



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

12 September 2017

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Tuesday, 12 September 2017

The Assembly met at 10 am.

MADAM SPEAKER (Ms Burch) took the chair, made a formal recognition that the Assembly was meeting on the lands of the traditional owners, and asked members to stand in silence and pray or reflect on their responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

ACT Health assets Ministerial statement

MS FITZHARRIS (Yerrabi—Minister for Health and Wellbeing, Minister for Transport and City Services and Minister for Higher Education, Training and Research) (10.02): I rise today to speak on the topic of ACT Health asset maintenance in response to a motion passed in this place on 2 August. The ACT Health service is renowned and well regarded by Canberrans for high quality health service delivery and health care. The ACT government is proud of the health care that it provides Canberrans and many others around our region. We know that this is vital for our community, especially to service the changing healthcare needs of our growing city.

Our health services are delivered in a range of facilities around the city. Members would be aware of many of these, more so than ever when we and our loved ones become patients of the health system. Care is delivered throughout these facilities, whether they be our hospitals, community health centres or walk-in clinics. They can become the stuff of strong memories, whether it is an emergency department we attended due to an unexpected injury or illness, the birth suites in which we had our babies, or clinics we attended as outpatients for rehabilitation and recovery.

As the healthcare system has grown and matured, so too have our facilities. Health assets and infrastructure are obviously a key feature of health service delivery. I am glad of the opportunity to reassure members and the community of the proactive approach ACT Health is taking to managing and maintaining these essential assets.

Canberra has, like cities across Australia, a wide range of health facilities. Those owned and operated by ACT Health were built over many years. It has long been the case that upgrades to and maintenance of these facilities are proactively managed by ACT Health, in addition to overseeing the construction of new facilities.

It is a feature of good government to undertake this proactive work. Most recently ACT Health commissioned a significant piece of work to inform this ongoing effort. As members would be aware, that report was undertaken by AECOM. It is titled *ACT Health infrastructure asset condition report and minor works priorities*, the AECOM report.

Members should also be aware that the AECOM report informed a significant budget initiative in the 2016-17 budget, the \$95.3 million upgrade and maintain ACT Health assets, or UMAHA, initiative. Both of these actions are an excellent example of the

proactive work ACT Health has undertaken to comprehensively assess its asset base and to identify priority maintenance, remediation and upgrade projects.

The intent of UMAHA, as the name suggests, is to upgrade and maintain ACT Health assets. Upgrading and maintaining assets includes responding to risks identified through information gathering and reports, such as the AECOM report.

The ACT community would expect no less of ACT Health than to prioritise those highest ranked risks, and that is exactly what has occurred. It is certainly not unusual for a condition report to be undertaken, for it to reveal issues requiring attention and for government to prioritise funding to respond to those issues appropriately.

The AECOM report identified 583 risk-rated items comprising four items with an extreme risk rating and 143 items with a high risk rating. The remainder were ranked medium or low. Risks rated extreme or high, which had not been otherwise addressed through separate projects, were therefore included within the scope of the UMAHA appropriation.

Of the four extreme risks, two were funded outside or partly outside of the UMAHA appropriation. Those include the helipad, which was funded through ACT Health's clinical service redevelopment phase 3 appropriation, and the gas meter works, which are joint funded, with the continuity of health services plan—essential infrastructure project undertaking the enabling works and enclosure and the UMAHA appropriation funding the cost of the replacement meter sets.

Additionally, medium and low risk items associated with the deferment of the Canberra Hospital buildings 2 and 3 redevelopment were included within the UMAHA appropriation. This resulted in 149 items being included in the final approved initiative being delivered across three financial years from 2016-17 to 2018-19.

The program of works has been grouped according to trade, size or location to create a series of streamlined work packages. This logical packaging assisted in the streamlining of investigative survey works to define the scope, output specifications and creation of construction packages.

The UMAHA program of works is rightly designed to minimise any potential risks to the interruption of the delivery of health services and to deliver essential remedial works on a planned basis. These objectives are closely aligned with the ACT government policies around sustainable delivery of health services.

As I am sure you can appreciate, Madam Speaker, the nature of health service delivery and associated infrastructure is complex. Health service delivery cannot simply be stopped for a number of hours to allow for works to be undertaken. Many of the works packages require specialist skills and expertise, as well as detailed coordination, design and investigation, to determine a works program. Shutdown planning and clinical stakeholder engagement are a crucial part of the project delivery phase.

We saw this in April this year when an electrical switch incident, which led to a small fire, necessitated the shutdown of power for a period of time. While this obviously had an effect on the day-to-day running of the hospital in the short term, the issue was well managed and the impact on patients and service delivery was minimised. It is currently forecast that the works identified in the AECOM report and subsequent UMAHA package will be completed by June 2019. Detailed reporting is undertaken for each works package, including monthly reports tracking scope, program, cost and risks.

There are 15 developed UMAHA packages and today I would like to provide an update on the progress of each one. We have developed a minor works package which covers small, low value items of work both on and off the Canberra Hospital campus facilities. Works on this package commenced in January 2017. There is also a generators package for which two generators were included for investigation and replacement. New generators were installed in December 2016.

The building 10 fire compartmentalisation package involves review and investigation of the building 10 fire compartmentalisation to amend penetrations in the fire and smoke compartments within the building. These works were completed in September 2016.

The Mitchell centralised sterilising services department package includes upgrade works on plant and equipment at the Mitchell centralised sterilising services department. These works are underway. They comprise a new cart washer, additional steriliser and the required associated infrastructure works including drainage, electricity, water, steam and exhaust for the new equipment. These works are anticipated to be completed by November 2018. The gas meter package includes the purchase of a new gas meter from ActewAGL to replace the existing building 12 meter. Construction is nearing completion, with final commissioning of the new gas meter to be complete by the end of 2017.

One significant package that members are already aware of is the main electrical switchboard replacement project package. The scope of the project was primarily targeted at replacing the ageing main switchboard assets at the Canberra Hospital in building 2 and building 12, including provision for an ActewAGL substation upgrade to address existing deficiencies and to support future organic load growth. These works are well underway, with building 2 works completion expected to be June 2018 and the building 12 works expected to be complete by February 2019.

The next package relates to lifts at Canberra Hospital. Two lifts in building 3 will undergo full replacement. The new lifts will improve access for patients and visitors to the main reception area in building 2. Works on this package are underway with anticipated completion due late 2018.

The electrical residual current device package covers buildings 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 8 and 10 at Canberra Hospital. The package will investigate and replace the electrical infrastructure, such as distribution boards and residual current devices across the campus where necessary. The residual current device package investigations are also

complete. To ensure cohesion across the hospital's electrical system, this scope will be reviewed, implemented and carefully staged in conjunction with the main electrical switchboard works.

The hydraulic upgrade package will investigate and, where necessary, upgrade hydraulic infrastructure such as valves, pumps, pipe work, tanks and seals. The scope of the package is ultimately to address the deterioration of the hot and cold water infrastructure. These works are underway in buildings 1, 2, 3, 10 and 12.

The heating, ventilation and air-conditioning package included an initial investigation into the heating, ventilation and air-conditioning infrastructure. These identified a number of assets, such as chillers, that require replacement. Additional investigations are also required to ensure that heating, ventilation and air-conditioning infrastructure can maintain a reliable source of heating and cooling ventilation to buildings across the campus in an energy-efficient and cost-effective manner. The procurement, investigation and reporting works are underway, with construction activities expected to commence in January 2018.

The building 10 cold rooms package includes an upgrade and replacement of the ageing mortuary cold rooms. Design works are complete and construction will commence later this year. The fire package includes upgrades to a number of fire systems, both passive and active, on and off campus. Investigation works to define the scope requirements are nearing completion. Minor construction works on and off campus are underway.

For the nurse call and ICT package, in order to facilitate future nurse call and ICT system upgrades, new or expanded communications rooms will be built in buildings 1 and 3. Procurement of a contractor to undertake this work is underway, with construction to commence later in 2017.

The facade package has delivered a detailed audit of external building elements on buildings 1, 2, 3, 10 and 12. Ongoing annual inspections are occurring to determine remediation requirements. The high-rated risks have been resolved and further necessary works, such as roof or facade leaks from rain, will be addressed as they are identified.

The one identified extreme rated risk has been downgraded to a high rated risk, following the introduction of restrictions to building 1 window opening, access restrictions to building 1 balconies/surrounding areas and ongoing monitoring of window condition as part of annual building facade inspections instigated under the program.

In regards to the high-risk rated items identified by the AECOM report at Calvary Public Hospital, Bruce, all items are expected to be completed in 2018. These packages include: the sub-mains upgrade; Marian roof upgrade, calorifiers and dampers project; and the environmental cooling upgrade.

To complement the work packages already outlined, the UMAHA appropriation also funds the development of strategic asset management plans for the ACT Health

property portfolio and medical equipment asset base. Additionally, there is an allocation of funding with the UMAHA appropriation for minor medical equipment procurement between now and the financial year ending June 2019 in excess of \$5 million.

In parallel with the planning and implementation of the program of works, Health infrastructure services operates a comprehensive risk register where identified infrastructure risks are subject to risk treatment plans and assignment to the appropriate risk owners for action. As the implementation of UMAHA program of works proceeds, any new infrastructure risks are being identified and are captured on the Health infrastructure services risk register so that they can be mitigated accordingly. This extends to a review of all risks identified in the AECOM condition assessment report.

In this way, ACT Health tracks all known infrastructure risks in a coordinated and strategic manner to ensure infrastructure investment is aligned to ACT Health's overall objective of delivering high quality, patient-centred care to the Canberra community. Work is underway in the 2018-19 business case process for ACT Health to commence planning activities for UMAHA phase 2.

Madam Speaker, as you have just heard there is a significant amount of work being undertaken to ensure that we provide safe and operable health facilities for our community and surrounding regions. We are committed to providing better care where Canberrans need it. The government has ensured that infrastructure maintenance and renewal of our health assets are undertaken in a well planned and strategic way.

Whilst the AECOM report certainly identifies a number of issues, I can assure members that the government has quickly and appropriately addressed the priority issues. I am confident that ACT Health is working systematically and thoroughly to address all issues funded through the UMAHA initiative.

As I have done to date, I will continue to keep the Assembly updated on progress regarding our infrastructure upgrades at Canberra Hospital and other ACT Health facilities. ACT Health take great pride in the health services they deliver and the way that they maintain facilities is an extension of this pride and commitment to meeting the ongoing healthcare needs of Canberrans now and into the future.

I present the following paper:

ACT Health Assets—Maintaining—Ministerial statement, 12 September 2017.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (10.15): I thank the minister for this statement this morning and will reserve comment to a later day on the substance of it. But reflecting on the motion of 2 August, I am not yet convinced that this statement complies with the motion. I recall that the minister and all of the government agreed to this motion.

The motion called on the minister by the first sitting day in September, which is today, to report on progress for work to fix each of the extreme and high risk issues identified, the cost of fixing each of the issues, the progress to date on each of the issues, and when each of the problems will be rectified.

The minister today has moved through 149 issues in a broadbrush way, referring to 16 packages. But I am not yet convinced that that complies with the matters brought forward in the original motion. In that regard, I reserve my right to return to the Assembly with a further motion if the opposition is not satisfied, on reflection and on closer study, with the contents of the statement today.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm Ministerial statement

MS FITZHARRIS (Yerrabi—Minister for Health and Wellbeing, Minister for Transport and City Services and Minister for Higher Education, Training and Research) (10.17): I begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people, whose sacred lands have so much meaning to their ancestors, kinship connections and families who continue to care for country.

It gives me great pleasure to be able to provide this update and to formally announce to the Assembly that the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm is open, has commenced its client intake processes and will soon be supporting local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

This has been a journey of many years for representatives particularly of the United Ngunnawal Elders Council, who came together with a common purpose driven by a deep sadness for the loss of lives within their communities. The Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm is the product of these conversations and will provide a place of healing, a place where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will feel safe and supported by their traditional custodians, community leaders, elders and respected role models. Cultural healers will work to make ongoing and meaningful changes in their lives and to break the cycle of drug and alcohol dependency.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples we understand that acknowledging who they are and where they come from is an intrinsic aspect of their identity. Their identity encompasses the story of their place of belonging, direct family lineage to their cultural identity, and self-empowerment for protecting their spiritual wellbeing. Although the introduction of healing is reasonably new to government service provision, the concept of healing has been part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's culture and way of life for thousands of years.

The concept of healing was first made most clear to the broader public in the *Bringing them home* report in 1997. Since then there has been growing recognition of the need for a holistic approach to tackle the root causes rather than just the symptoms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's suffering and disadvantage. Whilst the

concept is well accepted and has proven effective in countries such as Canada, in Australia it unfortunately still remains on the fringes. Putting spirituality and culture at the centre of care is not at the heart of Western medicine and often leads to questioning of its appropriateness as a policy response to issues such as incarceration or addiction.

The Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm will strive to do what has not been done thus far in the territory, that is, engage in the personal journey of individuals, families and communities dealing with the trauma caused by past practices and current disadvantage. In short, it aims to take a different approach to care to break the cycle of drug and alcohol problems, and these are the key words: break the cycle.

The Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm views the recurrent problems with alcohol, drugs and incarceration as symptoms of underlying issues. The farm strives to deal with these underlying issues rather than the symptoms in isolation. This is a difficult process. These issues are not ones which many want to talk about or, in some cases, even recognise. However, they must be confronted and addressed. The Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm will work to restore pride, trust and cultural identity whilst equipping individuals with a broad range of skills and networks needed to engage meaningfully in the community. This will form a base from which participants in the program can better avoid relapse, participate more fully in society and potentially even grow to become community role models themselves.

Through this project the ACT government aims to build individuals who have strong links to their identity and culture, who will not only be resilient in their own lives but can be seen as positive role models for others in their community and show that change is possible. This is a journey which will take time. Overcoming generations of disadvantage and trauma and restoring lost cultural identity do not happen overnight.

The work that will be done by the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm is not only about the individual healing journey; it is also a statement about promoting and protecting the unique and diverse cultures of our local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and recognising the importance that culture plays not only in the wellbeing of the community but also of the individual. This has been recognised as a central right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here in the ACT as part of the ACT Human Rights Act, and I am pleased we are able to give life to these rights through the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm.

All clients seeking to enter the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm will have to undergo an assessment process to determine their eligibility and preparedness for the program. The assessment process will examine the client's eligibility. This will involve two panels. The first panel will examine whether a client is in recovery from alcohol and drugs as well as their stability on any medications, their mental and physical health and any criminal matters which may affect their participation in the program. The second panel will examine the cultural and other preparedness for a client's participation in the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm.

Clients may be eligible for entry to the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm if: any criminal history has been discussed with the service manager and deemed as

manageable by the assessment panel; any mental illness is manageable; they are stable on medications; and there are no pending charges or criminal sentences which in the opinion of the service manager will interfere with the client's participation in the program or the conduct of the service.

A client may be referred to other programs and supports if: there are criminal charges still pending; there is chronic self-harm; they are not stable on medications; or there is any other factor which in the view of the evaluation panel would pose a risk to self or others or to the good conduct of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm.

With this said it is important to note the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm will take a no wrong door approach. Those who are not deemed suitable for the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm will be guided and supported by the staff of the bush healing farm to other services to support their needs with the view that in time, when they are ready, they will be welcomed back. Once a client has been deemed eligible and offered a place at the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm, they will commence working with support staff in the development of their individual plans for success.

To assist clients of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm to meet their goals, ACT Health, in consultation with the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm advisory board, has identified a number of key areas which are necessary for the success of the program. These areas include: reconnection to country and culture; a foundational skills program; a life skills program; and a relapse prevention program. To deliver on these key areas ACT Health has contracted with a range of service providers who will deliver programs to support the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm. In particular they have engaged with the Canberra Institute of Technology, Nutrition Australia, the healthy country program run by parks and conservation services and the alcohol and drug service of ACT Health.

ACT Health is planning for the first intake of between 10 and 15 participants initially in day programs transported from Canberra to the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm each day. As the programs develop, they will move to become residential programs with participants staying at the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm.

As I have mentioned, the key feature of the farm is to reconnect to culture and to land and to restore pride and identity among Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm clients. To deliver upon this, ACT Health has engaged the healthy country program of ACT parks and conservation. This is a well established and respected program. Through this program clients of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm will take part in visits to sites of significance around the ACT and be given insights into the cultural importance of these locations to local Aboriginal people.

Clients will also be given an understanding of local plants and the Ngunnawal plant use guide and they will also engage in activities to build a range of traditional tools and structures. Finally, clients will participate in yarning circles with local elders and other role models to talk about local culture both in the past and in the present. Through these circles elders will be able to engage with the clients and reinvigorate local cultural protocols and promote healing.

Providing skills education and pathways to employment is a core concept of the model of care. Through education and the promotion of job readiness and other foundational skills, we aim to restore confidence and provide pathways to employment and further education. To deliver this, CIT will deliver a unique foundational skills program to the clients of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm. This program has been specially developed by CIT to incorporate the eight Aboriginal ways of learning and will be co-taught by CIT's Yurauna Centre and Access Education. The program includes a cultural arts component which aims to reconnect participants to their cultural identities as well as to build self-confidence to participate in the other elements of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm. The proposal from CIT will link into the other parts of the program, notably the healthy country program.

It is a sad reality that many people in our community have not been given the opportunity in their lives to learn basic life skills such as cooking, weekly budgeting or how to access essential information that so many of us take for granted. We cannot assume that everyone has these skills, and this is something the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm advisory board was very aware of. As a result, ACT Health has commissioned Nutrition Australia to provide cooking skills and nutrition workshops. Three days a week clients will cook for themselves and their peers, building their skills in looking after themselves, their families and their community but also rebuilding their confidence in themselves.

It is also very important that we have in place programs which support recovery and prevent relapse. To this end the alcohol and drug service of ACT Health will conduct workshops and group sessions which will teach practical skills to help people deal with issues in their lives and empower them to abstain and achieve a healthy lifestyle balance.

To support the implementation of the programs at the bush healing farm ACT Health has recruited a number of staff to work with clients and service providers. The staff will guide clients through the assessment and intake processes and work with each client to develop individual support plans and ensure that a tailored approach is made to achieve the client's goals and aspirations beyond their time at the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm program. I am pleased to advise the Assembly that the majority of staff of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm identify as Aboriginal.

The government does not present this suite of programs as being complete just yet. This represents an initial offering to what we know is an evolving journey ahead of us. What I present today represents a beginning, a place to start and to learn and to come to grips with the concepts which Indigenous Australians have used for generations but, nonetheless, are new to Western medical tradition and to the setting in the ACT. We will evaluate this initial program, we will learn from it and, together with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, we will continue to evolve it.

To this end ACT Health is in the process of drafting a cultural healing framework which will establish the ongoing principals which underpin the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm and the concepts of cultural healing. ACT Health will work with the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm advisory board, Ngunnawal elders and the Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, the Healing Foundation and other members of our Indigenous community to deliver this framework.

In closing, I would like to thank the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm advisory board, in particular its founding members, Aunty Agnes Shea and Uncle Fred Monaghan. I would also like to make special mention of the co-chair of the advisory board and founding member Aunty Roslyn Brown. It was a particular privilege to be present at the opening of the bush healing farm with Aunty Agnes and to also on the same day celebrate her birthday. These three individuals started with a vision many years ago and have driven this project from the beginning. It is true to say that without their leadership and determination we would not be here today with a Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm which is playing its part in helping to heal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

I again apologise that the government's actions contributed to confusion during the planning phase and apologise directly to any members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community who felt misled as a result. I look forward to the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm evolving as a special and unique place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It certainly was a special occasion to be there at the opening. I thank Mr Steel, who came along to the opening as well. I present a copy of the statement:

Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm—Update on the progress and opening—
Ministerial statement, 12 September 2017.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee) (10.29): I too rise to speak on the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm. Our government is committed to providing better access to quality and culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. On 4 September I was pleased to have the privilege to attend the official opening of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm in the Tidbinbilla Valley with the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. We were joined by members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, Ngunnawal elders, community leaders, members of the Torres Strait Islander community and representatives from across the Canberra community.

The morning was a special day for those in attendance because it represented the realisation of the vision of Canberra's original custodians, the Ngunnawal people. The bush healing farm will provide a range of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people suffering from drug and alcohol addiction, with the emphasis placed on the important process of cultural healing.

The centre itself is nestled in the fantastic natural bushland of Tidbinbilla. The Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm's design and location recognises the significant role that country plays in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT, and the centre will serve as a point of reconnection to country and Aboriginal culture, away from modern city life.

The Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm is at its heart a place of healing. The centre's program and design will strengthen safety and support mechanisms offered to vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT who are suffering from substance abuse. Construction of the centre has been completed following productive collaboration between ACT Health and the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm working group, which has also helped to develop the service model.

The bush healing farm builds on the long preserved teachings and cultures of Canberra's original custodians. It will provide support through these teachings, led by the community of leaders and role models in a non-clinical setting. There is no doubt that this centre will take a unique approach to the healing process. By incorporating the support of elders and cultural healers, the centre will empower individuals through skills and knowledge to tackle the challenges of substance abuse and treatment setbacks.

The centre will offer prevention and education programs to be delivered by staff, the majority of whom identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Assistance will be provided to participants with emphasis on individuals reconnecting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and their own personal wellbeing. These goals will be pursued through many positive programs including life skills training, land management training, cultural programs, physical health and wellbeing programs and recreational activities. The centre will start helping 12 to 15 clients next month in its first 10-week program.

Joining local elders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders will be other culturally significant groups and organisations. Members of the Yurauna Centre from the Canberra Institute of Technology will help by guiding the centre's foundational skills program. This program has been designed for clients with a focus on education-based skills training, advice and cultural support.

Aboriginal rangers from ACT parks and conservation's healthy country initiative will help in delivering the centre's reconnection to country and culture program. The rangers will offer their considerable knowledge of Canberra's cultural heritage and environment to help clients re-establish these fundamental touchstones. Nutrition Australia will help conduct the centre's nutrition and food skills program. The organisation will help the centre's clients by providing their expertise in teaching the importance of healthy lifestyles. The program will teach the centre's clients to have confidence in cooking good, nutritious food for themselves and expand their healthy eating options.

The ACT's alcohol and drug service will deliver the centre's relapse prevention program. This self-management and recovery-based program will focus on aiding clients along the difficult path of recovery from substance and abuse addiction. The program will aim to support clients through positive wellbeing and self-reflection strategies, such as meditation, stress management and mindfulness.

This is a new approach to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT, and that is why it is so important that we get this right. We need to make

sure our centre can deliver the best possible outcomes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people facing the challenges of substance abuse. That is why the establishment of the centre will be carried out in a phased approach. We need a phased approach because the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm is a new model for the ACT, and few others like it exist nationwide. We need to determine what works, what does not and how best we can continuously improve and support the process of healing.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the work of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm working group and also senior Ngunnawal elders, including Aunty Agnes Shea. Most of us sitting in this room have had the privilege of hearing Ngunnawal senior elder Aunty Agnes Shea welcoming us to country at a range of different events. I personally put on record my thanks to Aunty Agnes for delivering a welcome to country at my brother's funeral three years ago next week, something that my family very much appreciated.

Aunty Agnes also led Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm's official opening with her traditional welcome to country. But this time Aunty Agnes was not only welcoming us to her country but also opening a project that she and the Ngunnawal people have driven. Opening the bush healing farm was a special day for Ngunnawal elders and the whole Ngunnawal community, who have worked hard to see this project realised. I am pleased that this week our government will legislate to recognise the unequivocal significance of the traditional owners to the ACT by establishing reconciliation day.

In conclusion, our government has taken important steps to provide better and culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by establishing the bush healing farm. With the intention to expand the farm's program to incorporate residential facilities in the future, I am proud of the action that we have taken to support the wellbeing of vulnerable people in the ACT by working in collaboration with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. I hope that by recognising the importance of culturally centred services, the bush healing farm will become an important place of healing in the future.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Active ageing framework Ministerial statement

MR RAMSAY (Ginninderra—Attorney-General, Minister for Regulatory Services, Minister for the Arts and Community Events and Minister for Veterans and Seniors) (10.36): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to update members on how work is progressing under the ACT active ageing framework 2015-18 to ensure that our city encourages the active participation of seniors.

Many more Canberrans are choosing to spend their retirement years in Canberra. This fact, combined with our relatively high income and education levels, low smoking rates and healthy lifestyles, is thought to contribute to Canberrans now having the longest life expectancies in the nation. The number of people aged 65 years or over

living in the ACT is projected to almost triple by 2055, when it is expected that one in five Canberrans will be 65 years or over.

While an ageing population brings a responsibility to care for older members of the community who need it, it also brings an enormous opportunity to capitalise on the experience and the wisdom of older people in our city. Many older Canberrans play an active part in our local communities. They volunteer, participate in the workforce, provide extended family support and play an active part in community, sporting and cultural activities.

Our cultural institutions, museums and a number of our festivals, such as the Multicultural Festival, happen because volunteers, many of whom are older Canberrans, contribute their time and their expertise. A number of our community services rely on volunteers, many of whom are retirees, to deliver assistance and support to some of our city's most vulnerable residents through food pantries, provision of meals, transport to medical appointments and a whole host of other services.

The contribution older Canberrans make within families should not be underestimated. Many take an active role in caring for their grandchildren and extended family, providing stable, loving care and important role modelling for our children.

The government, through its ACT active ageing framework, creates a blueprint for how we respond to locally identified needs of older Canberrans. The framework also sets out the government's commitment to the ongoing transformation to an age-friendly city which supports older Canberrans to be socially connected and active participants in community life. An age-friendly city optimises opportunities for good health, participation and safety in order to enhance quality of life as people age. An age-friendly city adapts its structures and services to be accessible to and inclusive of people of all ages with varying needs and capacities.

Today, Madam Speaker, I will update members on the continued progress we have made on implementing the framework in 2016-17. The framework sets out actions for completion in six key priority areas: civic participation and employment; communication, information and social participation; respect and social inclusion; community and health services; housing, outdoor spaces and buildings; and transportation. I am pleased to report that all 10 actions identified in the framework for completion in 2016-17 have been addressed. Reporting against each action item is available on the Community Services Directorate website. However, I would like to provide members with highlights of progress in each of the framework's six priority areas today.

Civic participation and employment is an area that is a protective factor against all manner of negative outcomes in the life of our seniors. Older Canberrans possess a wealth of knowledge and experience that is invaluable to their role as employees, volunteers and community leaders. As such, work is underway to strengthen opportunities for employment, training and volunteering pathways for mature age workers in this city.

The 2017-18 ACT budget includes the provision of \$1 million over four years from 2017-18 to assist mature age workers to upskill and re-skill, as well as to assist in the development of initiatives to boost the number of women working in trades. Through this work, the ACT government will aim to create more options for Canberrans in the later stages of life to gain the skills they need to enhance their job prospects or to seek a new career. This year the government has also put measures in place to lift restrictions on the number of funded courses a person can complete over their lifetime. This will allow mature age workers who already have a qualification greater access to traineeships and apprenticeships to upskill or to train for a new career.

Many ACT government agencies and services benefit greatly due to the engagement of seniors in volunteer roles. Libraries ACT recruits and engages seniors in volunteer roles including facilitating English conversation classes, making deliveries for the Home Library Service, literacy tutoring for adults and preparing discarded library items for sale. The success of events like Floriade and the National Multicultural Festival relies on volunteers, many of whom are older Canberrans.

The government also has open its seniors and veterans participation grants program. One of the streams of funding for this is for groups looking to encourage greater social participation for our senior Canberrans. Some of the most innovative ideas come from those who are in the community, and I look forward to seeing numerous exciting and creative ways to promote social connectedness in our seniors. Through all of these initiatives, we are helping to encourage all of our seniors to get out and remain connected to the city, through employment or volunteering.

Communication, information and social participation are vital to ensuring our seniors are an integral part of society in Canberra. Access to timely, practical information is vital for seniors to stay connected and to be informed about options and supports to stay active and independent.

The ACT seniors directory, which is funded by the government, provides readily accessible online information on topics including seniors support services and organisations; employment; lifelong learning; volunteering; housing; transport; and recreation. A hardcopy version is also created every two years, to assist those without access to the internet.

The *ACT Veterans and Seniors Newsletter* provides appropriate news and events information to veterans and seniors living in the ACT. The newsletter is distributed via email, and through the post to those who are unable to access the newsletter online.

Libraries ACT provides the community with access to ACT government information through promotional material about government services and programs, the ACT budget and consultation documents, as well as through hosting government consultation sessions and programs like ACT smart heating, property crime prevention and estate planning.

This year, the government has also funded the Royal Society for the Blind to provide training to those in the city who are vision impaired and over 55 in how to modify and

use their phones to ensure they can access information and remain connected. It is through ensuring that our seniors remain connected that we can ensure they are independent, able to make informed decisions and able to make best use of our wonderful city.

Supporting the respect and social inclusion of seniors is a core priority for this government. Participating in social, sporting, cultural and spiritual activities in the community allows older people to maintain or to establish supportive relationships and to stay informed. Active participation is also linked to good physical and mental health and lifelong wellbeing.

From 22 to 30 October 2016, the ACT government coordinated Grandparents Week celebrations. The week provided a range of events, programs and activities to promote interaction between generations of Canberrans.

This year, the government sponsored ACT Seniors Week celebrations. During the week, seniors participated in a range of events and activities throughout the Canberra region, including film screenings, dance performances and technology seminars. Seniors Week celebrations included a seniors expo which attracted around 3,000 older Canberrans and more than 150 exhibitors providing information on a variety of topics, including leisure, travel, health and community services.

The positive ageing awards, presented during the Seniors Week celebrations, recognised older Canberrans and community groups who contribute to the life of the community, ensuring that those who are out there to help increase the quality of life of our older Canberrans are celebrated. The 2017 *Life's Reflections* photographic competition was launched during Seniors Week. The competition invited the whole community to capture images of positive ageing and intergenerational relationships in Canberra. If I can momentarily put on one of my other hats, as Minister for the Arts, I know that the arts and photography are just another way that we can promote discussion and inclusion with the older people in our lives, as so many treasured memories are held, communicated and created through this medium.

The ACT government continues to fund the Council on the Ageing ACT to provide the ACT seniors card program. Around 68,000 ACT residents currently hold a seniors card, which provides them with access to benefits and discounts on a wide range of goods and services across Canberra. The scheme assists and encourages seniors to be active participants in the social and economic life of the city and recognises the valuable contribution of older people in their community.

Community and health services play a vital role in supporting older Canberrans to maintain good physical and mental health. This is then a key determinant in an older person's ability to socialise and engage in community life.

In March 2017, the ACT's response to the seniors health round table report was released. The seniors health round table was held in May 2016, and was attended by 70 delegates and 36 organisations, representing a range of views from the health sector and various community groups from across the ACT. The majority of the recommendations which emerged from the seniors health round table report are

consistent with and actioned through the ACT active ageing framework. The office for veterans and seniors is continuing to work with the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing and the ACT Health Directorate to consider how these recommendations can inform improvements in health outcomes for seniors in the ACT community, with a number of the recommendations agreed to and already being implemented.

Community-based health education programs are provided by ACT Health and are available to seniors as well as other residents of the ACT. This includes the adult healthy weight program and the stepping on falls prevention program aimed at helping older adults identify and address their own fall risk factors. In 2017, ACT Health attended the seniors expo, providing information sessions on a range of health topics of interest to seniors.

The health promotion grants program contributes to improving health outcomes for people in the ACT. In 2016-17, Alzheimer's Australia ACT received \$435,000 over three years to deliver the fill your bucket program, encouraging people to undertake daily challenges to maintain brain health and function. Also under the program, Belconnen Arts Centre received \$107,000 over three years to expand its dance for wellbeing program, which assists hundreds of older Canberrans to improve their physical activity levels, balance, strength and social and emotional wellbeing.

Community and health services play a vital role in the prevention of and response to elder abuse. Sadly, elder abuse is more common than many of us realise and it can have a devastating impact for older people and for families. The ACT government provides the abuse prevention, referral and information line for callers who are seeking assistance with issues of elder abuse.

In 2016-17 the ACT government also provided grant funding to a number of community organisations for activities to prevent and raise awareness of elder abuse, including to the ACT Disability, Aged and Carer Advocacy Service, ADACAS; Carers ACT; Legal Aid ACT; and the Bangladeshi Seniors Club, Canberra. We will be actively working to strengthen our responses in the area of elder abuse. The ACT government is currently consulting on recommendations outlined in the report of the Australian Law Reform Commission's inquiry into the issue and the Law Reform Advisory Council guardianship inquiry. Elder abuse is one of the first issues that the newly appointed Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing is investigating, and I am looking forward to hearing its expert recommendations in order to strengthen our work in prevention and response.

Housing, outdoor spaces and buildings are another key area of focus for the government, as an age-friendly city is one that seniors are able to easily and comfortably live in and move around. The outside environment and public facilities have a major impact on the mobility, independence and quality of life of older people.

The government's age-friendly suburbs project works to create an urban environment supportive of healthy, active ageing. It is about making it easier, more convenient and more accessible for older residents to move in and around their community. All suburbs are prioritised for age-friendly improvements based on current and future demographic profiles, the location of aged-care facilities and the suburb's need for

additional active travel facilities. Implementation of further priorities will be considered as part of the ACT government's ongoing maintenance programs. Construction of priority improvements for crossings, footpaths and bus stops commenced in 2016. Age-friendly suburbs project components have now been delivered in Ainslie, Weston, Monash and Kaleen.

Active living principles are also being incorporated into the Territory Plan. This will support healthy active lifestyles for all Canberrans. These principles relate to creating safe and attractive places and spaces and supportive infrastructure for all. Plans are in place for future designs for suburb upgrades to include, where possible, age-friendly inclusions. This will involve upgrading features such as the number and style of seats, footpaths and access points and appropriate lighting.

Stable and affordable housing which allows older people continued access to established networks of support and interest is essential to safety and wellbeing. The government offers the affordable rental scheme, which provides assistance to older Canberrans on low incomes to sustain private rental accommodation. The scheme provides an affordable rental product and reduces the amount of rent older people on low incomes are required to pay.

The ACT government has worked in close consultation with the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body to design new units to meet the needs of older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Five two-bedroom units were constructed in Kambah in 2016 and have proven very popular with the community. The government has also committed to building a second dedicated, culturally appropriate complex for eligible older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the future.

The ACT government has a suite of measures to ensure that we are looking after the most vulnerable in our community, including those seniors on fixed incomes such as the pension. The government has increased its funding in the budget over the next four years by \$35.1 million to ensure we can continue to support the most vulnerable in the community.

In order to make concessions available to more households and targeted to those who are most vulnerable, the energy and utility concession and the water and sewerage rebate, following extensive community consultation, were combined into one concession from 1 July 2017. This has provided extra relief to vulnerable seniors who are currently renting and who were not able to access the water and sewerage rebate. Additionally, the ACT government offers a rates deferral program for older Canberrans who are on fixed incomes. The program allows eligible residents to defer their rates payments until such time as their property is sold. This can help those who own significant property assets but who have fixed or limited income.

Finally, transportation is a key to ensure that our seniors can get around the city and remain connected and active participants. Transportation, including accessible and affordable public transport, is a key factor influencing active ageing. Being able to move about the city determines participation and access to community and health services. The government made a commitment at the election to provide free off-peak

bus travel for those over 70, easing cost-of-living pressures and increasing older people's ability to be active and independent. This has now been in place since 14 January this year and is enjoyed by many Canberrans.

The government offers the flexible transport bus service to assist seniors to access shopping centres, attend medical appointments and participate in social events such as Seniors Week. The flexible bus service has proven very successful, with over 50,000 passenger trips and over 1,000 passengers recorded on the booking system. I am pleased to note the expansion of the service to the inner north of Canberra from 11 September this year.

Work is progressing well to achieve the vision and the outcomes articulated in the active ageing framework. Work to create an age-friendly city has continued to be shaped by innovation and investment in key areas of work. We have a unique opportunity in Canberra to capitalise on our advantages as a planned city and to become a world leader as an age-friendly city.

The extent to which we achieve an age-friendly city is the extent to which we achieve an inclusive and vibrant one. Accessible public buildings, housing and streets enhance the mobility and independence of older people and those with disabilities. Safe neighbourhoods also allow children and women to be outside, confidently participating in social and physical activities. The whole community and economy benefit from the participation of older people in the community, enabled by appropriate transport systems and age-friendly environments.

As we enter the final stages of the ACT active ageing framework, we will be looking to the community, community experts and advocates, and within government, to plan the next stage of the ongoing transformation of our age-friendly city.

I present the following paper.

ACT Active Ageing Framework 2015-2018—Update for 2016-2017—
Ministerial statement, 12 September 2017.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS LE COUTEUR (Murrumbidgee) (10.57): Of course, as an older person it is very pleasing to hear about the work that is being done to support older people in our community. Civic participation and employment for older Canberrans are vital both for them and for the vibrancy of the city. We must take the time to respect the views of older people, and I am pleased there are a number of initiatives to promote civic participation and employment.

I would like to see more. I particularly reference that COTA was for a period funded to help older unemployed Canberrans get together a resume which would be attractive to employers and become job ready again but unfortunately COTA have informed me that the funding for this is no longer current and they have ceased the program.

Employment for older people has been recognised as a problem for a very long time. I do not know if everyone here is aware but every award that has provisions for redundancy normally gives an extra week or two if the person who has been made redundant is over the age of 45—not 65 but 45—recognising the considerable prejudice in the employment market against people who are not even so much older as just not younger.

Volunteering is very important and I am very pleased that the government is putting emphasis on that. But employment is as well, particularly in terms of older women. Quite a number of my friends will just say, “I have to work until I die because the old age pension is not going to be enough to live on.” Due to their circumstances earlier in their life they basically have not got any money—superannuation—and they are probably privately renting. Working is not just a nice thing for civil inclusion, it becomes a necessity for many older people. It is also a great thing in terms of actually feeling valued for your contribution if someone will pay you for it. That is how our society, rightly or wrongly, works.

Another area that I was particularly pleased to see was the ACT government consulting about the recommendations outlined in the report of the Australian Law Reform Commission’s inquiry. It is an issue I am concerned about and I will be actively monitoring activity in this area. I would really like to see elder abuse awareness extended to other cultural groups, using the Bangladeshi Seniors Club as an example. Elder abuse is an insidious issue in our community and one about which there cannot be too much awareness. I speak as a daughter who had parents, due to the lack of any alternative option for my parents, for quite a period in aged care which had lost its accreditation. Elder abuse is alive and well.

I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the recommendations the ACT Greens provided to the ALRC inquiry. The ACT Greens strongly supported the proposal that public advocates or public guardians should have the power to require a person other than the older person to firstly furnish information; secondly produce documents; or thirdly participate in an interview relating to an investigation of abuse or neglect of an older person.

We support the introduction of an oversight board such as a safeguarding adults board. We support the proposal to set up a public register of enduring powers of attorney and to ensure that sufficient safeguards are in place to ensure data privacy and security. The ACT Greens also support the suggestions contained in the discussion paper that a code of banking practice be reviewed to require banks to train their staff on the nature and impact of family and domestic violence, including economic abuse, and on identifying customers who, when making an application for credit, may be experiencing domestic and family violence.

The ACT Greens support the proposals regarding the establishment of an official visitors scheme for residential aged care. We note that this is a significant gap in the ACT because the ACT government has official visitors schemes for other institutions, for other places where people are effectively detained. But as aged care is largely a federal matter, and thus the ACT government has no oversight or official visitors scheme for aged care, this issue remains an ongoing concern. I am particularly pleased

to hear that the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Ageing is investigating these issues and I will be keen to hear what they have to say.

Another issue that I support is the development of age-friendly suburbs as the demographics of Canberra change and it is certain that we will have more aged people in our city as we move forward. I would also point out that age-friendly suburbs are not friendly just for aged people, they are friendly for all of us. The crossing at the edge of a footpath is known as a pram crossing but it also works very well for someone in a wheelchair or for someone on a walker. An age-friendly suburb is friendly for young people and old people and anyone in between who has got any mobility issues.

I am also very pleased that the flexible bus system, which was included in the parliamentary agreement, has just been rolled out in the inner north. I am really pleased that it has had the wonderful, positive reception which we expected it to have. Other issues of relevance in the parliamentary agreement include raising the profile of the active travel office and, through the office, coordinating the rollout of the \$30 million in additional priority footpath maintenance, cycling and walking route upgrades, as well as age-friendly improvements in our shopping centres and, as I mentioned, the age-friendly suburbs for our existing suburbs. These improvements are vital for older people and younger people so that we can navigate safely around our neighbourhoods and town centres.

The parliamentary agreement also includes encouraging bus patronage by implementing free bus travel for seniors and concession cardholders—unfortunately excluding students—on all routes and two months free bus travel on all new rapid bus routes for all travellers. That, obviously for the broader community, I think is a particularly useful one because, if we can get people realising that bus travel can work, they will use it more.

On this I might note that we have to be really mindful of the impact of the recent bus timetable changes, which have been announced but not yet implemented, on people whose independence relies on being able to catch a bus and not just on commuter services for people for whom bus travel is an option. I think it is in the order of a third of people in Canberra who do not have car licences. We need to make sure that localities where larger groups of elderly people are living are considered for bus stops. Sometimes it is only a small deviation from the main road or from where the bus has been going in the past to make a positive difference to someone's life.

I note that the current changes have left some areas with fewer bus services than they currently have. I am already receiving emails about this. I think that it is unfortunate but I am very hopeful that light rail stage 1, which will free up a large number of bus services—the light rail will provide the services that the buses were—will lead to an improvement in public transport not just for the inner north and Gungahlin where the light rail will be but for the rest of Canberra and that the bus services that have been freed up will be used to improve the public transport service for all of us and in particular people who actually rely on buses to get around.

I am pleased of course that concessions for seniors will continue and I am pleased, as Minister Ramsay talked about, that the concessions are being extended to vulnerable seniors who are renting and who were not previously able to access our concession system. But I note with concern that it is an emerging issue where seniors on fixed incomes, who are burdened with paying increasing rates and being on fixed incomes, do not have increasing funds to do so. We have to be really careful to ensure that we do not end up with a system which makes it harder for people to live independently and we have to look at the large number of people—18,000 pensioners—who have applied for the rebate scheme.

Minister Ramsay also mentioned the rates deferral scheme. I put a question on notice about that and I was shocked and surprised to find there have been only two applications for that scheme so far. I think we will probably talk a lot more about this tomorrow on Mr Coe's motion but I note that that scheme is in fact available only to people who live in the 20 per cent of most expensive blocks in Canberra. That is probably something that needs to be looked at urgently.

I would also note in terms of housing that older women are the fastest growing group of homeless people in Canberra and Australia and this is something—obviously speaking personally as an older woman, although not at risk of homelessness—that we need as a community to look at. The homelessness profile is changing. We are living longer; we are living a lot longer than we used to. When the aged pension first came out people could expect to be on it for a few months. Now people could expect to be on it for 10, 20 years and we have to look at how our society can work with that. A lot of these are federal issues but some of them are issues for the ACT as well.

Lastly I want to reiterate the enormous value that seniors have to our community. Hopefully we will all become seniors and hopefully we will all be respected for our contributions as seniors both past and present. Seniors' ongoing contributions to our community provide enormous value to them, to their family, to their friends and to the wider community.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Office for mental health—establishment Ministerial statement

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong—Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability, Minister for Justice, Consumer Affairs and Road Safety, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Mental Health) (11.09): Mental health and suicide prevention are continued priorities for the ACT government. This was reflected in the parliamentary agreement and committed to in the ACT government's 2017-18 budget initiatives, including funding for the establishment of an ACT office for mental health.

I acknowledge members, providers and the community's interest in the ACT office for mental health. I also recognise that there have unfortunately been some unavoidable delays in progressing formal consultation on this initiative. As members may be aware, the office for mental health is a key priority for me as the ACT's first

dedicated Minister for Mental Health. I believe a body such as this has the potential to make real and lasting change for mental health consumers, carers and their families.

To do this, however, significant community consultation and engagement are needed. In developing the office my four key objectives are: to ensure comprehensive oversight and increased understanding of the ACT's mental health system; person-centred approaches across all government activity; improved coordination of services and facilities; and that the best possible mental health and wellbeing services are available for all Canberrans to lead a meaningful and contributing life.

It is my intention to develop a model that can empower the office for mental health to provide reports and advice to the community and government on what is working and what is not. I believe that the office should also have a role in ensuring the best possible delivery of mental health treatment, care and support. This requires strong integration of relevant ACT government programs and services, as well as national initiatives and those services funded through Capital Health Network and the services provided by our non-government partners.

I was asked what progress had been made on the establishment of the ACT office for mental health. That was a recommendation of the estimates committee. While the drivers for change are clear, the model has not yet been determined. The ACT government has undertaken a literature review and looked at models currently operating elsewhere, both throughout Australia and internationally, to help inform options about what might work best in the ACT context.

I recently wrote to key stakeholders and partners to provide the outcomes of a desktop review of models of mental health commissions in other jurisdictions. The paper is the first in a series of consultation opportunities regarding the design of an ACT office for mental health. As a conversation starter, its primary purpose is to stimulate thinking about what key stakeholders would like to see from such an office and what learnings there may be from existing similar bodies.

Community and stakeholder feedback will drive much of the model's development. Following feedback from the conversation starter, a more comprehensive consultation process will be undertaken to feed into the design and development of the office. This will of course involve a combination of face-to-face forums and workshops, as well as online and written feedback.

The ACT has some great mental health programs and services which are staffed by a dedicated and passionate workforce. Across the Health Directorate I know that there are a broad range of reforms and consultations currently underway to improve the health system, including the territory-wide health services framework, which I understand will be released soon.

By working to improve the coordination between and integration of existing programs and services, we can start to move towards a mental health system, rather a mental health sector, which is supported to work to ensure that treatment, care and support are truly person-centric. Increased evidence-based decisions about mental health care and the funding of mental health programs and services are also essential. How that

looks and operates on the ground from next year is a key focus of mine for the 2017-18 financial year.

I present the following paper:

ACT Office for Mental Health—Establishment—Ministerial statement,
12 September 2017.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (11.13): Just briefly, I note that this is Suicide Prevention Week and that this is a statement which is very short on detail and very long on aspiration. There are only a few words in this statement and there are no actions. I think that, as the minister, Mr Rattenbury must be somewhat embarrassed to bring forward a statement like this in Suicide Prevention Week, when he says that this is his highest priority. All the time that I have been the shadow minister for health I have been told that this is the minister's highest priority, but we see no action in this place.

I ask the question: the minister says that he has recently written to key stakeholders and partners to provide the outcomes of the desktop model review. As the shadow minister for health, I have not received a copy of that. I would have thought that perhaps members of this place might be key stakeholders in such a discussion. I have been overseas, but since I have come back I have not seen that. If I have received it and it has been overlooked in my office, I apologise to the minister. But if I have not received it I think it would be appropriate for at least the shadow minister and other members in this place to receive such a consultation document.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Community Services and Social Inclusion, Minister for Disability, Children and Youth, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations) (11.15): I welcome Minister Rattenbury's update on progress to date and future plans for the establishment of the ACT office for mental health and reiterate his statement that mental health and suicide prevention are continued priorities for the ACT government.

In his statement Minister Rattenbury rightly acknowledges the need for appropriate consultation with people with lived experience, their carers and families, as well as advocates and service providers. In his statement Minister Rattenbury noted his four key objectives for the development of the office for mental health.

I briefly want to highlight two of the objectives and how they align and interact with my responsibilities as Minister for Disability, Children and Youth and with the work of the Office for Disability—specifically Minister Rattenbury's objectives of ensuring improved coordination of services and facilities, and that the best possible mental health and wellbeing services are available for all Canberrans to lead a meaningful and contributing life.

A critical and developing part of this service system is the national disability insurance scheme. As at 30 June this year, the primary disability identified for 12 per cent of all active NDIS participants with approved plans in the ACT was a psychosocial disability. This is the highest portion nationally and is significantly higher than the seven per cent portion nationally. Psychosocial disability is the term used to describe disabilities that may arise from mental health issues. Whilst not everyone who has a mental health issue will experience psychosocial disability, those who do can experience severe impacts, including material disadvantage and social exclusion.

The June 2017 NDIA report to COAG stated that 728 ACT participants have a psychosocial disability as their primary diagnosis. However, as the ACT government highlighted in our submission to the Productivity Commission inquiry into the NDIS, engagement with new services and providers continues to be a concern for people with psychosocial disability, particularly where the person is explicitly unwilling to engage with services. At the same time, we have heard that those with mental illness who are not found to be eligible for the NDIS have experienced reduced access to community activities.

Support for people with psychosocial disability under the NDIS is one of the issues that the ACT Office for Disability continues to address with the National Disability Insurance Agency. The Office for Disability, which was established late last year, continues to provide strategic advice and practical assistance to enable people with disability to enjoy their rights as citizens of the ACT and to assist in the implementation of the NDIS in the ACT.

This year's budget included \$2.2 million over four years to strengthen the Office for Disability's ongoing policy and oversight responsibilities in the ACT under the NDIS. The Office for Disability will work closely with the office for mental health to ensure that we take a coordinated approach to supporting and including people right across our community. I look forward to continuing to work with Minister Rattenbury on the issues where our portfolio responsibilities intersect, to seeing the outcomes of the consultation and how the office for mental health operates later in this financial year. I commend Minister Rattenbury for his ongoing commitment to this extremely important initiative.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in care

Ministerial statement

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Community Services and Social Inclusion, Minister for Disability, Children and Youth, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations) (11.18): There is considerable concern in the ACT community about the increasing number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care. This concern is shared by the

ACT government and me, both as Minister for Disability, Children and Youth and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. I was therefore pleased recently to announce a comprehensive review of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people involved with the ACT child protection system.

The over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care is a national problem. However, this problem has also been intractable in the ACT. For a decade we have consistently seen that around one in four children in out of home care is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the ACT are 12 times more likely to be in out of home care than non-Indigenous children. Despite being one of the most affluent communities in the country, we have the third highest rate of over-representation, according to the latest *Child protection Australia* report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

Recent reports, like *The family matters report—measuring trends to turn the tide on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child safety and removal* and the Victorian Taskforce 1000 report *Always was, always will be Koori children*, have highlighted the national issue of over-representation and the need to respond to its drivers. They have also emphasised the growing impatience of the community in seeking to arrest the high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people coming into out of home care.

The specific reasons for the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in child protection are complex. We all know that past forced removal practices, the intergenerational effects of separation from family and culture, and lower levels of economic participation and educational achievement have contributed to poor social, economic and health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The three main precursors to children and young people of any background entering out of home care are mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse and family violence. There is substantial evidence to indicate that intergenerational trauma has resulted in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and families being over-represented in the prevalence of drug and alcohol abuse and family violence, and under-represented in seeking and receiving support for mental illness.

The independent review of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people involved with the ACT child protection system will provide us with a deeper understanding of these issues. The review will also provide a better understanding of how we can best respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families.

At the core of the review is respect for the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Under the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agreement 2015-18, the ACT government is committed to building stronger families and addressing the growing number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in care, and this review is a major initiative to deliver on that commitment.

For too long in this nation we have sought the advice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people but not listened to that advice. The *Bringing them home* report is nearly 20 years old and yet contains recommendations that have been too slow to take hold across Australia.

The review I have announced will take Aboriginal knowledge in this area and put that knowledge at the centre of the review. It will adopt the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child placement principle, as clearly articulated by the Secretariat for National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Care, known as SNAICC, as a guiding structure. The child placement principle recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the knowledge and capability to make the best decisions concerning their children and recognises the importance of each child staying connected to their family, community, culture and country.

The child placement principle is widely recognised by peak Aboriginal bodies as the authoritative construct that should guide child wellbeing decisions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. All Australian governments have agreed to implement the principle under the national framework for protecting Australia's children 2009-20, and we will focus our efforts through this review to live up to this commitment. This review will help to ensure that here in the ACT we are not only acknowledging the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child placement principle but that the principle is central in our policies and practice.

The five key elements of the child placement principle are prevention, partnership, placement, participation and connection. "Prevention" states that each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child has the right to be brought up within their own family and community. "Partnership" asserts that the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community representatives, external to the statutory agency, is required in child protection decision-making.

"Placement" requires that the placement of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child in out of home care is prioritised. Where possible, placement should, firstly, be with Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander relatives or extended family members, or other relatives or extended family members; secondly, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family-based carers; and, finally, with non-Indigenous carers or in residential settings.

"Participation" means that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, parents and family members are entitled to participate in all child protection decisions affecting them regarding intervention, placement and care, and including judicial decisions. Finally, "connection" requires that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out of home care are supported to maintain connection to their family, their community and their culture, particularly when children live with non-Indigenous carers.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child placement principle is not simply about where or with whom a child is placed in out of home care. It is about what we do to support families and how we place families at the centre of decision-making

about their child's safety and wellbeing and keeping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children connected to their family, community, culture and country.

In that context I note that we will not simply wait for the review to be finalised to take action to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Already, under a step up for our kids, we are providing more intensive and culturally proficient early intervention support through the children and families program delivered by Uniting, with the support of their Aboriginal services and development unit, Jaanimili.

I also recently announced a pilot of family group conferencing run by independent Aboriginal staff to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to make decisions about how they can address the challenges they face and keep their children safe at home. Wherever possible, we want these decisions to be made by families, not courts. We know we have a long way to go, but we are determined to pilot this evidence-based approach and evaluate its effectiveness for local families, in partnership with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Yesterday, on behalf of the ACT government, I signed the family matters statement of commitment. Family matters, established by SNAICC, is a national campaign to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people grow up safe and cared for in family, community and culture.

Today also marks commencement of the SNAICC 2017 conference, to be held here in the ACT. The conference will focus on assisting SNAICC with the vision of an Australian society in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are empowered to determine their own future; where the rights of their children, young people and families are protected; where cultural identity and achievements are valued; and where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families have access to culturally appropriate services.

The ACT government is standing with SNAICC, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous organisations, state and federal members of parliament and state and territory commissioners and guardians in support of reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care. Together we can make a difference.

As the independent review of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and the family group conferencing pilot proceed, lessons will continue to inform decisions about the circumstances of individual children and their families through the prism of the child placement principle, making real and practical differences for these families and children.

Consistent with our commitment to authentic partnerships, the review process will be co-designed with identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and other key Indigenous organisations. The process will be overseen by a steering committee of representatives of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and national Aboriginal organisations with specialist knowledge in this area.

To this end the Community Services Directorate has written to SNAICC, the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service, Gudan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation and the incoming ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body to support the steering group and the design process.

The co-design will look at methodology, provide vital cultural advice and determine lessons to be learned. This body will be independent of the child and youth protection service so that the community can have full confidence that their work is truly independent. The Community Services Directorate, through the director-general, will work closely with the steering group to provide the support necessary to undertake this comprehensive review.

The review will also be supported by the child and youth protection quality assurance and improvement committee, which is chaired by the Director-General of the Community Services Directorate, and includes independent experts from across Australia and senior ACT government representatives. The committee was established in 2016 as part of a \$2.47 million initiative under the safer families package to enhance quality assurance practices and to support improved decision-making in child and youth protection services. The committee's engagement will allow the steering group to draw on expertise across government and across Australia to support their role. It will also ensure that lessons are learned not just within the child protection system but across other arms of government.

There is no easy or quick solution to building the community's confidence in the system and achieving a consensus for future action in this area. The experience across Australia and the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people tell us that we must be prepared to persevere but that we must not delay. We must be prepared to hear of lessons that are hard to hear and we must be prepared to take the time to fully address what we learn. That is why we will be working carefully and methodically to ensure the review delivers real value for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families.

The review has three phases and will take approximately two years to complete. The first phase will include the establishment of the review team, governance structure and review methodology. The steering committee will be established to oversee the design phase and to advise the review team on how to best engage with children, young people and their families.

The second phase will see the reviewers focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are involved with child and youth protection services on interim or short-term care and protection orders. The third and final phase will focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people who are on long-term orders, with a view to determining if appropriate casework and services are in place to support their connections to culture and family.

It is anticipated, without pre-empting the co-design, that an interim report will be delivered in mid-2018, after phase 2, and that a final report will be delivered in

August 2019, after phase 3 is complete. The review's primary focus will be to inform system-wide improvements that will fully realise the Aboriginal child placement principle in the ACT. Case planning for each Indigenous child and young person currently involved in the child protection system will be independently reviewed to ensure those children are thriving and are supported to maintain connections with their family, culture and community.

We will learn much about the child protection system from this review, including how our systems can change to be more culturally safe, inclusive and culturally proficient. However, as previously outlined in relation to some of the precursors to child abuse and neglect, it is important that we realise that not all, and indeed perhaps not even most, of the lessons we will learn will be lessons solely for the child protection system. There will be lessons for other government agencies and community-based organisations.

This review will provide the most comprehensive exploration of what leads to families' involvement in the child protection system and how various systems responded. As a service system, we must be ready for these lessons. I encourage all in our community to commit to the process and support this review. Let us commit to delivering an independent review of the scale that is necessary to make a real difference in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families in the ACT.

I present the following paper:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in care in the ACT—Ministerial statement, 12 September 2017.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 9

MS CODY (Murrumbidgee) (11.32): I present the following report:

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee (Legislative Scrutiny Role)—Scrutiny Report 9, dated 5 September 2017, together with the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

MS CODY: Scrutiny Report 9 contains the committee's comments on seven bills, 19 pieces of subordinate legislation, three government responses and one regulatory

impact statement. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting. I commend the report to the Assembly.

ACT Health assets Ministerial statement

MS FITZHARRIS (Yerrabi—Minister for Health and Wellbeing, Minister for Transport and City Services and Minister for Higher Education, Training and Research) (11.33), by leave: Regarding the costs that Mrs Dunne raised, my ministerial statement earlier this morning on the maintenance of ACT Health assets inadvertently did not include this information. As I outlined in my statement, the package of works underway in terms of upgrading and maintaining ACT Health assets is a significant and complex package of works. The total completion cost of each package of works is not yet finalised, as the UMAHA program is being continuously developed. I would be open to providing that information in the appropriate format at the completion of each work package. I add that the regular financial reporting is provided to the Assembly through the tabling of relevant documents, questions taken on notice, the annual report and budget estimates processes.

Statute Law Amendment Bill 2017

Debate resumed from 24 August 2017, on motion by **Mr Ramsay**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (11.34): The Canberra Liberals will be supporting this bill. We have been through the standard consultation processes with the legal profession, and this piece of legislation is a good example of what a SLAB should be. We have seen in the past in this place, and I have raised this point many times, that a statute law amendment bill has been used to try to pursue a more significant policy agenda. That is not the purpose of these bills, and this bill is consistent with what it should be. I thank the Attorney-General for that. We have had previous conversations about it, and I thank him for that.

This particular bill includes amendments to the Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act 2004, the City Renewal Authority and Suburban Land Agency Act 2017, the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 and the Residential Tenancies Regulation 1998. Turning first to the annual reports, it amends that act to insert a new section 9A in part 3, to provide that the Chief Minister is the minister with the responsibility for a state of the service report. The City Renewal Authority and Suburban Land Agency Act 2017 has actually been a matter of significant debate, and the whole system has been cause for much concern. I will not re-litigate in great detail some of the concerns that have been raised, but in essence the effect is that the Treasurer will have the function of making directions in relation to land acquisition by the City Renewal Authority or the Suburban Land Agency instead of the minister.

The explanatory statement states that this will ensure transparency and consistency with the broader accountability framework established under the act. This is really a clean-up of a bit of a mess, to be honest. It seems to be a good fix-up, but

I foreshadow that this is an area that we will continue to monitor very closely with regard to the City Renewal Authority and Suburban Land Agency. It is a problematic area of government policy.

The other area that is worthy of note is the changes to the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 and Residential Tenancies Regulation 1998. These relate to smoke alarms in rental properties, and this is a fix for an unintended problem. The original intent was to allow people leasing properties to install a hardwired or a battery-operated smoke alarm that meets the relevant Australian standard. However, the existing act had the unintended consequence of requiring lessors of an existing building to install only hardwired alarms rather than having the choice of installing hardwired or battery-operated alarms. This now addresses that issue, with a series of consequential amendments as well.

With regard to structural amendments to the Legislation Act schedule 2, which is reserved for minor, non-controversial amendments of the Legislation Act initiated by the PCO, none appear controversial. They originate from the PCO, and I commend again the good work that the PCO does in supporting our legislative framework here in the ACT. Schedule 3, technical amendments, appears to be exactly that. I again thank the Attorney-General's office and the PCO for their good work, and also those who have provided specific feedback, in particular the Law Society, who had no issues with this bill. As I said, we will be supporting it.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (11.38): As Mr Hanson has noted, this bill makes a number of amendments to 17 acts. These amendments are minor, structural and technical. I would like to make a few remarks on some of the significant ones among them. One of the more significant changes in the bill relates to the residential tenancies legislation. It clarifies that smoke alarms must be installed in rented premises and that these smoke alarms must meet the requirements prescribed by regulation. This allows for regulations to be updated from time to time rather than the requirements being restricted by the building code. In effect, this means that smoke alarms may be either battery operated or otherwise hardwired and connected to mains power, which is what the building code requires for some classes of buildings.

I am very pleased to see this amendment come through. A number of years ago I circulated a discussion paper and started talking about having minimum standards for rental properties. This is certainly one of the areas that should be in place. I think we still have some distance to go on other matters, but I certainly welcome the fact that this is being dealt with here. We do now need to consider issues such as energy efficiency ratings and the like, but certainly from a safety point of view this is an especially important minimum standard for rental properties.

I now turn to issues with the City Renewal Authority legislation. The bill also clarifies the procedure for establishing the audit and risk committee for the City Renewal Authority. Members will recall that, when the legislation was debated earlier this year, there were many simultaneous amendments from all three parties in this place, so I think it was probably inevitable that there would be a few areas that would need a little tidying up. This is one of those areas, and we certainly support this.

When it comes to the Legislation Act 2001 and the legislation regulation, these amendments are very minor, technical and non-controversial. Perhaps the most interesting of them relates to the unique status of the ACT, which has state and local government functions performed by the one level of government. These amendments remove reference to “by-laws” in the definition of “subordinate law” in section 8 of the Legislation Act. Subordinate laws are laws or rules made by, for example, the executive, under a power given by parliament. By-laws, on the other hand, are typically used by local councils in other contexts and often relate to a particular geographical area, such as the parking rules in a street or suburb. In the ACT no by-laws have been made since self-government. It therefore makes sense to remove reference to them from the territory’s statute books to avoid confusion.

The bill makes some minor technical and administrative amendments to various road transport acts. Primarily these amendments remove or update clauses that are now out of date, duplicated or redundant, or provide clarity as to wording and definitions. Similarly, this bill also makes some very minor amendments to the Utilities Act 2000, which I have some oversight for as Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability, and they provide updated references to the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 2008.

Finally, there is also a series of minor corrections to cross-references to other parts of legislation, as well as minor changes to definitions and the removal of outdated transitional provisions. The Greens support this legislation. We believe that these are useful and important tidy-ups to various acts and will make the operation of legislation in the ACT better.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra) (11.42): It is safe to say that statute law amendment bills, as I think we have heard already, generally do not invite excitement, and even the bill’s acronym, SLAB, makes you wonder. But they are really important to make sure that our laws are of a high standard, that they are coherent and that they are working in the way that this Assembly intended. That is exactly why I am delighted to speak in support of this bill today.

The SLABs recognise that laws need to be regularly updated in minor ways to keep up with technological and societal changes and to make sure that the ACT’s statute book is coherent. SLABs make uncontroversial and technical changes to legislation to ensure that legislation is consistent. Sometimes this is as simple as omitting “minister” and substituting “Treasurer”. This SLAB is set out in three parts. Schedule 1 contains minor amendments initiated by government directorates and agencies. For example, one amendment concerns everyone’s favourite time of year, as I am sure Mr Hanson will agree: annual reports. The Annual Reports (Government Agencies)—

Mr Hanson: I prefer estimates myself.

MS CHEYNE: True. Estimates is number one, followed closely by annual reports. The Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act includes a cross-reference to the dictionary definition of “responsible minister” but the cross-referenced section does not contain any definition. This amendment corrects that oversight and updates the cross-reference.

Schedule 2 covers amendments to the Legislation Act initiated by the Parliamentary Counsel's Office. I do not think it can get much more uncontroversial than this one, although I am happy to receive interjections from the other side to liven things up a bit. This SLAB omits references to "by-law" in the definition of "subordinate law". Given the ACT has not made any by-laws since self-government, because by-laws typically relate to a particular geographical area and to local government, this makes a lot of sense to me.

The final schedule is where the really exciting changes come in. Wait for it: syntax is improved, language is updated, redundant provisions are omitted and notes are added. And I am personally thrilled that a number of cross-references are corrected so that they actually relate to the right section.

Mr Hanson: Really? Excited and delighted?

MS CHEYNE: Wait for it; I am getting there. In all seriousness, these are really important changes—

Mr Hanson: I hope you are not misleading the house. It is very serious to mislead. Saying you are "delighted, excited and thrilled"—I think it is getting close.

MS CHEYNE: I am sorry; I am clearly not being excited enough. I will try to liven things up a bit. In all seriousness, these are very important changes, not just for the enthusiastic pedants among us but also for the operation, the interpretation, the coherence and the ease of use of the acts, which can only be a good thing. In addition, SLABs do make important changes that have real implications for safety. Mr Hanson and Mr Rattenbury have talked in some detail about these, but I would like to talk in detail about them as well, because this is important to me for a range of reasons, including some personal ones.

For example, this bill amends the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 and the Residential Tenancies Regulation 1998 to clarify the rules for the installation of smoke alarms in rental properties. Currently the Residential Tenancies Act says the installation of smoke alarms must comply with a specific part of the building code. This creates confusion. The building code requirements were only intended to apply to new buildings, not to existing buildings. There is also some uncertainty as to whether the requirements apply to all classes of buildings that are subject to a residential tenancy agreement.

There is no room for uncertainty when it comes to an obligation to install smoke alarms in a rental property. This SLAB amends the Residential Tenancies Act so that requirements in relation to smoke alarms can be prescribed by regulation instead of by reference to the building code. The SLAB will also introduce those new regulations in the Residential Tenancies Regulation 1998.

These regulations very clearly set out what landlords must provide for tenanted properties. The smoke alarms must comply with Australian standards, must be functional and must be installed in or near a ceiling. Smoke alarms must be installed

in each storey of the premises, and if there is a bedroom on that storey then it must be in every hallway or corridor associated with a bedroom. These regulations may sound quite straightforward and common sense, but the importance of clear rules around smoke alarms cannot be overstated.

In April 2016 the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee of the federal parliament published a report on the use of smoke alarms to prevent smoke and fire-related deaths. The committee noted the importance of smoke alarms as one element in preventing injury and deaths from smoke and fire. For example, based on hospital admission data, there were 103 fire-related fatalities between 2004 and 2015 in the Melbourne metropolitan district; 26 of these 103 fire-related fatalities occurred in homes where there was no smoke alarm or the smoke alarm was disarmed.

The Victorian Metropolitan Fire Brigade issued advice in 2013 that, without working smoke alarms, you are four times more likely to die in a house fire. Not having adequate smoke alarms means you are four times more likely to die in a house fire. The Metropolitan Fire Brigade also pointed out the importance of adequate smoke alarms in rental properties, which are at risk of falling through the cracks without clear rules on where the responsibility for smoke alarms lies. They found that 38 per cent of home owners only had one smoke alarm installed, compared to 46 per cent of rented properties.

I have been speaking to friends this morning about this, reflecting on my own experiences, which I will draw some attention to shortly. I am of the age when I have lots of friends who might now own a property or be a bit more careful about what sorts of protections they have in their homes. But they certainly recall that when they were first in a share house or first living in a rental property they did not have a smoke alarm in their home. That is personally distressing to me, so I am very glad about what this SLAB will achieve.

My personal story, for those in the chamber who are not aware of it, is that at university I went to a college called St John's College, at UQ, in 2004 and 2005. In 2005, on Good Friday, our college—this is in Queensland—did not have smoke alarms. In fact, they were being installed that week in some of the older buildings. One of the things that you never expect to see, particularly on a day that is important for a number of other reasons—which was very important, because it meant that the college was largely empty—happened: a building burnt down.

The background to it is that there was a faulty cable. I think it was a fridge and it was, fortunately, locked in a fellow university student's room. Literally some cables were hanging from the ceiling and these smoke alarms were being installed. It was just very, very fortunate that no-one died on that day. The only way that we were really able to alert people was by knocking on each other's doors, going door to door and hoping that everybody was out. Because there were not smoke alarms installed, there was no way to ensure that people were alerted otherwise.

And while I certainly appreciate that that was in very different circumstances from what we are talking about here—in a different jurisdiction, over a decade ago and on a college campus—I think it really does underline those figures from the Victorian

Metropolitan Fire Brigade that if you do not have adequate smoke alarms installed you are four times more likely to die in a house fire. We should not be leaving things up to luck, like they were in my situation. I still have nightmares regularly about watching that building burn to the ground. I know that many of the students there lost all of their belongings. It really was just luck that it was Good Friday and that people were not there. We should not be leaving things up to luck. We should not be leaving things up to codes that might not be quite fit for purpose. That exactly points to why these rules and these updated regulations are so important.

Ensuring that our rules on smoke alarms in tenanted properties are clear and provide adequate protection is absolutely critical. These rules can save lives. By drawing the obligations relating to smoke alarms out of the building code and implementing new, straightforward regulations, we are ensuring that tenants are given the best chance of escaping a fire in case disaster strikes. This is just one example of the importance of technical amendments in the Statute Law Amendment Bill or, as we fondly call it, the SLAB. This bill makes a range of changes to existing legislation to amend technical errors and to ensure coherence in our statute books. I hope I injected a little bit of excitement for members here today.

Mr Hanson: Yes, we are excited.

MS CHEYNE: So excited—I hope Hansard is recording that. With that, I absolutely commend this bill to the Assembly.

MR RAMSAY (Ginninderra—Attorney-General, Minister for Regulatory Services, Minister for the Arts and Community Events and Minister for Veterans and Seniors) (11.55), in reply: As I start, I would like to acknowledge and thank the members—Mr Hanson, Mr Rattenbury and Ms Cheyne—for their contributions to the debate and for their support of this bill. I would also like to note that it is good to see the way that cooperation and humour can come from a SLAB. It is fun when you see those all brought together, as well as them managing also to highlight the importance of people's stories and the way that what may seem quite technical, quite dry amendments can actually have significant impacts on people's lives. That is one of the prime reasons why this government continues this process.

This bill does carry on the technical amendments program that continues to develop a simpler, more coherent and more accessible statute book for the territory through minor legislative changes. Statute law amendment bills provide an important and useful mode for continually modernising the ACT statute book. A well-maintained statute book is a very practical measure to assure members of the community that we are committed to meeting their needs. Regular reviews and regular updates help to ensure that our laws are relevant, are fair and are kept up to date. And through these amendment bills we ensure that we maintain a minimum, consistent standard in the presentation and the cohesion of legislation.

Our legislation comes from different sources. It comes from many different time periods, and SLABs help to ensure that our legislation is consistently easy to understand and drafted in a way that makes sense to people who wish to understand our laws. These bills are an efficient mechanism to take care of non-controversial,

minor or technical amendments to a range of territory legislation, while conserving resources that would otherwise be needed if the amendments were each dealt with individually.

This particular Statute Law Amendment Bill covers three types of amendments. As has been noted, schedule 1 deals with minor amendments; for example, clarifying which ministers are responsible for a function to ensure that the legislative intent behind a bill is preserved. Schedule 2 deals with structural amendments. Structural amendments are those that deal with how our legislation is organised. For example, these are amendments that affect the kinds of laws and instruments that the Assembly and the executive can make and the process by which they are made. And, as has been noted, schedule 3 includes technical amendments. These are things like improving grammar or correcting typos.

Each individual amendment in this bill is minor, but the process of improving the operation of our statute book is important. Government works more efficiently and the law is less prone to dispute as a result of this series of bills. Some examples from each of the schedules in this bill, as have already been spoken to, continue to highlight the value of this bill.

Briefly, the bill, in schedule 1, amends the Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act 2004 to correct an oversight by inserting new section 9A in part 3 to provide that the Chief Minister is the responsible minister for a state of the service report. This simply clarifies the roles of ministers with regard to annual reports.

The City Renewal Authority and Suburban Land Agency Act 2017 is amended to omit references to “minister” and substitute them with references to “Treasurer” in section 63. This means that the Treasurer will have the power to make directions in relation to land acquisition by the City Renewal Authority or the Suburban Land Agency. The power to make those directions is consistent with the Treasurer’s responsibilities under the act, sections 9 and 39, in relation to financial matters of an authority or an agency.

The Residential Tenancies Act 1997, section 11B, as has been noted, is amended in relation to the installation of smoke alarms to clarify a reference. The intention of section 11B when it was included in the act was to allow lessors to install a hardwired or a battery-operated smoke alarm that meets the relevant Australian standard for smoke alarms. As has been pointed out, this may be a technical and non-controversial amendment but, as Ms Cheyne has made particularly clear, these alarms certainly have significance in the way that people live and in the quality and the safety of people’s lives.

The way that section 11B referenced the building code did create uncertainty. It had the unintended consequence of appearing to require lessors of existing buildings to install a hardwired alarm rather than having the choice of installing a hardwired or a battery-operated alarm, and this was never the intention behind the legislation. This bill resolves the uncertainty by revising section 11B to provide for requirements in relation to smoke alarms to be specified by regulation.

Schedule 2 contains minor, non-controversial, structural amendments of the Legislation Act 2001, and they have been initiated by the Parliamentary Counsel's Office. Schedule 2 amends the Legislation Act, section 8, to omit a reference to "by-law" in the definition of "subordinate law" because no by-laws have been made in the ACT since self-government. By-laws do typically operate most often in relation to local government laws. In the ACT the most common type of subordinate laws are regulations, which are made by the executive. These amendments remove references to by-laws, and related amendments are also made elsewhere in the act and in the Legislation Regulation 2003. These changes provide clarity and will avoid confusion about whether by-laws exist in the territory.

Finally, schedule 3 contains minor or technical amendments of legislation initiated by the Parliamentary Counsel's Office. The explanatory notes in the text of the bill explain what each of the changes does, and for the most part they are things like correcting cross-references.

I welcome the Assembly's support for the technical amendments program. Our shared support for this bill represents a commitment to maintaining a contemporary, practical and relevant ACT statute book and, despite what may appear to some to be technical and potentially dry, as has been noted SLABs may even be exciting and delighting. They are certainly important for the ongoing quality of our legislation. Because of that, I would like to express my appreciation to those who work behind the scenes on legislation such as this. Primarily I would like to express my thanks to the Parliamentary Counsel's Office, who are working regularly on amendments that find their way into SLABs.

Additionally, in this bill the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate has worked in relation to the City Renewal Authority amendments, and the Justice and Community Safety Directorate has worked on the residential tenancy amendments. They may be dry but indeed they are valuable. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Leave granted to dispense with the detail stage.

Bill agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 12.04 to 2.30 pm.

Question time—rules for asking questions

Statement by Speaker

MADAM SPEAKER: Before I call the Leader of the Opposition to ask the first question without notice, I would like to make a brief comment. Members will be aware that there are several standing orders that govern the operations of question

time. I have noticed that some of the original questions being asked by members over recent weeks have been preceded by a somewhat lengthy preamble. I would like to remind members of standing order 117(a), which states that “questions shall be brief and relate to a single issue”. I have also observed that some supplementary questions have several facets to the question, and I remind members that standing order 113B stipulates that “immediately following the answer to a question, one supplementary question may be asked”. I would ask that members bear these standing orders in mind when they are framing their questions.

Questions without notice

Taxation—reform

MR COE: My question is to the Chief Minister and Treasurer. Former Chief Minister Jon Stanhope said in a recent piece:

Canberrans believed at the time that the tax reform began that they had a deal with the government. Many people, having recently received their latest rates bill, are legitimately asking whether the government has kept its end of the bargain.

Why has your government not kept its end of the bargain on tax reform?

MR BARR: We certainly have kept our end of the bargain, with a particular emphasis on reducing those inefficient and unfair taxes that were part of the ACT tax system throughout the era of self-government, including the Stanhope government, I note. Our commitment was to abolish insurance taxes, which we have done. Our commitment was to reduce payroll taxes, which we have done by increasing the payroll tax-free threshold to the nation’s highest amount, \$2 million. And our commitment was to reduce stamp duty over a 20-year period. The rate of stamp duty has fallen both in the commercial stamp duty area and in residential stamp duty. The counterfactual position would be that we would have just left all of the tax rates unchanged. In that case, stamp duty would have gone up by between 20 per cent and 30 per cent, which would be consistent with what has happened in New South Wales and Victoria, and rates would have gone up as well.

MR COE: Chief Minister, are the increases in rates and land tax simply going to be passed on to renters and drive up the cost of living even more in the ACT?

MR BARR: The various costs associated with renting out a property are tax deductible in the federal tax system. The costs can be claimed back in relation to the income earned on the property under the Australian taxation system.

MRS DUNNE: Treasurer, why has your tax reform process resulted in housing becoming more unaffordable due to significant increases in rates?

MR BARR: The measures of housing affordability as put out by the Real Estate Institute of Australia show that the ACT is the most affordable jurisdiction, that the percentage of income required for rent and mortgages is lower—

Mr Coe interjecting—

MR BARR: When people borrow for the stamp duty, they have to pay for that. They pay that amount back over the 20 to 30-year duration of their mortgage. So a lower up-front cost less stamp duty means less pain in mortgage payments over the longer term.

Again, the question that those opposite need to answer is: what is their policy alternative? Are they going to jack stamp duty back up again to make housing even more unaffordable for first home buyers, second home buyers, third home buyers and fourth home buyers, in fact anyone who needs to move at any point in their life: those who need to move because they have a baby and they need a bigger house or because they are downsizing. Any time you move, Alistair Coe and the Liberal Party want to gouge tens of thousands of dollars of stamp duty out of your pocket.

We, in contrast, are cutting stamp duty. I can say that not only is the rate of stamp duty lower now—

Mr Coe: You are bringing in more now than in 2012.

MR BARR: Because of commercial stamp duty, not residential. Residential stamp duty has fallen in rate and in quantum in real terms.

Seniors—rates impact

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is to the Treasurer and it relates to the fairness of the rates concession and deferment system.

Members interjecting—

MS LE COUTEUR: Treasurer, the aged assistance deferment scheme applies only to people whose homes are in the highest 20 per cent bracket based on the unimproved value of their home. Why is the scheme not available to older people struggling to pay their rates who live in the other 80 per cent of blocks which are worth less? Surely these people would be more likely to need support than the arguably well-off in the 20 per cent?

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Treasurer, did you hear the question, because there were a lot of interjections. Do you want it repeated?

MR BARR: No, but I note that it was a very long question. In response to Ms Le Couteur, there is a range of different programs and concessions available. Duty deferral is but one of the programs—

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Just a minute, Treasurer. Please resume your seat and stop the clock. Please, members, Ms Le Couteur is sitting at the back of the chamber. She is trying to hear the Treasurer who, as protocol requires, is facing the chair. So she is having difficulty hearing. Treasurer.

Mr Wall: Comments are directed to the chair, but don't you think he needs to be facing us?

MR BARR: Thank you, Madam Speaker, and Mr Wall for the advice on whether I should in fact be addressing my comments to you, to him or to other people in the chamber. The form of this place, particularly sitting in this place, is that it is not appropriate for me to turn around and address all of my comments directly to Ms Le Couteur. I will put my comments, remarks and answers to the question to you, Madam Speaker, as I am addressing you, the chair of the Assembly.

Regardless of which direction I am facing and whether those opposite seek to interject over the top of me, Madam Speaker, the point is that there is a variety of different concession programs available for members of the community. The simple point is that those people who were paying an extreme amount of stamp duty are now paying significantly less. Had we left the policy settings alone, stamp duty would have been even higher. It is very important to address housing affordability challenges and one of the best ways is to reduce stamp duty.

MS LE COUTEUR: When did the government last conduct a detailed analysis of the eligibility rules for rates concessions and deferrals to make sure that vulnerable people get the assistance they need?

MR BARR: In the concessions review recently completed.

MS CHEYNE: Chief Minister, how much has stamp duty reduced for a \$500,000 property in the ACT?

Mrs Dunne: On a point of order, Madam Speaker, the question that Ms Le Couteur asked was about rates concessions for elderly Canberrans. It was not a general question about stamp duty. The question from Ms Cheyne does not flow naturally from the questions asked by Ms Le Couteur, and I think you have to rule it out of order.

Ms Le Couteur: My point was that the Treasurer did not in fact answer my question. I asked about deferral, not just concessions. He did not touch upon that in his answer. I did not have time to get up before Ms Cheyne was up with a supplementary.

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Cheyne, I will give you an opportunity to rephrase your question.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: It has happened in this place before, and the previous Speaker has done that. Ms Cheyne.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Are we all settled down, members?

MS CHEYNE: Chief Minister, can you update us on concessions generally available in the broader context of how stamp duty is also reducing for Canberrans generally?

Mrs Dunne: I still have got a point of order. Madam Speaker, on the point of order, the question was about rates concessions for elderly people and any bringing in of stamp duty is clearly not in conformity with the original two questions.

MADAM SPEAKER: Even though an opportunity was provided, I will rule it out of order. I am probably still reflecting on your SLAB debate as well.

Centenary Hospital for Women and Children—aluminium cladding

MS LAWDER: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, has the government ordered or procured new cladding for the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children? If so, when did that order take place?

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Ms Lawder for the question. No, not to my knowledge.

MS LAWDER: Minister, have there been additional safety measures implemented inside the hospital, as we have seen announced at the Queanbeyan hospital?

MS FITZHARRIS: Yes, there have been.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, can you guarantee that all visitors and patients in the women's and children's hospital will be safe until the new cladding is replaced, and can you outline the safety procedures that you have put in place?

MS FITZHARRIS: Madam Speaker, there were two quite distinctly different questions in that question. I would ask you to rule on whether I ought to answer both of them or just one.

Mrs Dunne: Madam Speaker—

MADAM SPEAKER: On the point of order, Mrs Dunne.

Mrs Dunne: There is no point of order.

Ms Cody: Point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: Point of order.

Ms Cody: There would seem to be two questions coming out of that question, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Minister for Health, can you respond to the question and focus on the safety of the cladding.

MS FITZHARRIS: Yes. Based on all the advice I have received from within both ACT Health and ACT Fire & Rescue, who have stated publicly that the building is safe, based on all of that advice from the experts, yes, I can reassure the Canberra community that they will be safe in the Centenary hospital.

Light rail—Mitchell

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the minister for transport. Minister, when will there be a light rail stop in Mitchell?

Mr Barr: If it had been you lot, never.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Stop the clock. It is a very jovial question time. If we can, I will ask the minister to respond to Mr Milligan's question.

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Mr Milligan for the question and the Chief Minister for his very succinct answer to that question. As has been indicated for a number of years now, the light rail stage 1 route is future-proofed for a stop at Mitchell. There was considerable consultation undertaken at the time.

Opposition members interjecting—

MS FITZHARRIS: Of all the champions of light rail stops on the other side of the chamber—Alistair Coe, the champion of light rail for his own electorate; Mr Milligan, the member for Yerrabi—I don't recall anybody opposite ever advocating for a Mitchell stop.

Mr Hanson: Mrs Dunne probably did.

MS FITZHARRIS: I recall them advocating for tearing up the contract. My apologies, Madam Speaker, Mrs Dunne did advocate for light rail. That is right. But, as has been discussed, as has been stated for a number of years now, the stage 1 construction of light rail is future-proofed for a stop in Mitchell, at the corner of Flemington Road and Sandford Street. There may well be an opportunity to further explore that over the coming years. I look forward to continuing discussions with the Mitchell businesses about that issue.

MR MILLIGAN: Do the thousands of people who work in Mitchell and the hundreds of millions of dollars worth of economic activity generated in Mitchell warrant a light rail stop?

MS FITZHARRIS: According to the opposition, no: no businesses warranted any light rail infrastructure. No businesses in Canberra warranted investment in major transport infrastructure, according to the opposition. I will continue to have conversations. Clearly the government made a decision around the Mitchell stop which was important, and that was to future-proof a light rail stop.

MR COE: What other services will be offered for people in Mitchell if bus services to the city are no longer going to be in existence?

MS FITZHARRIS: The work to integrate the bus network with the light rail network is underway. I expect that broader community engagement on that issue will be able to start in the next couple of months and I look forward to having those conversations with the community and with stakeholders about accessibility of the Mitchell business precinct. I would note that currently public transport patronage to Mitchell is actually very low, and I can provide further data on that to the Assembly perhaps tomorrow after question time.

Economy—AAA credit rating

MS CODY: My question is to the Chief Minister. International ratings agency Standard & Poor's has recently reaffirmed the territory's AAA credit rating. What does having a AAA credit rating signify about our economy?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Cody for the question. For those who are not across the detail of a AAA credit rating, it is only assigned to an entity that has "extremely strong capacity to meet its financial commitments". This is the highest possible credit rating assigned by international ratings agencies. S&P has had a look at the wide range of indicators in the territory budget, including our forward investment plans, our revenue-to-spending and debt-to-revenue ratios, and the steady path back to balance that we have held to for the last five budget updates. S&P's decision to reaffirm the territory's AAA credit rating, having reviewed our forward budget plans, confirms that we are effectively managing the territory's budget. It also confirms that our borrowings are reasonable and manageable relative to our investment in city-building assets and infrastructure. It also reinforces that we have made sensible use of the territory's balance sheet to keep Canberra's economy growing to keep Canberrans in work during what have been challenging economic times. The S&P report makes it clear that the only real risk on the horizon for the ACT is the commonwealth government. The negative outlook on the ACT's credit rating reflects the potential for a downgrade of the commonwealth's rating, because no Australian state or territory can hold a credit rating higher than the Australian government. This would see, if the Australian government's credit rating were downgraded, all states and territories downgraded with it. But we have experience of managing economic risks posed by Liberal governments, and we will continue to manage the territory budget in a manner that is consistent with this AAA rating.

Mrs Dunne: Madam Speaker, on a point of order, can I seek your guidance before we go to a supplementary question, please? Standing order 59 relates to anticipation of discussion. I know that over time we have significantly watered down this standing

order, but the issue of the AAA credit rating is on the notice paper and has been listed for debate tomorrow. I wonder whether, in light of that, a question about the AAA credit rating is out of order, given the reasonable time rule that is in the anticipation debate.

MADAM SPEAKER: I understand there have been interest in and comments about rates this morning. Is there not a motion on the notice paper for tomorrow about rates?

Mrs Dunne: That is my point.

MADAM SPEAKER: As I understand it, the question from Mr Coe was around rates, and there is a motion on rates tomorrow in private members' business. So the same rule would apply.

Mrs Dunne: Quite possibly. I do not know that this is something you necessarily would need to rule on now but perhaps it is something to reflect upon. There has been some change in thinking in the Assembly about this. If people are asking questions today about something which is clearly on the notice paper for tomorrow, and that applies across the board, it is something to think about.

MADAM SPEAKER: It is a point I will take.

MR BARR: On the point of order, Madam Speaker, in the 11 years I have been in this place the interpretation of the standing orders has certainly evolved from what was a very strict rule that you could not even go near the subject area to a much more liberal—with a small “l”—approach to these issues. That is why we did not raise a point of order in relation to Mr Coe's question which related to a matter that he himself put on the notice paper for tomorrow. Obviously you will need to reflect on these matters but, from the government's perspective, I do not think that a very strict interpretation of that standing order assists in the free flow of debate in the Assembly. The practice that has more recently evolved gets the balance right.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. I think that was part of my comment as well—that there were questions that were already reflected. The members have had discussions with their whip about reviewing standing order 117 and getting some clarity about that, and about 118, so we can throw 59 into the mix. But this question will be asked and answered.

MR BARR: Thank you Madam Speaker. The benefits of maintaining a AAA credit rating—

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: We can mark 12 September as the funniest day, I think.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR BARR: I can generally predict the opposition's questions too.

MADAM SPEAKER: You are on your feet for a supplementary, Ms Cody.

MS CODY: Yes. The Chief Minister would like one. I am pretty sure that the Chief Minister would like a supplementary, Madam Speaker. And I would really like to hear his response this time. I note that the other side were talking all the way through Mr Barr's previous response, so it would be good to hear this one.

Chief Minister, what are the benefits to the territory of maintaining a AAA credit rating?

MR BARR: Ms Cody, I am grateful that you asked. Clearly our maintaining a AAA credit rating demonstrates that the government is managing the territory's finances and our economy in a responsible way. And it clearly signals to global investors that the ACT is a stable, safe and low risk investment destination providing access to a large investor base. The AAA credit rating shows that the government can deliver infrastructure and services to the community at a lower cost than would otherwise be the case.

Whilst many factors contribute to the rate of interest that we pay on our borrowings, it has been estimated that having the highest possible credit rating reduces our borrowing costs by between five and 10 basis points. That is somewhere between \$50,000 and \$100,000 saved annually for each \$100 million that we borrow.

As one of only three AAA rated states or territories in Australia, and one of just 26 subnational jurisdictions around the world outside of the US, to hold this rating, our credit rating is also a useful selling point for attracting inbound investment to our city.

We have ambitious but very achievable plans for our city. We are showing inbound investors who are considering delivering major projects here that they can look at our AAA credit rating as one of several very positive signals about the strength of the city's economy and the soundness of our city's public finances.

MR PETTERSSON: What factors have contributed to the territory maintaining its AAA credit rating even while expanding investment in Canberra's health, education and transport infrastructure?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. Standard & Poor's have said, "The ACT's financial management will successfully deliver its infrastructure plans, including private-public partnerships and the asbestos eradication scheme, while containing debt levels."

It says that the government has "successfully addressed a number of challenges, including the global financial crisis in 2008-09 and the commonwealth government's fiscal consolidation," as well as "addressing the substantial costs involved in remediating asbestos issues in private dwellings within budget." And our work "on reforming the ACT's tax system towards a more stable income source and away from volatile conveyance duties," and our plan to fully fund our superannuation liability by 2030 have been confirmed and affirmed by S&P as "credible".

The quickest way that we could lose our credit rating, of course, would be, for example, to seek to rip up a contract for a major infrastructure project. That would be one way that we could do that. But there is only one party in this chamber that has taken to an election that policy approach of ripping up not only a contract but the territory's credit rating. We saw the result of that.

Visitor

MADAM SPEAKER: Before we go to further questions without notice, I want to acknowledge in the chamber Mr Hargreaves, a former member of this place. Welcome back!

Questions without notice Government—citizens juries

MR WALL: My question is to the Chief Minister. The citizens jury on compulsory third-party insurance will, according to the government's frequently asked questions handbook, "hear from a range of experts and consider evidence, including the community feedback and survey results". Feedback will be published online and the jury's deliberations will be open to the public but places will be limited. Chief Minister, will all of the evidence provided to the citizens jury, including presentations by experts, be made public online, and if not, why not?

MR BARR: It would certainly be my hope. We cannot control the format or nature of every single piece of evidence or contribution that would be made. But where people present, and do so in a format that would allow for that information to go on the website, I have no problem with that.

MR WALL: Chief Minister, will the jury's deliberations be made public on line or in any other form?

MR BARR: Again, perhaps subject to reasonable limitations of technology and capability; I do not think it will be a *Big Brother* episode but, again, members of the jury will no doubt have a range of discussions and deliberations and reach a conclusion.

MS LEE: Chief Minister, what other processes, in addition to making the evidence public, are in place to ensure that the information provided to the citizens jury is accurate, balanced and comprehensive?

MR BARR: These are matters that can, of course, be subject to a variety of different opinions. In this day and age there is even conjecture over what constitutes a fact or what might be real news or what might be fake news. But I am certain that in this process we have given the stakeholders the variety of opportunities that there will be for all the different perspectives in this debate to be put before the jury. This Assembly, and indeed the broader Canberra community, can have confidence that the jury members will be able to hear from a wide variety of perspectives.

Will it be possible to verify every single fact contained within every utterance of everyone in the context of this debate? That might be a challenge that is beyond anyone but then that, I think, would apply to almost any public policy debate in this city, this country or the world at this point in time.

MADAM SPEAKER: Before I call questions without notice, I will just go back to Mrs Dunne's point on standing order 59. The Clerk has brought to my attention that there was once, under standing order 117(f), the following: questions may be asked to elicit information regarding business pending on the notice paper but discussion must not be anticipated. That was struck out in 2008. Again, I will take your comment. I think it will go to both sides. It may limit where you want to go as well.

Transport—roadside drug testing

MR HANSON: My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney, it has been announced that New South Wales will become the first state in Australia to include cocaine in roadside drug testing. The Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission's national wastewater analysis showed the ACT to be in the top three cocaine-using jurisdictions in the country, reportedly "far above" all other states. Attorney-General, what studies have you done on the implementation of cocaine testing for drivers in the ACT?

MR RATTENBURY: Madam Speaker, I have responsibility for roadside drug testing in the ACT.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR RATTENBURY: Yes, personally; it is a big job. I will take Mr Hanson's question on notice and provide him with the details of any studies that have been done or any examination of that matter by the ACT public service.

MR HANSON: Minister, will you be reviewing the ACT laws in light of the new decision? Will you make any review public?

MR RATTENBURY: Certainly, I have been actively considering this issue of roadside random drug testing broadly in the context of both concerns that have been raised by people about thresholds and what the appropriate thresholds are for roadside drug testing; and also substances that are not currently included.

There are a number of substances that are not currently included that can inhibit a driver's ability behind the wheel, including some legal prescription drugs that can inhibit people's capabilities. This is a live issue within the government and I will be happy to inform the Assembly if the government does form a view to make any change in that space.

MR PARTON: Minister, is this another case where New South Wales residents are going to be protected by laws but ACT residents are not?

MR RATTENBURY: I am happy—as Mr Parton was not here at the time—to remind members that it was actually because of the Greens and the Liberal Party, who first passed these laws in a combined effort in the 2008-12 Assembly, that the ACT now has random drug testing.

Mr Hanson: You've changed, Shane.

MR RATTENBURY: I think Mr Hanson is the one who has changed. He used to be able to do sensible policy. Certainly the ACT government is actually very vigilant on this issue and we will continue to monitor the latest developments. We want to improve road safety for people in the territory and I think that there are a range of drugs which need to be examined for their impact on road safety, just as there are other matters where we need to be constantly vigilant in this space.

Transport—Canberra to Sydney rail service

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, can you please update the Assembly on the support for upgrading the Canberra-Sydney rail service.

MR BARR: I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. I can advise the Assembly that since I took that somewhat slow train ride to Sydney earlier this year, I have received a significant number of letters and expressions of support from Canberrans and from New South Wales residents along that rail corridor, bemoaning what is a 19th century rail service that currently exists between Canberra and Sydney.

I am pleased to advise the Assembly that there is significant support from Canberra region councils, including Queanbeyan-Palerang and the Yass Valley Council, for this service to be upgraded. A more efficient and timely rail linkage for Canberra and the surrounding region would create significant benefits for our community; it would increase tourism, increase job opportunities and make it even more attractive to live and invest in our region.

I recently discussed this issue with the Lord Mayor of Sydney, Clover Moore, and she agreed that both of our cities would stand to benefit from better transportation links. I am also very welcoming of recent comments by Premier Berejiklian supporting the prospect of improved eastern seaboard rail links. The ACT government is actively engaging with the New South Wales government to build the case for an improved rail link.

The possibility of a higher speed Sydney-Canberra rail link has long been discussed by the ACT, New South Wales and commonwealth governments. But, let's be frank, there has been a lot of talk and very little action. Now is the time to act given that the commonwealth's national rail program is slated to invest \$10 billion over the next decade in major rail projects.

MR PETTERSSON: What are the next steps in upgrading the rail line?

MR BARR: The ACT government will continue to work closely with New South Wales, in particular the New South Wales transport and infrastructure minister, Andrew Constance, whom I met with at the end of that slow trip to Sydney earlier in the year, to put forward a joint ACT-New South Wales proposal to the commonwealth for funding from its national rail program.

We are also working with the New South Wales government on possible investment in new high-speed tilt trains and associated infrastructure upgrades, which would at least bring this service into the late 20th century. An improved rail service to Sydney will require significant investment on the New South Wales side of the border, and I am keen to work with New South Wales and the commonwealth to make this necessary upgrade a reality.

Both the ACT and New South Wales governments are very supportive of the Canberra region as a true region, with Canberra at its heart, but with the surrounding local government areas strengthening their economies. Improving rail links between Canberra and Sydney will certainly help make this happen. I am confident that we will be able to speed up this rail link to get people and freight moving between our capital cities.

MS CHEYNE: Chief Minister, how will both Canberra and the City of Sydney benefit from a better connection?

MR BARR: I discussed the rail line at last month's Council of Capital City Lord Mayors meeting. Sydney Lord Mayor, Clover Moore, was enthusiastic about the economic opportunities of improved services between Canberra and Sydney. Upgrading the track to suit more modern trains would cut the journey time down from the four to 4½ hours it currently is, making rail between Sydney and Canberra competitive with current driving, bus or flying options.

This opens up the door to increased labour market movement and growth, tourism opportunities and better business connections for Canberra. Improving this strategic transport link would support economic growth and export opportunities for small businesses in the Canberra region and, importantly, provide genuine transport choices for people travelling between the national capital and Australia's largest city.

The New South Wales government's south-east and tablelands regional plan recognises a connected and borderless Canberra region with our city at its heart. A better connection to Sydney will help Canberra achieve recognition as the world-class events destination that we have outlined in our 2025 major events strategy. We will continue to advocate for a rail service befitting a 21st century nation and for the benefits to be gained by Canberra, Sydney and the surrounding regions.

Waste recycling facility—government shareholder status

MS LEE: My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, on 2 August you advised the Assembly:

... in order to ensure effective commercial management of Icon Water, its shareholder Ministers provide approval only on a narrow range of significant decisions such as board appointments and major purchases or divestments;

Chief Minister, do you regard the Fyshwick waste to energy proposal, in light of the proponent being Actew/AGL of which Icon Water is the owner, to be a major purchase?

MR BARR: It certainly has potential to be but it is at the early stages of its consideration.

MS LEE: Chief Minister, why is this not a conflict of interest?

MR BARR: Because we have a statutorily independent planning system.

MR WALL: Chief Minister, to date what involvement have you had with the proposal for the Fyshwick power facility, as Chief Minister, Treasurer or as a shareholder minister?

MR BARR: I have read about it. I have been invited to attend a briefing in relation to the proposal. That would be about the extent of it to date.

ACTION bus service—timetable

MS CHEYNE: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Can the minister please update the Assembly on Transport Canberra's new bus timetable that will commence in October?

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Ms Cheyne very much for the question and her ongoing interest in Canberra's transport network. I am pleased to inform the Assembly that the new Transport Canberra bus timetable will start on Saturday, 7 October. Updates to the weekday and weekend timetables across the network are the first in a series of improvements as we progress towards the introduction of light rail and an integrated public transport network. The focus in this update has been on more services and more connections for more passengers, more rapid routes and more services on the weekends.

This government is delivering on our integrated public transport plan. We went to the last ACT election with a clear time frame for the delivery of new rapid bus services right across Canberra. That is why I am really pleased that this will include, come October, the new black rapid in Canberra's north, the new green rapid throughout south Canberra and the extension of the blue rapid bus services to the Lanyon marketplace. We are also providing passengers with an opportunity to use these new rapids for free during the first two months.

October will also see the introduction of new public transport infrastructure, with the Dickson interchange opening on Cape Street in Dickson. This precinct will continue to grow as the light rail stop will come on line and urban renewal will see the

reimagining of the old Dickson registration office. The area will truly be a showcase of transport-oriented development.

In the lead-up to the timetable change, Transport Canberra will continue to provide more information to passengers on changes and more opportunities for them to travel more frequently around the city, and this will include information on Transport Canberra's website, the ability to review your travel options online and customer service officers available to assist right across the network.

MS CHEYNE: Minister, what improvements are being made to the rapid bus service?

MS FITZHARRIS: We are continuing to build on the rapid bus network started under this Labor government, with the red and the blue rapids the most frequently used services in Canberra. We will be introducing the new black rapid and the new green rapid in October.

The introduction of the black rapid will see changes to the 250 route, with services every 15 minutes or better. The service will run via Aikman Drive, providing the fastest possible connection between the Belconnen and Gungahlin town centres; connection to the new University of Canberra public hospital, opening next year; and, of course, the UC student campus.

The introduction of the green rapid will see changes to the current routes 4 and 5. The green rapid, formerly route 6, has been designed to provide faster connections from Woden and the city via Barton, Kingston and Manuka. Connecting to the green rapids will ensure south Canberra access to the Woden town centre, Canberra Hospital, Reid CIT and Fyshwick.

There are also important changes for rapid buses on the weekends. The blue rapid, the 300, will now run seven days a week between Belconnen, the city, Woden and Tuggeranong, providing faster journeys, particularly to Woden, city and Belconnen, for passengers travelling to and from the town centre as well as a seven day a week service to the brand-new Wanniasa park and ride.

The route 950 between Gungahlin and the city will change to the red rapid 200, so we now have a red rapid available on the weekends as well as on weekdays. On the weekends it will be every 15 minutes. The significant increase in service levels will ensure that there is capacity to meet the demand along Flemington Road and Northbourne Avenue as we build towards the introduction of light rail services.

MR STEEL: Minister, how will the network improve travel times and connections to meet the needs of our growing city?

MS FITZHARRIS: I thank Mr Steel for the supplementary question. The network planners within Transport Canberra have been working hard to review the bus network and make improvements and adjustments. These improvements will ensure our most popular services, including the blue and red rapids, continue to keep up with increasing demand. The blue rapid between Belconnen, the city, Woden and

Tuggeranong will change to run seven days a week; and the red rapid 200 between Gungahlin and the city will also now run seven days a week.

To support the seven-day alignment of blue rapid services through Tuggeranong, the route 971 will be extended through Erindale to the Woden town centre, ensuring good service levels through Erindale bus station as well as better access to Woden for residents of Isabella Plains, Calwell and Theodore. For residents in Kaleen and Giralang, changes to weekend routes will further align to weekday services through the introduction of the routes 930 and 931. Kaleen and Giralang locals will be able to catch more convenient public transport every day of the week, particularly to Belconnen and Dickson, for more connections to the red and blue rapids.

The popular free city loop has carried over 114,000 passengers since commencing in July last year. To ensure the continued reliability of this service, it will be moved from Northbourne Avenue and continue to connect the city centre with the ANU, New Acton and Braddon. Lastly, significantly, the Weston line route 182 will extend to service the new suburb of Denman Prospect. This will ensure that residents in Molonglo continue to have access to Cooleman Court, the Woden town centre and the city.

Greyhound racing—transition package

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Regulatory Services. Minister, I have spoken with local greyhound breeders and trainers who are concerned that this government's treatment and demonisation of the industry is having adverse effects on families and individuals. I have some deep concerns for some of those individuals. Minister, how many people have made contact with the greyhound transition team?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Mr Parton for the question. In relation to the transition team, I will take the specifics on notice regarding how many people have made contact so far. Certainly, I would take this opportunity again to encourage those people who are going to be transitioning out of the industry to make contact with the team.

I note that there is some significant time still available for that transition process and I would certainly encourage people to note—and I draw this to the attention of the Assembly, Mr Parton and, through him, the people involved in the industry—that one of the key areas of support under the transition taskforce is counselling support, personally offered support, to make sure that the attention is provided to those people in the way that is most appropriate to them.

MR PARTON: Minister, when will this government take real responsibility for the stresses that they have placed on individuals and families who are making an honest living or participating in an honest, legal activity?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Mr Parton for the supplementary question, noting that it is a matter that I have answered on a number of occasions. What we are doing is moving to end the industry. The government is taking responsibility for the work by way of establishment of the transition task force and ensuring that there is a range of support provisions made for people, and I encourage them to make contact with the task force.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, will you reconsider the details of the transition package, given that few to no trainers are taking up the government's package?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Mr Milligan for the question. With respect to the premise of the question, I do not have the information at this stage to be able to accept it, but we are working with the transition task force in being able to develop a range of services. There is still quite a significant amount of time available, and I do encourage people to make contact with the task force between now and the time that the task force support will end, which is 30 June next year.

Canberra Hospital—risk assessment report

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. Minister, in your statement delivered this morning, you outlined 15 groupings of works under the upgrade and maintain ACT Health assets initiative. You said that your statement was given in response to the Assembly's motion passed on 2 August 2017.

Minister, the Assembly's motion specifically called for an update on the cost, progress and time lines to fix each of the extreme and high risk issues identified in the report, not to put them into groups. Minister, will you table, by the close of business today, the detail required by the Assembly's motion of 2 August? If not, why not, and will you table it at a later date if not today?

MS FITZHARRIS: I think that Mrs Dunne may have missed an addition that I made to that statement at the end of presentation of statements by ministers. I inadvertently did not include information on the costs, and I made a subsequent statement on that.

Given the scale of the initiative and the range of information that I have provided under each of those packages, I do feel that I have met the requirements of the motion passed by the Assembly.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, what was the identified extreme risk referred to in your statement this morning that has been downgraded to a high risk?

MS FITZHARRIS: That is the windows.

MS LAWDER: Minister, what measures were put in place to ensure the safety of patients, staff and visitors to the Canberra Hospital, both internally and externally, to justify that downgrade?

MS FITZHARRIS: I am afraid I did not quite understand the question. If Ms Lawder could repeat it?

MS LAWDER: What measures have been put in place to ensure the safety of patients, staff and visitors, externally and internally, to justify the downgrade of the window from extreme to high risk? How did you justify downgrading it?

MS FITZHARRIS: In my statement today I answered Ms Lawder's question about the measures that have been taken to downgrade that risk, and that is to have locking

of the windows unless for access to relevant balconies. But I reject the assumption that it has any impact on the safety of staff, visitors or patients at Canberra Hospital. I did outline those measures in the statement earlier this morning.

Children and young people—foster care

MR STEEL: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Children and Youth. This week is Foster and Kinship Care Week. How does foster and kinship care contribute to supporting Canberra's most vulnerable children and young people?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Steel for his very important question and his interest in this topic. We mark Foster and Kinship Care Week from 10 to 16 September to recognise and thank foster and kinship carers for their important contribution to our community.

Foster carers and kinship carers are the backbone of our out-of-home system. Carers open their homes and their hearts to some of the most vulnerable children and young people in our community. In fact, I encourage anyone who has not yet watched last night's *Australian Story* about two amazing foster parents who made a real difference in many children's lives to take the opportunity to do so.

Where children cannot live safely with their birth families it is important that we find them a safe, stable and loving home where they can safely grow and thrive, whether that is for a short period or forever.

Some carers become carers by choice. For others it is about stepping in to help family members experiencing difficulties. No matter whether a person chooses to become a carer or caring chooses them, all carers step up to a vital role and it is important that we support them.

As you would be aware, Madam Speaker, A step up for our kids introduced a range of additional supports and training for carers. In particular, the independent kinship and foster care advocacy support service, delivered by Carers ACT, provides independent support and advice to assist carers and to resolve issues with service providers and child and youth protection services.

I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of the ACT government to thank the foster carers and kinship carers in our community who provide a safe, stable and loving home to children and young people when they are most in need.

MR STEEL: Minister, how are the ACT government and the ACT Together consortium working to recruit and support foster and kinship carers?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Steel for his supplementary. The out-of-home care consortium established under A step up for our kids—ACT Together—is responsible for recruiting foster carers in the ACT. I am pleased to inform the Assembly that they are now halfway to their 2017 target of recruiting 80 new foster carers, with 40 new carers so far stepping up to care for some of Canberra's most vulnerable children.

ACT Together, led by Barnardos, has a dedicated carer recruitment team that has developed an innovative carer recruitment strategy. This includes promoting foster care through several mediums, including social media, radio, print, stalls and information sessions.

There are various types of foster care, from short-term emergency care to becoming a permanent carer. I would encourage anyone thinking about taking on this rewarding role to contact 1300 WE FOSTER to have a chat. Recently, a new committee has been established by child and youth protection services and ACT Together to focus on carer wellbeing. The committee's membership includes carers with lived experience of kinship and foster care.

As I mentioned, new advocacy support and engagement services under A step up for our kids are also important elements of the service system. Carers ACT's kinship and foster care advocacy service, which I mentioned earlier, complements our supports for children, young people and birth families, including through the children and young people engagement support service operated by the CREATE Foundation, and birth family advocacy support services operated by Australian Red Cross.

These services support the very important goal of families, carers, children and young people, community organisations and government working together collaboratively to make the best decisions for the safety and wellbeing of a child or young person when they need our support the most.

MS ORR: Minister, how is ACT government working with the Red Cross to support families who are engaged with the child and youth protection system?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Orr for her supplementary question. As I mentioned, new advocacy, support and engagement services under A step up for our kids are a critical element of the system. The birth family advocacy support service operated by the Australian Red Cross provides independent information and support to birth families with children in care or with children at risk of entering care. The aim of this service is for parents to be supported and empowered to engage with the care system in an informed way.

Coming into contact with the child protection system can be a stressful and traumatic time for a parent. Having a better understanding of what may happen during the process goes a long way towards making this extremely fraught time a little easier. This includes information on what parents' rights are, the rights of their children, and the legal obligations of Child and Youth Protection Services. That is why CYPS has worked with the Australian Red Cross and the Women's Legal Centre to develop new "Working together for kids" guides.

These guides, which replace a previous single book, have been made available in hard copy and online to inform families about the child protection process and the roles and responsibilities of those involved. These guides provide straightforward, accessible information about child concern reports and what happens when one is made; going to court and working to reunite families; what happens when children are

in care; how parents can represent themselves; and how to raise concerns and make complaints within the system. These five guides are an invaluable resource not just for families but also for any agency that provides support to families navigating the child protection system.

Children and young people—protection

MRS KIKKERT: My question is to the Minister for Disability, Children and Youth. Minister, what specific lessons have been learned and implemented following the Glanfield inquiry?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: To start with, I would refer Mrs Kikkert to a quite comprehensive statement that I made during the last sitting of the Assembly where I outlined the things that have been done to respond to the five specific Glanfield inquiry recommendations that relate to child protection. One of the incidents that, unfortunately, led to the establishment of the Glanfield inquiry was, of course, the tragic death of Bradyn Dillon and I want to take this opportunity, again, on behalf of the government, to convey our deepest sympathies to Bradyn's mother, Rachel, and the rest of her family.

As Bradyn's mother said recently, domestic violence is too often the cause of children being unsafe in their own home. That is why the ACT government is putting so much effort into ensuring it takes a system-wide approach to addressing family violence. And I have to say the ACT community is also responding with increased vigilance. We are seeing this through an increase in child concern reports and we have recently responded to that with extra resources, including almost \$44 million committed in the 2017-18 budget.

In the wake of the Glanfield inquiry of course, the government responded to that report and two other reports with a comprehensive \$21 million safer families package which was further supplemented in the most recent budget. Among the many other measures, the safer families package included almost \$2½ million for enhanced child protection case management and coordination, building on work that was already underway. Part of this funding was for improved quality assurance through independent case analysis, drawing on lessons from other jurisdictions. The case analysis team provides independent analysis of individual cases at key decision points and identifies good practice, practice concerns and knowledge gaps.

At a systemic level we have established a child and youth protection quality assurance and improvement committee which includes members from other jurisdictions who offer a fresh set of eyes to identify areas for improvement in case management.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, with due respect to Bradyn Dillon's mother, Rachel Jones, when will the government release information about what was known about her child, Bradyn Dillon, in the weeks and months prior to his death?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: As Mrs Kikkert is well aware, there are very strict privacy provisions under the Children and Young People Act, and I am not in a position to provide any information about the Bradyn Dillon matter.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, has the matter of Bradyn Dillon been referred to the Children and Young People Death Review Committee? If not, when will it be?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mrs Dunne for her supplementary question. As I am sure she is well aware, the Children and Young People Death Review Committee reviews all deaths of children and young people in the ACT.

Government—gambling harm minimisation

MS ORR: My question is to the Minister for Regulatory Services. Minister, what outcomes does the government seek from the upcoming gambling harm minimisation round table?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Ms Orr for her question. I am convening the round table this Friday to give the government a solid evidence base for introducing—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR RAMSAY: new and more effective harm minimisation measures in clubs. The government is absolutely committed to reducing the impact of problem gambling in this community.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR RAMSAY: We have been clear in our election policies—

Ms Orr: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Resume your seat, please, minister. Ms Orr, a point of order.

Ms Orr: As the minister needs to address you, I am finding it quite hard to hear his response with Mr Hanson's interjections.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, that would be a reminder not to interject so the minister can be heard. Minister.

MR RAMSAY: We have been clear in our election policies and in our commitments and we have been following through in the past year. That includes reducing the number of electronic gaming machines to 4,000 by 2020.

Alongside new policies, the government will continue to look for ways to improve the effectiveness of our current framework for regulating gambling. Just some of the key questions that the round table will be considering on Friday are: what additional harm minimisation rules can we adopt from other jurisdictions? Are our self-exclusion rules for clubs strong enough to help problem gamblers to get help? Can clubs support staff to identify and respond appropriately to individuals at risk of gambling harm?

The round table will develop information about our options, including the implementation of bet limits and pre-commitments on gaming machines in the

territory. It will examine evidence about the effectiveness of different harm minimisation measures and practical issues with implementation. I am confident that this round table will help shape the future direction of gambling harm reduction in the ACT.

MS ORR: Minister, how will the community's expectations and views be represented at the round table?

MR RAMSAY: Canberrans have made it particularly clear that they expect this government to treat harm minimisation as a priority and to deliver robust and effective reforms. Problem gambling has devastating consequences for individuals, for families and for the community. Courageous individuals, including Professor Laurie Brown, have come forward and shared detailed and personal accounts of the effects of problem gambling. Their examples show us why it is critical to keep working towards a stronger harm minimisation framework.

The round table will bring together industry knowledge, expertise in harm minimisation, and community views on gambling harm. It has been structured to ensure that the group focuses on meeting our community's demand for better harm minimisation and that the viewpoints and the expertise necessary to achieve results are there.

Representatives of the clubs sector, including Canberra Community Clubs, Clubs ACT and the independent clubs, will be attending. Community groups, including organisations that assist people and families affected by problem gambling, and gambling reform advocates, will be there. There will be academic experts in harm minimisation to provide knowledge of the latest evidence and research. Most importantly, individuals with lived experience of problem gambling will be attending and sharing their experiences and viewpoints. The government will continue to encourage—

Mrs Dunne: You've got lived experience of problem gambling. It's how you get into government.

Mr Hanson: You're addicted to the pokie money, aren't you?

Ms Orr: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: I am about to call Mr Hanson and Mrs Dunne to order. The interjections continue; the volume goes up. Enough is enough. I cannot hear the minister responding. Even though there are only 23 seconds left, I expect that he be able to be heard. Do you have anything to add, Ms Orr?

Ms Orr: No, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you.

MR RAMSAY: The government will continue to welcome and to encourage the engagement of those who are directly affected by gambling harm, as well as

organisations working to reduce gambling harm, and the industry, including the clubs sector, as the government takes forward this important work.

MS CODY: Minister, how will the government incorporate the recommendations of the round table into its current framework?

MR RAMSAY: The government will be looking closely at the evidence about our gambling industry, and ways to improve our legislation. The round table will provide the necessary foundation to create enhanced measures. Where there is evidence to support making changes to our laws and our policies, we will take action. We have a track record of taking action quickly and effectively. An example of this is our work on EFTPOS limitations. In August this government introduced and the Assembly passed legislation to restrict cash withdrawals from EFTPOS—

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms Cody: Madam Speaker—

MADAM SPEAKER: Minister, resume your seat. Ms Cody, is there a point of order?

Ms Cody: A point of order. I am finding it very difficult to hear Mr Ramsay's response, as I have all day today. The opposition have been ridiculously noisy.

Ms Lawder interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Lawder, I think you were interjecting then, so I will ask you to be quiet. There is a recurrent, an eternal, request for you, Mr Hanson. Minister, do you want to resume, with some level of silence, in the 59 seconds you have?

MR RAMSAY: We can hope that there will be a level of silence. That legislation was a direct response to the concerns raised earlier this year. The round table was established by the government to support a broad harm minimisation agenda by focusing on the regulation of gaming at clubs. The people who will attend the round table will bring industry, community and expert viewpoints. The process will give us an evidence base for taking action.

It is important to recognise that this round table's findings are part of a range of consultation, investigation and reform processes. As you are aware, Madam Speaker, my directorate is currently circulating a paper on options to reduce the number of electronic gaming machine authorisations to 4,000. I anticipate ongoing consultation and action in this area as we continue to address the issue together. We are seeking community views on mandatory pre-commitments and bet limits on gaming machines at the Canberra Casino. This is a government that acts and will continue to do so.

Mr Barr: I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.

Answers to questions on notice

Questions 358, 361 and 363

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra): In accordance with standing order 118A, I ask the Minister for Health and Wellbeing for an explanation as to the lateness of answers to questions on notice which were due on 3 September: that is, question 358, which relates to the flu season; question 361, which relates to the Canberra Hospital Medihotel; and question 363, the answer to which I received during question time today, which was nine days late. I ask for an explanation as to why these three questions on notice were not answered in the time frame set out in the standing orders.

MS FITZHARRIS (Yerrabi—Minister for Health and Wellbeing, Minister for Transport and City Services and Minister for Higher Education, Training and Research): Yes, our answer to 363 was signed off this morning; I do apologise for that. I wanted to provide a full answer to Mrs Dunne, and I have asked ACT Health for more information so that I can provide that to her. I expect that will be with me by the end of this week.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (3.37): In accordance with standing order 118A(c), I remind members that the standing order says that if a member cannot answer a question within 30 days, the member has the option of making that explanation to the member beforehand. In accordance with standing order 118C, I move:

That the Assembly take note of the Minister's failure to provide an answer to questions on notice Nos 358, 361 and 363 in the time provided for by the standing orders.

Madam Speaker, this is an ongoing issue for members of the opposition. We come to the beginning of a sitting period and there are a number of questions. I have five questions outstanding as of this morning, and I will get to the others in a minute. The answer is often, "I have just signed something off," or "I am trying to get a better answer." But the standing order is quite clear: a member has 30 days to answer the question and if the member cannot answer the question in 30 days they have a responsibility to make an explanation to the member who has asked the question, essentially asking for an extension. Or this Assembly has the option of taking note of the failure to answer. This is an opportunity for the Assembly to note that a series of questions have not been answered within the statutory time frame. It is a very simple motion.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Major Events) (3.38): Whilst all ministers in this place go to great lengths to answer questions from members, many of those questions are multifaceted and involve an extraordinary amount of work. I would not want to even begin to quantify the dollar cost associated with answering questions on notice, because that element—

Mr Coe: The cost of democracy.

MR BARR: Yes, there is indeed a cost of democracy, and I am not seeking to suggest that there should not be a question on notice process. But there is also a question of balance and reasonableness. There have been 600 questions on notice, many of those questions multifaceted questions that run over pages and that involve seeking information from outside of government and require quite complex pieces of work in order to provide answers to members. I think the record of this government in providing answers in a timely way would compare very well to those of previous governments in this place over the nearly 30 years of self-government.

Whilst in this instance Mrs Dunne has a few questions that are about a week overdue, I think it is important that the Assembly understand and acknowledge that these are not just abstract processes; there is a lot of work that goes into answering questions on notice. And these 600 that are on the notice paper do not include the questions that come through the estimates process that we have just concluded, and then the annual reports process. They are also part of scrutiny in this place. There are thousands of questions. In fact, a good chunk of our public service's time is spent simply answering questions on notice.

In this debate more broadly, it is important to be able to balance a range of competing priorities. The commitment I give on behalf of all ministers in this place is to endeavour to answer all questions as promptly as possible. But there is also a responsibility in relation to the length of questions and the type of information and reasonableness of questions that are asked that goes both ways in any functioning democracy.

On occasion there will be information that takes longer to obtain or the number and volume of questions in terms of sub-questions within a certain period make it difficult to respond within deadlines. The record of ministers in this place in answering questions on notice, I believe, is very good. Ministers do seek to provide answers in a timely way, as is seen by the fact that there are very few questions that are beyond the deadline and there have been 600 asked.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Urban Renewal) (3.41): Madam Speaker, I want to speak to this as well, particularly in regard to the Chief Minister's comments about the amount of detail in questions. Firstly, I will apologise to Mrs Dunne with regard to two questions outstanding from me. One is regarding Smith Street in Weetangera. The response is being signed this afternoon and will be with Mrs Dunne tomorrow.

But in particular I want to go to question 371 regarding Kinleyside Crescent, Weetangera. Again, I apologise for the delay, but the question does go back for quite a lengthy time. In fact, correspondence between the two offices began in 2015. It is important that, with this response, we take into account all of that correspondence to provide a full answer with all of the history involved. That is the work that my office has been doing to ensure that we get the best answer to Mrs Dunne in a timely manner. In this case, it is just over the due time, but it will be delivered to her office tomorrow or submitted by tomorrow.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (3.43): We will not be supporting Mrs Dunne's motion. I have been having a look at the standing orders in the course of the debate. Standing order 118A(c) flags the fact that:

... in the event that the Minister does not provide an explanation or statement to the satisfaction of the Member, that Member may, without notice, move a motion
...

I heard the minister say that it had taken longer because she had sought additional information. Certainly that is my lived experience: at times, questions come forward, and when you read the provided answer, perhaps from knowing the context in the Assembly, you think that there is further information that is required or that the question could warrant a better answer. That process does take some time to go back and forth. In relation to the specific question that is being discussed today, I think the minister did provide a satisfactory answer. Whilst the member may not agree with it, we will accept that as a reasonable explanation.

In light of comments from the Chief Minister, which I think gave a very fair and balanced account of the situation, I would like to say that I do find myself at times challenged by some of the questions that are sent as questions on notice which, through some basic researching or reading of annual reports, could be self-answered rather than relying on the question on notice process. I think it is important that we have these questions and that there is scope, but sometimes there is a bit of flexibility because it can take a bit of time to pull some of this information together.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (3.44), in reply: I can count, but I do draw members' attention to the whole of the standing order. The standing order basically sets out that questions should be answered within 30 days and if they cannot be answered within that 30 days the minister may provide to the member who was asked the question an explanation or statement as to why the member cannot be provided with the answer. If that does not happen, a member is entitled to come into this place and draw attention to the matter. Quite frankly, if ministers learn from this process that, if they cannot answer on time, they might pay members the courtesy of being in touch with their office and saying, "We cannot answer in time, but it might take us an extra five days," or whatever, that might be a reasonable outcome.

Members of the opposition have to come in here at the beginning of every sitting period. I have five questions today, and I am sure that other members have questions as well, because there is a long list of questions that are outstanding and were not answered in the period. This happens on a regular basis. Members in this place come in after question time, usually at the beginning of a sitting period, and ask for an explanation as to why they have not had questions answered. To give the answer "I've signed it off" or "I'm about to sign it off" is not an explanation as to why it is late. It is not an explanation as to why it is late. To say, on a sitting day, nine days after the answer was due, "I am about to sign off," or "You might get it tomorrow," is not an explanation as to why the answer is late.

What I am asking for, and what the standing order calls for, is an explanation. If the explanation is "It is more complex than the department thought and I have sent it

back,” that is fine, but, quite frankly, ministers should be doing members the courtesy of saying, “I can’t answer your question on time, for these reasons.” Then we would not need this standing order to be operated as frequently as it is operated in this place. I commend the motion that we take note that the minister has not answered the question.

Then we go on to the stuff about the Chief Minister saying, “Oh, this is terrible. You are asking us too many questions.”

Government member interjecting—

MRS DUNNE: We are doing our job. We are doing our job on behalf of the people of the ACT. It is important to know about the flu season and about the Medihotel. It is important to know about the number of beds. The people of the ACT are entitled to know the answers to these questions. It is not sufficient for the government to say, “It’s inconvenient for us to answer the questions.” This is the cost of democracy. This is the cost of open government.

Mr Barr: I have not contested that.

MRS DUNNE: You are contesting it. If he did not think it was a problem, the Chief Minister would not have got to his feet and whinged about it. That is what he did. He whinged about the audacity of the opposition in asking questions.

Question resolved in the negative.

Questions 368 and 371

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra): In relation to standing order 118A—the minister has already anticipated this, but I want to put it on the record—I want to mention questions on notice 368, in relation to development in Kinleyside Street, and 371, in relation to development in Smith Street, both in Weetangera. Ironically, questions were put on notice because of the failure of the minister to answer correspondence. I would like an explanation as to why they were not answered in the time frame set out in the standing orders.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Urban Renewal): I did give a detailed explanation, particularly on 371, about the length of time required to prepare the answer to Mrs Dunne, to ensure, as I said, that it is in response to her questions, with the history and the correspondence from my office to her office. I understand that my office has been in touch with Mrs Dunne and advised that we are preparing it, so I am quite surprised that she has come in today with this motion. With regard to the Smith Street, Weetangera, one, my understanding is that the address in the response from the directorate was incorrect and we needed to amend that address to ensure that the response was correct for Mrs Dunne.

Leave of absence

Motion (by **Mr Wall**) agreed to:

That leave of absence be granted to Mrs Jones for today's sitting due to illness.

Papers

Madam Assistant Speaker (Ms Lee) presented the following papers:

Estimates 2017-2018—Select Committee—Schedule of unanswered questions taken on notice and questions on notice, as at 31 August 2017, dated 12 September 2017, together with answers to questions taken on notice and questions on notice.

Standing order 191—Amendments to:

Crimes (Intimate Image Abuse) Amendment Bill 2017, dated 28 August 2017.

Lands Acquisition Amendment Bill 2017, dated 29 and 31 August 2017.

Government Agencies (Campaign Advertising) Act, pursuant to subsection 20(1)—Independent Reviewer—Report for the period 1 January to 30 June 2017, dated 1 September 2017, prepared by Professor Dennis Pearce.

Mr Barr presented the following paper:

Public Sector Management Standards, pursuant to section 56—Engagements of long term senior executive service members—1 March and 31 August 2017.

National Environment Protection Council—annual report 2015-2016

Paper and statement by minister

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Urban Renewal) (3.51): For the information of members, I present the following paper:

National Environment Protection Council Act, pursuant to subsection 23(3)—National Environment Protection Council-Annual Report 2015-2016.

I ask leave to make a statement in relation to the paper.

Leave granted.

MR GENTLEMAN: Today I am pleased to table the National Environment Protection Council annual report 2015-16 to the Assembly. Under the ACT's National Environment Protection Council Act 1994 the report must be tabled within seven sitting days of the report's adoption by the commonwealth. The 2015-16 report was formally tabled by the commonwealth on 15 August this year. The report covers the

activities of the council, the operation of the service corporation that supports the council and the implementation and effectiveness of national environment protection measures. These measures ensure nationally consistent environmental standards, goals or protocols relating to air, water, noise, site contamination, hazardous waste and recycling.

Throughout 2015-16 the National Environment Protection Council continued focusing on the Council of Australian Governments' strategic environmental priorities. From 1 July 2014 operational support for the National Environment Protection Council was provided by the commonwealth Department of the Environment and Energy. A decision to streamline the future NEPC work program included an agreement to proceed with a revised governance structure. During the reporting period the National Environment Protection Council, together with the National Environment Protection Council committee of senior officials, continued to support the COAG statement of the environment being fundamental to the wellbeing of all Australians and its preservation being our bequest to future generations.

The work on the national plan for clean air included implementing national emissions standards for wood heaters. It also continued the review of the Australian particle standards and other air quality standards in the ambient air quality NEPM. This work helps to improve the management of ambient air quality, which is essential to the protection of the Australian community's health and wellbeing. The ACT is supportive of these national works, in particular, the work on improving air quality, which will assist in further addressing the ACT's winter particle pollution problem. The ACT met all of its reporting requirements for the National Environment Protection Council annual report 2015-16. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Papers

Mr Gentleman presented the following papers:

Subordinate legislation (including explanatory statements unless otherwise stated)

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

Architects Act—Architects Board Appointment 2017 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2017-204 (LR, 16 August 2017).

City Renewal Authority and Suburban Land Agency Act—City Renewal Authority and Suburban Land Agency Regulation 2017—Subordinate Law SL2017-26 (LR, 21 August 2017).

Family Violence Act—Family Violence (Transitional Provisions) Regulation 2017—Subordinate Law SL2017-25 (LR, 17 August 2017).

Official Visitor Act—Official Visitor (Housing Assistance) Appointment 2017 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2017-206 (LR, 21 August 2017).

Race and Sports Bookmaking Act—Race and Sports Bookmaking (Sports Bookmaking Venues) Determination 2017 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2017-205 (LR, 21 August 2017).

Road Transport (General) Act—Road Transport (General) Application of Road Transport Legislation Declaration 2017 (No 5)—Disallowable Instrument DI2017-201 (LR, 17 August 2017).

Road Transport (Safety and Traffic Management) Regulation—Road Transport (Safety and Traffic Management) Child Safety Equipment Approval 2017—Disallowable Instrument DI2017-203 (LR, 17 August 2017).

Veterinary Surgeons Act—Veterinary Surgeons (Board) Appointment Revocation 2017 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2017-202 (LR, 17 August 2017).

Work Health and Safety Act—Work Health and Safety Amendment Regulation 2017 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2017-24 (LR, 17 August 2017).

Community services—men’s sheds

Discussion of matter of public importance

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Ms Lee): Madam Speaker has received letters from Ms Cheyne, Ms Cody, Ms Lawder, Ms Le Couteur, Ms Lee, Ms Orr, Mr Parton, Mr Pettersson and Mr Steel proposing that matters of public importance be submitted to the Assembly. In accordance with standing order 79, Madam Speaker has determined that the matter proposed by Ms Lawder be submitted to the Assembly, namely:

The importance of men’s sheds in enhancing community wellbeing and social inclusion.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (3.54): It is a pleasure to rise today to speak of the importance of men’s sheds in enhancing community wellbeing and social inclusion in the ACT. When I was a child growing up, sheds in the backyard were very much the male domain. Your dad would go out to the shed, often after dinner, to what was then termed as the escape from the kids in the house—probably more likely to escape from the washing up—and undertake these men’s activities which were a bit mysterious to me at the time. They often involved woodwork and metalwork and things like that. Sometimes my dad’s friends would come around and they would work out in the shed together. They may be fixing a motor, doing up an old car, getting a boat engine to run, all sorts of different things. So men’s sheds are very much part of the Australian culture.

The men’s shed movement is, if you like, an updated version of that traditional men’s shed in the backyard environment. What we found over the past 20 or more years was that men were not very good at asking for help. They were not very good at acknowledging when they had health issues, including mental health issues. They were not very good at identifying when they did not have friends, when they felt lonely, when they had problems and they did not feel able to share. Sometimes it was instilled in them from a young age that men should be the strong part of a relationship and they had to put on that brave front, the stiff upper lip.

Hopefully, things have been changing more recently, with a focus on the need to seek help, that it is okay to seek help and it is okay to talk about your issues with someone

else. Sunday was World Suicide Prevention Day and Thursday this week is R U OK? Day. These movements and national and international days highlight the need for people to speak up when they need help. So it is timely to talk about a movement such as the men's shed today.

Research has shown that relationship breakdowns, bereavement, loss of access to children following a divorce or other relationship breakdown, and physical or mental illness are just some of the problems that men may find difficult to deal with on their own. Studies have linked social isolation and loneliness to physical health symptoms, including high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke and depression. ABS 2015 data shows that Australian men aged over 85 have the highest suicide rate in Australia, at 39.3 per 100,000 people. In comparison, women in that age group had a suicide rate of 5.7 per 100,000. That is 39.3 compared to 5.7 in 100,000—alarming statistics. The next highest age-specific suicide rate for men was in the 45 to 49, 40 to 44 and 50 to 54-year-age groups, with rates of 31.5, 30.6 and 30.5 per 100,000 respectively. Again, alarming and disturbing statistics.

Organisations who work in this space, such as Sane Australia, the Australian General Practice Network, beyondblue, Menslink and, of course, the Australian Men's Shed Association, all state that men still do not naturally talk about their physical, social or mental health. One research study that I looked at determined that men should physically meet with four friends two times a week in order to reap the benefits of male friendship. I am sure we all know people who do not have that level of engagement twice a week, meeting with four male friends. The benefits of strong male friendships include a stronger immune system, the release of endorphins, an overall decrease in anxiety levels and, apparently, even higher levels of generosity. This research goes so far as to recommend that guys “do stuff” while they socialise, and that is exactly what the men's shed movement is about.

In the words of Professor Barry Golding, a men's shed researcher from the Federation University, Ballarat:

Men don't talk face to face. They talk shoulder to shoulder.

The men's shed movement builds on that approach. While they are standing shoulder to shoulder at a lathe or building toys for children to sell at a fete, men raise issues, often slowly and haltingly at first. They are not looking eye to eye; they are sharing a physical activity, and this facilitates a more natural exchange of information between them. It is not as confronting to those men as looking someone in the face and confessing your deepest, darkest, innermost secrets, which is difficult for many of us to do at any time.

Ms Cheyne: Not me; it's all on the table.

MS LAWDER: Okay, maybe not for everyone, but if you have been brought up in that way that you have to be strong and always appear to be in control and to be the solutions person in a relationship, it can be difficult to admit that you are struggling.

The men's shed movement began organically in Australia about 20 or so years ago and has evolved into an organisation known as the Australian Men's Shed Association. A number of other sheds are not members officially of AMSA, the Australian Men's Shed Association. Some of them that I am aware of include Goodwin Village in Monash. They have a men's shed there even though it is not officially affiliated with AMSA, and many other retirement communities have a men's shed type approach as well.

The objective of the men's shed movement is to advance the wellbeing and health of their male members, to provide a space where men can talk shoulder to shoulder. Of course, there are so many other spin-off benefits. Some of these men's sheds create fabulous toys and other projects that they give to charities or sell at fetes and then donate the money to other organisations. There are many, many ways in which the work of the men's sheds benefits not only the men who go to them—and that is enormously important—but also the broader community.

A men's shed is intended to be accessible to all men, regardless of their background or ability. In fact, I have heard of some men's sheds just recently who are engaging in relationships and partnerships with Alzheimer's ACT, where people with Alzheimer's come along and share making things and painting things with members of the men's shed. Again, that is another huge benefit to our community as a whole.

The men's shed provides a safe and friendly environment for men to work on meaningful projects at their own pace, often learn new skills and have the ability to teach and mentor other people in those skills. Every shed is a bit different; they work differently. Some sheds are open every day of the week; some sheds are only open a couple of days of the week. They make, for example, furniture for schools and equipment for training for the Ambulance Service—stretchers and things—and they have mentored school children. It really helps to reduce isolation in our community. Often men's sheds, as well as the AMSA organisation, apply for grants to facilitate their work.

It is lovely to see here in this place that men's sheds have the support of everyone; it is a bipartisan thing. We can all recognise and appreciate the benefits of men's sheds, and we can see that health benefits can be delivered by stealth, if you like, and not necessarily directly. There are around 1,000 men's sheds in Australia and about 12 in the Canberra area. Another slightly different model I visited recently is the South Canberra Veterans shed, which, of course, is looking for a permanent home. For men who can find themselves isolated, a men's shed can get them involved in their community, give them meaningful activity and get them some informal advice which will help make their lives and our community better.

MR RAMSAY (Ginninderra—Attorney-General, Minister for Regulatory Services, Minister for the Arts and Community Events and Minister for Veterans and Seniors) (4.04): It is certainly a pleasure to speak on this particular topic, noting the priority that the ACT government places on men's sheds, and I look forward to speaking briefly on a number of specific examples of that. We know that men's sheds offer men in the Canberra community a place where they can establish friendships and

networks of support and where they can continue to productively contribute to the community. Men's sheds provide opportunities for men to continue to learn and to share their skills and experiences, often after they leave full-time work.

In my particular portfolio as Minister for Veterans and Seniors it is one of the areas on which I have been focusing. We know veterans can face particular challenges in transitioning to civilian life. One of the key challenges is social isolation, when they may feel others cannot relate to the experiences they have been through as veterans. So I am committed to helping to build a society where everyone belongs, where everyone is valued and where everyone has the opportunity to participate.

The men's shed model works well to provide an avenue for veterans to remain connected with those around them and to find ways to be productive and actively engaged with the community. It enables veterans to connect with others with whom they can develop a stronger sense of camaraderie and shared understanding. It is a great example of mates helping mates.

The ACT government is working with veterans organisations to provide increased opportunities for veterans living in Canberra to get actively involved, including in the community through programs such as these. The Veterans Support Centre in Page, in my own electorate of Ginninderra, has close to 600 members. It supports veterans of all ages and provides access to a range of wood and metalworking facilities to create a men's shed like environment where veterans can come together, work with their hands and remain connected with fellow veterans and their communities.

I was pleased to visit the centre recently. They gave me a tour of the facilities and spoke to me about the challenges that they help veterans work through and how they help veterans remain active and connected in the community. With the assistance of ACT government funding, donations of materials and labour by major industry and the work of the centre's volunteers, the centre has established a metalwork workshop and a woodwork workshop. Veterans are able to connect with peers and teach each other new skills. Veterans can discuss issues and open up with like-minded people who can empathise with past experiences. These are important first steps to those who are seeking help and connection, as it is through discussions like this that people can then help out on where to find other support and new networks.

I am also pleased to advise members that the 2016-17 veterans and seniors participation grants round has provided funding for the establishment of a men's shed for veterans on the south side of Canberra, similar to that available on the north side in Page. It has funded first-aid courses and equipment for the administration and setting up of the group, including laptops and a printer. Similarly, this shed provides support and social inclusion for both serving and ex-serving members of the Australian Defence Force, for their families and for like-minded individuals. It will support members' self-worth by providing opportunities for members to contribute to activities that support each other and support the community more generally.

At present, the group is meeting at the Lake Tuggeranong sea scouts hall for its planning and social activities, and the group is also in the process of setting up a workshop in Tuggeranong Archery Club, to which it has access two days a week for

workshop activities. They have received several donations of equipment, including saws, a drill press and work benches, and I look forward to them expanding their services. The men's shed model provides valuable benefits to veterans and their families, and the government will be looking to continue our work with veterans organisations in Canberra to support our valued veterans to stay involved in their community.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong—Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability, Minister for Justice, Consumer Affairs and Road Safety, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Mental Health) (4.09): I welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter today and I particularly appreciated Ms Lawder's opening remarks. I think she did a very good job of describing the necessity of men's sheds, the role that they play in the community and the benefits that they deliver.

As members will know—and I am sure many of us have been to visit them—there are 10 official men's sheds in Canberra, spread all across the city. Some cater to specific groups: one in Tuggeranong supports veterans; one in Evatt caters to model railway enthusiasts. Across Australia we have men's sheds that support our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community by providing a space to pass on cultural knowledge and yarns to their community and their kids. We even have men's sheds that are open to women, I am told. I was actually surprised to discover that in preparing for today's discussion. I am sure there is one out there somewhere. I cannot tell you where it is, but I do believe that that is the case.

The beauty of the men's sheds is that they are all different. Some make furniture, some restore old cars or bicycles, some maintain the local environment and parks, some teach skills, some have talks and forums and some just provide a space with tea, coffee and a shared computer where men can relax, chat with their mates and check their emails. I think this again goes to the point that has been raised in the discussion today, which is that the activity almost does not matter; it is simply the act of coming together and doing something collectively that is actually the real strength of men's sheds. All men's sheds have a shared purpose: to advance the wellbeing and health of their members by providing a safe and friendly environment to work on meaningful projects at the members' own pace, in their own time and, most importantly, in the company of others.

They are built on the idea that good health means feeling good about yourself and feeling good about your community and how you are connecting with it. We know from countless studies that if you feel socially isolated, if you do not feel like you belong somewhere and if you do not feel like you have a purpose, you are likely to feel more disconnected and to suffer the consequences that come from that, whether that is issues around mental health or physical health or a range of other issues. I think members are all familiar with this sort of research.

As Ms Lawder touched on, men often feel like they cannot ask for help. We do not feel comfortable talking about not coping, and when we are not coping we feel like we should do more. We need to do more than ask for help, and it is that solutions idea of being able to toughen up and get on with it. I guess that is the classic language

around this. Whilst that may be a traditional approach, it is clearly not always the right answer.

Because men do not ask for help, they can end up doing things like turning to drink, taking more risks or simply isolating themselves and withdrawing from the people in their life, which is the very opposite of what those people want to do. They do want to be able to reach out. Without that connection with other people, something like a relationship breakdown or the loss of a job, a divorce or illness can have a catastrophic effect on the mental and social wellbeing of men. That absence of a support network of friends who can help put something into perspective or can offer perhaps alternative sources of support means that some of those very testing events that can occur in your life can have a much greater impact.

Social connectedness is just as good for your health as quitting smoking or going for a daily jog, and that is not an empty platitude or some sort of wellness meme. A 2010 study of nearly 300,000 participants found that stronger social relationships effectively extended your life and massively improved your wellbeing. People who felt socially isolated or disconnected had a higher risk of early death than if they smoked, drank or were in fact obese.

As men, especially older men, we find it easier to talk shoulder to shoulder rather than face to face. It is an interesting idea. I think it is a very succinct way of gathering together a really important idea. I think that kind of equality and common ground in working together on a project, which is the very premise of the men's shed, is a very effective way of doing that. Whether it is going fishing, watching the football or working on a project, men seem to do those things better than talk over a coffee—not that some men do not love their coffee and will not sit in a cafe for hours—but I think that there is definitely a different style there. And that is the strength of the men's shed model.

Particularly with my responsibilities in the mental health portfolio, I do spend some time thinking about these things, obviously, and talking to a lot of people who work in this space. I think that one of the ideas that are really emerging in the discussions around mental health is that we have to think of these activities and these issues as mental fitness rather than just mental health. As much as we must work on our physical fitness, we also need to work on our mental fitness or our mental wellness and be deliberate about that at times. We cannot just assume that it is going to be okay. Just as we need to tune a car or go to the gym to look after our bodies, there are things that we must also do for our mental wellbeing. Some of those we can do at the same time, for our physical and mental wellbeing, but there is definitely a space and there is an importance to being mindful and aware of and deliberate about your mental wellbeing.

I welcome the fact that we have had this opportunity to discuss this today, particularly in the context of, as Ms Lawder noted, Suicide Prevention Week. Unfortunately, we do see men over-represented in suicide statistics, for some of the reasons we have discussed today and for other complex reasons as well. But it is important that we talk about these issues. Certainly it is something that, again, as the responsible minister, I am very aware of, and a message I am keen to promote is that we must talk about

these things openly if we are to tackle them in our society. I welcome the opportunity to have this discussion this week particularly, but more generally to acknowledge the role of men's sheds in our community, to congratulate all those involved. It takes an effort to run something like this, but I think the benefit far outweighs the effort that goes into that.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (4.15): I rise to speak to this matter of public importance. Isn't it refreshing when we get a matter in this chamber that all of us agree pretty much wholeheartedly on every aspect of? I wish there was more of that. Someone once described men's sheds to me as a practical network to support cranky old men. I commend my colleague Ms Lawder for initially bringing this one forward but also for her speech on this. I know that she has particular experience with one tall, cranky old man and that she and others have experience that blokes are strange creatures. I think it is safe to say that we do get stranger as we get older.

Blokes are funny, as has been highlighted by a number of the speakers on this, because we do not talk enough. Blokes often believe that they are self-sufficient, that they do not need to reach out to anyone else for help. I think too many men retreat to a cave within themselves to deal with their problems. I know it a generalisation, but so many men struggle to have their thoughts shared with others. What that means is that, as men get older, as men stop playing sport, as they get to the end of their working lives, their friend networks diminish, and for some men those networks disintegrate completely. Men's sheds across Australia and, of course, across Canberra reconnect cranky old men who soon discover that they are not as old as they thought they were and they are probably not as cranky as they thought they were.

I do recall inspecting a men's shed workshop on one occasion. It was a very busy workshop, with so much activity going on. The power tools were going; the jokes were rolling out; there was the sound of hearty laughter. It was almost like question time here. It was echoing around the place. In a quieter place I asked one of the men's shed representatives where he believed these men would be today if they were not in there, so actively participating in life. And he turned to me with a very serious face on and said, "I don't want to put too fine a point on it, but the reality is that some of them would be dead." He is absolutely right. When older men lose connection, when they lose the sense of self-importance, they lose so much of their lives.

I have to tell you that I witnessed it firsthand earlier this year with my father. I was staggered to see the deterioration in my father's health after he had disconnected from the networks which had once supported him. Men's sheds change lives. Echoing the thoughts of Mr Rattenbury earlier, I do wish to commend everyone who is involved at any level in pulling together the activities of men's sheds and making it work.

The modern men's shed is an updated version of the shed in the backyard that has long been a part of the Australian culture. The shed in the backyard has for many years been a man's place, where men would retreat from the hectic pace of life to make or repair things and enjoy the company of other men. Due to the changing property and social trends, the backyard shed is disappearing. It is probably disappearing more quickly in this city than in some others. These circumstances, combined with retirement and loss of social networks, as we have explained, can

cause social and emotional health issues. And the various men's sheds right around the country are doing whatever they can to stop that.

I want to make special mention of the Tuggeranong men's shed on their recent 10th anniversary. Thanks to Frank Vrins and Keith Gilby for inviting me along to that 10th anniversary lunch at the Burns Club. I have paid tribute in this place to the Speaker, Ms Burch, for her huge role in assisting the Tuggeranong men's shed to secure their current location. I know that my colleague Ms Lawder also has a very, very strong connection to the Tuggeranong shed.

We also had a bunch of representatives from various men's sheds join us here in the Assembly yesterday. I had a long chat with Neil Sperring from the South Canberra Veterans shed, based on the shores of Lake Tuggeranong. I heard about the grand vision that they have of expanding and offering so much more. I know that that will happen. I also met Ian from Isabella Gardens shed. I got to meet Brian Blackburn from Weston Creek yesterday. I must mention also Alan Boyd from the Hall and district men's shed. Congrats to all those who are involved in this very, very important part of the community.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Community Services and Social Inclusion, Minister for Disability, Children and Youth, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations) (4.20): I am very pleased to recognise the important contribution of men's sheds to the wellbeing and inclusion of many men in our community. As we have heard, men's sheds are accessible to all men and provide a safe, friendly and healing environment where men are able to work on meaningful projects at their own pace, in their own time and, importantly, in the company of other men.

A major objective of the movement is to advance the wellbeing and health of male members of the men's shed and to encourage social inclusion. As I have said, men's sheds allow men of all ages to come together to work in a safe, supportive environment, to do volunteer work and to seek fellowship with like-minded people. I have been reminded in preparing for this debate of two men's sheds that I heard about last year and one that I visited.

Ms Lawder's comment about the tripartite support for this motion reminded me that on federal election day last year I drew the short straw to travel to Nimmitabel to deliver some election campaign material. As members would be aware, in July it is very cold in Nimmitabel. But I received a warm reception, not only from the Labor booth captain but also from the Liberal Party booth captain.

I learned from both of them that they were respectively also the president and secretary of the local men's shed in Nimmitabel. They told me about the work that they had been doing to restore and preserve the Nimmitabel railway station and yard. Both of them shared with me their enthusiasm for the men's shed movement more generally and the opportunities that they had had to get together with other men's sheds to talk about the different ways that men's sheds conduct their business. Minister Rattenbury reflected on the variety of opportunities that men's sheds provide.

I also had the opportunity last year during the campaign to visit the Majura men's shed. They welcomed me with a lovely morning tea, which I very much appreciated. Again, a variety of activities were on offer. They make clear on their website—Ms Lawder mentioned the partnership with Alzheimer's Australia ACT—that the Majura men's shed has entered into a wooden toy enterprise for men with dementia, including young men with early onset dementia.

But you do not have to participate in making; you can just come along for a yarn and a cuppa if that is all that you are looking for. The Majura men's shed describes itself on its website as follows:

Members of Men's Sheds come from all walks of life—the bond that unites them is that they are men with time on their hands and would like something meaningful to do with that time.

Making things helps men—helps people, I think—beat depression. It gives many men meaning, particularly when they have lost something else that is meaningful in their life, whether that is a job as a result of retirement, forced or voluntary; whether that is losing a partner; or whether it is something else that has happened in their life. As others have said, women grieve face to face; men grieve shoulder to shoulder. Men's sheds provide them with an opportunity to do that.

The ACT government assisted in building a men's shed movement in the ACT some years ago with one-off funding from the community support and infrastructure grants program. It acknowledges the commitment and tireless work of volunteers engaged in organisations across our community, including those engaged with men's sheds.

I would like to draw members' attention to a number of grants programs. Obviously, I was not able to make it to another men's shed get-together yesterday as I was in the Assembly. But I understand that people raised questions about the kinds of grants that men's sheds could apply for. I would like to encourage members who are in contact with local men's sheds to draw their attention to grants programs like the community support and infrastructure grants and the grants that support local community organisations to establish and enhance their digital capacity. We have funded that \$125,000 round of grants.

Those grants will be coming up later in this financial year. We are also establishing a new round of grants, which was an election commitment. An amount of \$200,000 over four years has been allocated to support greater social inclusion of people with disability in our community by providing grants to fund training, increased awareness and infrastructure modifications for community organisations. Men's sheds might be interested in applying for these grants to improve access for people with disability to particular pieces of machinery or to improve their locations in general.

The ACT government is committed to supporting our community partners through the allocation of grants where both the government and community can work together to make an impact. Community grants create a platform to engage with all sections of

society and to break down the barriers to participation. I again encourage members of the Assembly to support their local men's shed and to provide them with information about how they can engage with the ACT government.

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (4.26): I am delighted that Ms Lawder has brought this matter of public importance to the Assembly this afternoon. I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to it for a few moments. Recently I struck up a phone conversation with an elderly gentleman who responded to a classified advertisement that my family and I had placed in a local paper. In the course of speaking, he let me know that he recently lost both his wife and his dog and felt lonely and lost. This information broke my heart. Sometimes I worry that many of us have lives that are so filled with people and things to do that we overlook the existence of those who have no-one and next to nothing to make them feel a part of a bigger community.

Not everyone has a busy household full of noisy children practising the piano, working on school assignments and kicking a soccer ball against the side of the house. Not everyone has a job to go to—some because they are retired, some because they have lost their employment. Too many people have no-one to talk to, no-one to share with and no-one to care for. After speaking with the older gentleman that I mentioned earlier, I thought about his situation and what I could do. Then I rang him back and invited him to come to dinner with my family and me.

I am happy to be able to do this, but I know that dinner at the Kikkert household is never going to be enough to meet the needs of the thousands of Canberrans who find themselves socially isolated for whatever reason. Social inclusion means that all individuals are able to access services, connect with family and friends, enjoy work, pursue personal interest, belong to a local community, deal with personal crises and have their voices heard. In short, it is about making sure that no-one is left out.

Research conducted by the University of Melbourne and the Brotherhood of St Laurence in 2010 estimated that five per cent of the Australian population is subject to profound social exclusion. Many of these people are men, and especially older men who have left the workforce. As Peter Butterworth of the ANU College of Medicine, Biology and the Environment has noted:

For men, in particular, work ... provides a major opportunity for social connections and interactions ... So the loss of work, particularly for men ... can have a profound effect on mental health.

And as Jeff Kennett, founder and board chairman of beyondblue, has put it:

Where do men go, particularly when they're a bit older or if they're younger and lose their jobs? Where do they go if they've got nothing productive to do? Many stay at home and just shrink and drink and die.

It is into this breach that the men's shed movement has stepped. First developed as an idea at a 1995 men's health conference, there are now 850 men's sheds established across Australia, and still more are forming. A men's shed is a shared space where local men, both old and young, can get together and bond over shared hobbies and

interests, develop and share knowledge and skills, serve the community by working on various local projects, and build friendships and connections.

Community-run men's sheds are a prime example of what effective prevention looks like. Research clearly indicates how damaging social isolation can be, both physically and mentally. In contrast, those who participate in men's sheds typically experience improved self-esteem, physical and mental health, and wellbeing.

I am grateful that two of Canberra's men's sheds are located in my electorate of Ginninderra. The Belconnen community men's shed in Page is open four days a week and was purpose-built. It is fully insulated, has disabled access and is equipped with both woodworking and metalworking tools.

The Melba shed offers a weekly program of activities, including presentations and excursions, and currently hosts a walking group, a cycling group and a Meccano group. This last group goes to three or more local primary schools each week to work one on one with students to build Meccano models. This mentoring program provides boys with a friendly and positive experience with older males and focuses on the skills of perseverance, responsibility and public speaking, proving that the good things that happen in men's sheds do not just stay in the sheds.

Madam Assistant Speaker, I am personally grateful for men's sheds and for all they do to improve community wellbeing and social inclusion in the ACT. I encourage all Canberrans to acknowledge and support this important work.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

Motion (by **Ms Berry**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Australian peacekeepers

MR RAMSAY (Ginninderra—Attorney-General, Minister for Regulatory Services, Minister for the Arts and Community Events and Minister for Veterans and Seniors) (4.31): This afternoon I rise to mark Australian Peacekeeping Week. Seventy years ago this Thursday, Australia embarked on its first peacekeeping mission. Our involvement started in Indonesia on 14 September 1947, with four Australian military officers becoming the first UN peacekeepers in the world. These officers were deployed to the United Nations Good Offices Commission in the Dutch East Indies. From that day to the present, 90,000 Australian peacekeepers from our defence and police forces, as well as expert civilians, have participated in 73 operations in 64 countries.

A number of Australia's peacekeepers have lived or are currently living in the ACT. I want to take some time this afternoon so that we can pause, reflect and acknowledge the sacrifices made by these peacekeepers and join with the community

to honour their contributions. Australian men and women have played a significant and ongoing role in often complex and sometimes dangerous peacekeeping operations around the world, in the service of international peace and security. We recognise their courage, compassion and professionalism in facing the unique challenges of their individual operations.

On Thursday the Australian Peacekeeping Memorial will be unveiled in Canberra by the Governor-General, His Excellency General the Hon Sir Peter Cosgrove. It will be the first memorial of its kind in Australia and one of only three in the world, with other memorials in Ottawa and New York. Unlike other memorials on Anzac Parade, the Australian Peacekeeping Memorial will recognise not only military and UN peacekeepers but also police and civilians.

This dedication and commemoration will be the principal event during a week-long commemoration of the 70th anniversary of Australia's involvement in peacekeeping. A range of events and conferences are being held at the Australian War Memorial and at other venues around Canberra. I look forward to attending the dedication, as well as a number of other events through the week.

We are again reminded at this time that peace is central to our community and our nation's wellbeing. It is a responsibility that we all hold—that is, to foster, to enhance and to promote peace here, in our region and throughout the world. The Australian Peacekeeping Memorial acknowledges the difficult and dangerous work of Australian military, police and civilian peacekeepers. Their work has helped to protect civilians and has assisted to develop a peaceful environment in countries emerging from conflict or disaster.

This memorial will be a focal point for all Australians to reflect on the service and the sacrifice of generations of Australians who have helped bring peace and stability to troubled parts of the world. I encourage all of us in this place to visit the memorial and pay our respects to those who have served. We are fortunate to be the host city for the Australian Peacekeeping Memorial, which will provide all of us with a place to acknowledge the difficult and dangerous work of the Australian military, police and civilian peacekeepers.

Finally, to the peacekeepers, past, present and future, we acknowledge your contribution, we thank you for your work and we will always remember what you do to promote peace and stability throughout the world.

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (4.35): I would like to thank the Attorney-General, who is also the Minister for Veterans and Seniors, for his comments. As a former peacekeeper myself, I thought they were very generous comments and well said. I would like to quickly add my congratulations to General Tim Ford and General Ian Gordon, two people I know personally, who have been instrumental in the development of the memorial. It is an endeavour that they have both been working on for some time.

Gender pay gap

MS LE COUTEUR (Murrumbidgee) (4.36): Last week, 4 September, was Equal Pay Day. This date marks the additional time from the end of the previous financial year that women must work to earn the same as men earn if they are also working. I would like to spend a few minutes today reflecting on the gender pay gap and why early childhood educators went on strike across the country last week.

Using average weekly earnings data released by the ABS, the Workplace Gender Equality Agency calculates the national gender pay gap to be currently 15.3 per cent. The national gender pay gap is the difference between women's and men's average weekly full-time base salary earnings, expressed as a percentage of men's earnings. It is a measure of women's overall performance in the paid workforce. It does not compare equal, like-to-like roles. On average, men working full time earned \$1,638.30 and women earned \$1,387.10, which makes a difference of \$251.20. That means that for every \$100 a male typically earns, a female typically earns \$84.70.

We know that the gender pay gap starts when women first enter the workforce and widens with age, peaking in their 40s and 50s. Many women do not work full time. They work part time at three times the rate of men, which further reduces their income and savings capacity. Women are also more likely to take time out of the workforce due to unpaid caring and domestic responsibilities. For every hour of unpaid work a man does, a woman performs an average of one hour and 46 minutes.

Over a lifetime of caring and working, women retire, on average, with just half the superannuation balance of men and have an average of 52.8 per cent less in savings than men. This is one of the reasons we are now seeing an ever-increasing cohort of older women at risk of homelessness.

We know that workforces that are generally feminised are the lower paid sectors. These are the sectors where caring is the main responsibility—sectors such as health, community care, disability care, aged care and early childhood care. There has been little improvement over time. The gender pay gap has hovered between 15 and 19 per cent over the last two decades.

Something clearly will have to shift before we see this change. There needs to be a cultural shift that values women's work as much as men's work and requires us to shift our thinking to realise that caring jobs are some of the most important jobs in our society. Without them, where would we be as a society? We need to see men doing more unpaid work so that women can have access to their fair share of paid work.

It is because of these inequities that I supported the workers from the early childhood sector who went on strike last week. They walked out at 3.20 pm because they said that was when they started working for free because of the low wages. It is no coincidence that 97 per cent of childcare staff are women. Early childhood educators are laying the foundation for our future society and they should be paid accordingly.

Despite early childhood educators spending anywhere between 18 months and four years studying to qualify for their positions, a childcare worker with the bare minimum of 18 months training earns \$42,218 a year, which is just \$3 an hour more than the minimum wage. They are under great pressure and we risk losing them from this workforce if nothing changes, because they too have dreams of owning a home and having decent retirement savings, and they will simply move on to another, better paid sector if nothing is done.

In light of this, and it being very close to Equal Pay Day, I am speaking today because of my support for gender equality. I am reminded of UN sustainable development goal No 5, which stipulates that gender equality is not only a fundamental human right but also a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.

Marriage equality

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra) (4.40): I want to take a moment to put on the record how proud I am of the ACT community in their showing of support for marriage equality in the lead-up to the postal survey. During what is a difficult time, we know the government is doing what it can to support the LGBTIQ community, but in addition to this it is truly buoying to have the broader ACT community come on board in so many symbolic and practical ways. For example, with the generosity of UnionsACT and the CFMEU, households and businesses throughout Belconnen and broader Canberra have been able to show their support for marriage equality loud and clear with rainbow yes posters and corflutes.

That showing of support was extremely clear this past Saturday, 9 September, at a well-loved, progressive institution in my electorate and within my home suburb of the Belconnen town centre, which hosted a huge party in support of marriage equality. No-one will be surprised that this progressive institution is La De Da, led by Aaron Ridley.

The CBR says yes party was held in conjunction with Canberra Music Blog and Mulgara, with 100 per cent of bar profits being donated to the marriage equality campaign. In just a few days they pulled together some of Canberra's finest artists. I want to put on the record who they were: Anomic, Betty Alto, Bottle Brush, Boots Byers and Jim Dusty, B-tham, Canberra Gay and Lesbian Qwire, Canberra House Social, Defcat, Endrey, First Gulf War, Goodbye Rose, Hopeless Youth, Josh Veneris, Lash, Laura Ingram, Manila Folder, Megan Bones, Nice Up, Northbourne Flats, Pleased to Jive You, Suavess, Tahlia, and Teen Jesus and the Jean Teasers.

A highlight for me was the Canberra Gay and Lesbian Qwire's rendition of Home. I encourage everyone to check this out on their YouTube page. Throughout the performances, rainbow flags flew, and after dark a bright rainbow "yes" was projected onto the side of the building. I think I can speak for everyone in attendance in saying what an extraordinary and moving event it was. It was bright; it was happy; it was united. But it was also very serious and sombre as to the jobs that we have to do over the coming few weeks.

I was so very proud to be there among so many supporters and to have the honour to briefly speak and to put on the record, again, that every member of the ACT government, Labor and Greens, supports marriage equality. As we move into the period of receiving, filling in and submitting our postal surveys, I want to continue to encourage individuals and businesses to speak up for marriage equality, to speak up for human rights and for equal rights, and to speak up for love.

Environment—Mulligans Flat nature reserve

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (4.43): Madam Deputy Speaker, let me set the scene. It is pitch black with only red-light torches; it is cold, and every now and then you can hear rustles, birds calling and frogs singing. Suddenly, your guide says, “Ooh, I saw some silver eyes; come over this way.” She jogs off to a spot about five metres away and crouches down. You follow, because the whole point is to see something new. “Oh no, it’s disappeared,” she says. “What is it? What is it?” I ask. “A huntsman.” Needless to say, after that I became a little suspicious every time our guide said, “Look over here.”

A few weeks ago my team and I were treated to a twilight tour of Mulligans Flat sanctuary. It was timely that we had booked this tour just before Ms Orr’s motion in the Assembly last week about the unique beauty of this nature reserve and how we can best utilise this asset to promote ecotourism.

Mulligans Flat was established in 1995 following a community-led campaign to protect the box gums, grassy woodlands and bird and wildlife population. Today it forms part of the ACT’s nature reserve system and is managed by the Mulligans Flat woodland sanctuary management subcommittee of the Woodlands and Wetlands Conservation Trust, which works for the ACT parks and conservation service to maintain and improve the sanctuary and its wildlife.

Collaboration between the ACT government, the ANU and the CSIRO, and funding from the federal Liberal government, has created a fully enclosed sanctuary so that it can be totally cat, fox and other predator free, allowing for the reintroduction of species, some of which had become extinct. In 2012 the eastern bettong was reintroduced, more than 100 years since it had been extinct in the wild on the mainland of Australia. Since then a number of other species have been reintroduced, including the New Holland mouse in 2013, the bush stone-curlew in 2014 and the eastern quoll in 2016.

My team and I were guided by the amazing team of guide Shoshana, volunteer Amy, and Alison from the woodlands and wetlands trust. One common element that exists in every tour or visit I make to our nature reserves is the dedication, the passion and the hard work ethic of our rangers, guides and volunteers, who give so much to make Canberra the great bush capital that it is. This twilight tour was no exception.

It was dark, it was cold and it was definitely out of my comfort zone—even outside of my electorate—but I could not have asked for a better evening. Sho, Amy and Alison were a wealth of knowledge, and I am fairly certain they must have had magic torches

because they were able to show us some of the wildlife that I would never have known was so close by. There were six bettongs, five sugar gliders, several red-necked kangaroos and swamp wallabies, lots and lots of frogs—I lost count; I could not even see them—and of course the huntsman spiders that I was lucky I did not see. And there was even a rare sighting of a quoll as we had almost made it back to the exit, an exciting experience, given how shy the quolls are.

Having spent most of my life walking past various trees without giving them much thought, I thought it was interesting to hear about why certain trees have different bark or leaf colour. Having spent most of my life not stopping to really listen to nature, it was fascinating to be able to actually distinguish between different frog types and bird calls after a few moments standing in the dark doing nothing but listening. Having spent most of my life staying well away from kangaroos or other animals in the wild, it was quite spectacular to see some of our unique wildlife in their own environment.

A highlight of the trip had to be Sho's many dad jokes, my favourite being when, after we spotted the quoll, she turned and asked us whether we had had a "quoll-ity" time.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is no wonder the Mulligans Flat twilight tours have been so popular since they started. With the warmer nights coming, I encourage everyone to do a twilight tour. Sho's excitement about spotting a huntsman was because it signals the warmer weather. One of the signs of the onset of spring—don't say I didn't warn you—is the silver eyes, all eight of them. A huge thank you to Sho, Amy and Alison for taking the time to share their passion and knowledge with us. Canberra's nature would not be what it is without you.

Crime—domestic violence

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (4.48): It is with a heavy weight of responsibility, both on my shoulders and in my heart, that I rise today. In a personal way, I want to say that I am sorry. Nineteen months ago a young boy here in the ACT was murdered by his father, who has now confessed to the terrible crime.

Mrs Jones, Bradyn Dillon's mother, has stated publicly that she and her family contacted Child and Youth Protection Services, ACT Policing and other government agencies in an effort to get someone to intervene for the safety of Bradyn. I have no way of knowing exactly what was said by Mrs Jones and her family or what happened to those reports of concern once they were received. But I am so sorry that the hoped-for intervention did not occur.

I am also sorry that Mrs Jones first learnt the extent of Bradyn's injuries as she sat in a courtroom two weeks ago. How awful to realise the depth of pain he must have been in in the months before his death, as evidenced by the 60 to 70 bruises found on his body. As a mother, it hurts me to see one of my children get a single bruise or cut, yet I am able to fix that with a bandaid or a kiss. I cannot imagine the anguish of a mother worrying for months over the pain that her child might have been in but feeling utterly helpless.

One of the most important things we can do when loved ones leave us is to speak well of them. To contribute to this today, I wish to quote Mrs Jones:

Bradyn was a “mummy’s boy” who always looked at me with such love and told me I was beautiful. Very few people are able to make me feel as special as he made me feel. Bradyn had a way of making everybody around him feel joyful and was extremely compassionate for a boy of his age. If there was ever someone left out, he would ensure they felt included and went out of his way to make them happy.

What a tragedy to lose such a happy, cheery, loving boy. To all who loved him, I wish to say that I am so, so sorry and give my sincerest condolences. Last week was National Child Protection Week, sponsored by the National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect, or NAPCAN. As Leesa Waters, Deputy CEO of NAPCAN, has said, we must not “wait until a child has been abused or neglected before we do something. We need to work together as a community to stop this from happening in the first place.”

We in the Assembly must do all we can as well. Those responsible for child protection need to be fully transparent when tragedies such as this occur. The public have a right to know what went wrong so that they can be assured that necessary changes have been made. Robust independent review of decisions made needs to be an option. Parents must know that they have somewhere to turn when they feel no one is listening to them. We must do all we can to prevent this kind of tragedy ever happening again. We owe it to Mrs Jones and all those who loved Bradyn.

Education—early childhood

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee) (4.51): I rise today to draw members’ attention to the *State of early learning in Australia* report published by the Early Learning: Everyone Benefits campaign. *The state of early learning in Australia 2017* is the second report in a series tracking progress across a range of different early childhood education and care outcome measures. It provides a picture of how far Australia and states and territories have come in the area of early childhood, where we are doing well and where we need to focus our efforts to improve children’s outcomes.

The report has built on the inaugural *State of early learning in Australia* report in 2016, which I was proud to author in my previous role before coming into the Assembly. Importantly, the second report in the series reflects on trends emerging in the data from the baseline report.

Across Australia roughly one-third of children from birth to two years participate in early childhood education and care. But in the ACT we have the highest rate of birth to two-year-olds, 46 per cent, attending early learning, which is likely to reflect city characteristics and also higher market wages and greater workforce participation here.

Early childhood education and care participation rates are higher in the Australian Capital Territory than in any other jurisdiction, at 72 per cent, which is likely to reflect great demand for long day care based on workforce participation patterns as well.

It is important to note that while this is the highest—this is at age 3—the remaining 28 per cent of children are unlikely to be attending any early childhood education program, unless they are attending one of our fantastic Koori preschools. It is also likely that these children are the most disadvantaged and most likely to benefit from access to early childhood education and care. As the report notes:

The participation of three-year-olds in early learning in Australia is lagging behind the rest of the developed world. Research indicates that two years of a high-quality preschool program delivers better outcomes than one year, especially for children who are developmentally vulnerable.

In contrast, the participation rate of four-year-olds in early education in the ACT is much higher than that of three-year-olds, with full enrolment. However, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children attending for 40 weeks of the year is slightly lower than in other jurisdictions, at 94 per cent, with the exception of New South Wales.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are almost twice as likely to be developmentally vulnerable in health and wellbeing, social competence, communication and emotional maturity. So looking at strategies to engage and work with families in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to encourage access is no doubt an important part of the future of education process which the government is working on.

In relation to quality, the report notes that the national quality framework will continue to play a crucial role in driving continual improvement across the sector. It is pleasing to see that the ACT has one of the highest proportions of early childhood services that have been rated excellent, and exceeding, with the exception of South Australia.

Attracting and upskilling staff, particularly at diploma and degree level, continues to be a challenge, but there have been significant improvements in qualification levels over the past eight years since the national quality framework was introduced. This should remain a focus, because we know that staff qualifications is one of the key structural quality factors that significantly impact on children's developmental outcomes.

In conclusion, the state of early learning reports provide an important snapshot of early childhood outcome measures in the ACT, and I encourage all members to read it as we continue on the future of education reform journey.

I also take this opportunity to stand in solidarity with early childhood educators who walked off the job for better pay last Thursday. Around 150 early childhood educators in the ACT walked off the job on 7 September in unprecedented action as part of the Big Steps campaign. Strike action is not easy for early childhood educators to take, because of the disruption caused for families accessing childcare. But the early childhood profession has an incredibly powerful influence on children's long-term development, and early childhood educators who work in non-government early

childhood services are paid peanuts, around \$21 per hour on average. I think that families understand this and want to see federal action to address professional wages for the educators that support their children's learning and development.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 4.56 pm.