainly make those available. I am aware that their statistics already break down the number of phone calls or the calls that have come in. Of that, X per cent of them would be what they would class as conversations around elder abuse. I think one of the helpful things around the OPALS line as well is that it receives a broader range of phone calls that are in relation to matters that may be difficult matters for older Canberrans but may not be elder abuse as such.

MS LAWDER: There are referral pathways?

Mr Ramsay: Absolutely.

MS LAWDER: They do not say, “Sorry, that is not elder abuse”?

Mr Ramsay: No.

MS LAWDER: What are some of those?

Mr Ramsay: One of the very important pieces of the work of OPALS is to make warm referrals, soft referrals, the whole range of things. Sometimes that may be in relation to legal support. Sometimes it is in relation to other forms of support or social support.

Again, one of the clear strengths that Legal Aid as an organisation has is that it is very well embedded in our community, both in terms of the legal sector and also the broader community support sector. Again, one of the realities of legal difficulties is that people going through a difficult time do not necessarily sit and analyse and say, “I’ve got a legal problem and then I’ve also got a financial problem and I’ve got a social problem.” They know that something is just not quite right.

The advantage of the OPALS line is that it is able to have that conversation with people and effectively to triage, to work through what may be the right form of support. And that it an important part of this as well.

THE CHAIR: Minister, could you say what OPALS stands for?

Ms Evans: It is the Older Persons ACT Legal Service.

I can now answer your question, Ms Lawder, because I have received the information. The Older Persons ACT Legal Service has taken 593 calls across the 2018-19 financial year. With 192, there was some indicator that it may be related to elder abuse. Recognising that when people first call they might be seeking advice—as the minister just said, they may not know what they are really asking for—about 192, they are thinking, may have been related.

Legal Aid ACT helpline staff will take those calls. Then they will work out whether there is some information or referral required. If it is more complex, professionals might be looking for secondary consultations or referring people to a solicitor or that sort of thing. The breakdown seems to be more around initially the number of calls and then what kind of call it might be in relation to elder abuse. At this point, that is the information that we are able to provide.

MS LAWDER: Are you still taking that on notice or is that all the information you have?

Ms Evans: No, we will not take that on notice, because that is all the information that CSD would have.

MS LAWDER: So it is 192 out of 593.

Ms Evans: Yes.

MS LAWDER: What were the other 400?

Ms Evans: They would be people ringing for general information or advice that may not be related to elder abuse.

MS LAWDER: Do you capture statistics on what they are looking for? Housing advice?

Ms Evans: That question would have to go to Legal Aid rather than CSD.

MS LAWDER: Finally, are you aware whether any charges have been laid against any individuals as a result of calls made or in relation to calls made to OPALS?

Mr Ramsay: I am not aware of that. I will follow that one through with Legal Aid and the DPP.

MS LAWDER: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: Minister, there was a program assisting veterans to seek employment, particularly in the ACT public service. Can you talk me through how that is going?

Mr Ramsay: It is going very well. Ms Whitten might be able to give further detail. It has been a very high priority. One of the good things I have been able to do with the

outgoing Veterans Advisory Council is put on the record my sincere thanks to them for the work that they have done in being able to help promote that. One of the important things for the work, in relation to veterans and now more broadly with their families as well, is understanding the age demographics and the nature of who are our separating veterans. For the information of the committee, the average age of people separating from the Defence Force is about 31. Therefore, there is that sense of the importance of being able to help foster that transition to employment.

One of the things that we have done in the ACT public service—there is a range of things—is appoint five executive champions across the public service who are bringing in a mentoring program that is available for people, for themselves and for other people who are offering themselves as mentors to be able to provide a mentoring relationship either with veterans or with the families of veterans who are employed in the public service.

Ms Whitten: In relation to the veterans employment program, what we have initiated, at the request of the minister, is a veterans employment register. That currently has about 110 people who receive monthly emails about information on veterans employment initiatives in the ACT public service, particularly around what job vacancies are available in the ACT public service which might meet the skills of those individuals where they have shared that information. That has just been initiated this year. We are very much looking at the skill sets that the individuals have to offer, and then trying to match some of the job vacancies to those individuals. So there is that personal sending of emails to individual veterans who have expressed an interest in employment in the ACT.

THE CHAIR: Of those 110, none currently works in the ACT public service? Or some might?

Ms Whitten: No, these are people who are interested in working in the ACT public service.

THE CHAIR: Interested?

Ms Whitten: Yes.

THE CHAIR: So they do not currently work in the ACT public service.

Ms Whitten: Yes.

THE CHAIR: As part of that register, do we know what levels people are looking for and what skills?

Ms Whitten: We certainly have a bit of information around their skill sets. That is quite varied. There could be ICT specialists, also health professionals, emergency services skills, mechanical engineering, and leadership. There is quite a diverse range of people who live in the ACT and, when they leave the forces, are interested to have employment within Canberra. They are the kinds of skill sets that we are looking at at the moment.

Mr Ramsay: One of the helpful things about the nature of the ACT public service is its breadth and its diversity in terms of the roles that are available across the various directorates. There are probably few employers that have the range of employment opportunities that the ACT public service does. It has been important at some of the defence transition seminars and other seminars to be able to have that information. I was at one a while ago when someone who was seeking to separate from the defence forces said, “I would be interested but you would not possibly have a position for me.” He named his particular skill set and the person that was standing behind him said, “Actually, in the directorate that I am in, that is exactly the skill set that we are looking for at the moment.”

There is not only the breadth of skills in veterans who are separating from the defence force, but also the breadth of the ACT public service. That is an important match. Again, it helps us change the narrative in relation to our veterans. A few years back it was a bit of “Everyone is wounded; everyone is damaged.” We have come a long way from that to be able to recognise the high skill sets, the high training and the high capability that exist in people who have served in our defence forces and who are serving in our defence forces and so being able to see that it is an important and positive employment choice for people to choose to employ them. By no means is it new employment for the sake of being nice. It is a matter where we employ them because we get great things out of our veterans. The work of the team that is being led in CMTEDD is excellent.

THE CHAIR: As part of the register to support those 110, if they decide that there is a job from the information that you send through, do you then offer support to help them understand how to apply for that job? Public service criteria are not the easiest things to write to.

Ms Whitten: We have a range of guidelines. The minister just mentioned a mentoring program, but that is for people who are already in the service. We also have a guide which was released in December last year around actually employing veterans in the ACT public service. That is more about the supervisor’s role. We also have a guide that was released in April of last year, a veterans employment transition guide, which talks about what the ACT public service is. These guides are available on our veterans page on our employment portal. All that information is there. The other guide that we have developed is a guide about translating the rank in our defence service and what that might look like in terms of level in the ACT public service, to try to assist not only the individual former member of defence but also employers to understand that if somebody has been a sergeant, a corporal or whatever, that could equal some other kind of classification in our system. It is different languages really.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, what work is the government doing to undertake, on a local level, support for veterans and their families in relation to mental health? I know that there are national reforms. Is the ACT partnering to implement the national reforms and, if so, to what extent?

Ms Whitten: That is obviously one of the very important issues facing veterans as they leave the Defence Force. It is around the transition from a space where they feel part of the family and defence is very much their identity. It may also be that they have been serving in a place where they have experienced some trauma. So mental

health is a massive issue that we know is being managed through the commonwealth's support for veterans.

Certainly within the ACT, particularly at the moment through our grant rounds, we are considering how we best target work supporting veterans. There is a range of supports that we have been providing. For instance, recently we provided a \$10,000 grant through the Cuppacumbalong Foundation for veterans who want to engage with blacksmithing, which is a quite therapeutic way for veterans to engage, to meet people who have similar interests. So there is that range of supports that we have been putting in place.

We also provided \$10,000 to Lifeline Canberra to look at training for Canberra veterans in conversations around mental health, suicide prevention and that kind of thing. We are providing some small amounts of money out into the community where veterans are likely to be engaging, and we are looking for opportunities through the office of the coordinator-general for mental health around how the programs that are being provided to the broader community can translate specifically for veterans. As the minister mentioned, they tend to be younger, maybe, than our perception of a veteran, and experiencing some challenges that are a bit different from the average community member.

Mr Ramsay: In addition to that, other than at the veterans ministers council itself and working with that, I have had a specific meeting with Minister Chester in relation to the work that we may be seeking to have in the ACT. A number of announcements have been made about areas of mental health or health hubs across other parts of Australia, and I have been working with Minister Chester in relation to future possibilities for the ACT as well.

MRS DUNNE: So at the moment, apart from some allocation through the grants process, there is not much that is specifically happening in relation to veterans?

Mr Ramsay: Again, there is a—

MRS DUNNE: But there is some stuff that you are having a conversation with Minister Chester about?

Mr Ramsay: There is the work that is happening through the grants programs. Most of the work in relation to mental health and the health of veterans is led through DVA, obviously, at a national level. I am working in relation to the federal government for that work to be extended and developed here in the ACT as well.

MRS DUNNE: Yes. Could you, on notice, provide the committee with information in relation to mental health emphasis in the grants program?

THE CHAIR: And whether it continues to veterans' families, because often supporting veterans with mental health issues affects families as well.

Ms Evans: Mrs Dunne, are you asking for the list of what grants have been provided in relation to mental health?

MRS DUNNE: Yes.

Ms Evans: All the grants are available on our website and they are all listed specifically, but we can provide it with a highlight on the ones that may be beneficial.

MRS DUNNE: Thanks.

MS LE COUTEUR: You have got two ministerial councils, one on ageing and one on veterans and their families. I appreciate that veterans and ageing are not exactly the same, but what are you doing to ensure that there is not a double-up? Many veterans will also be in the ageing category, in the nature of things.

Ms Evans: The minister has really supported an initiative for all of our advisory council chairs to meet. In the past 12 months what we call the joint advisory council chairs, JACC, have commenced meeting. That is a really fantastic forum in terms of talking about both the work that aligns across all the different portfolios and also the work that is very different, because sometimes the chairs would not necessarily be aware of work that is happening with their advisory council. That secretariat is supported through the ACT government.

The chairs meet about every two months. Each of the chairs takes a turn in being the chair for the JACC, and the secretariat, as I said, is provided to capture their ideas. For instance, recently the JACC group met to consider the wellbeing indicator work and think about how that aligns across all the different portfolio areas. We have also had conversations around, for instance, things like age-friendly work, because that might flow down into different areas such as, as you said, the veterans area. That initiative in the past 12 months has started to see some really important alignment across all of the advisory councils and chairs.

MS LE COUTEUR: Could you give us, on notice, a list of the councils that are all meeting together like this?

Ms Evans: Certainly.

MS LE COUTEUR: It sounds very interesting.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We will conclude. Answers to questions on notice should be provided to the committee secretary within five business days after receipt of the uncorrected proof *Hansard*, day one being the first business day after the uncorrected proof *Hansard* is sent to the ministers by the committee office. All non-executive members may lodge questions on notice. These should be received by the committee secretariat within five days of this hearing. Responses to questions on notice should be provided to the committee office within five days of receipt of the question, day one being the first business day after the questions are sent to the ministers or the officials by the committee secretariat. When available, a proof transcript will be forwarded to witnesses to provide an opportunity to check the transcript and suggest any correction. Thank you for attending today.

The committee adjourned at 5.02 pm.