



# Debates

WEEKLY HANSARD

Legislative Assembly for the ACT

**NINTH ASSEMBLY**

**14 FEBRUARY 2018**

[www.hansard.act.gov.au](http://www.hansard.act.gov.au)

## Wednesday 14 February 2018

### Petitions:

Car park closure in O'Malley—petition 3-18.....	103
Mount Taylor access—petitions 18-17 and 27-17 (Ministerial response) .....	103
Car park closure in O'Malley—petition 3-18.....	104
Lands Acquisition (Reporting Requirements) Amendment Bill 2018 .....	108
Urban renewal precincts .....	110
ACT Ambulance Service—resourcing .....	130
Health—investment and planning.....	143

### Questions without notice:

Planning—housing choices .....	149
Recycling—container deposit scheme.....	150
Planning—affordable housing .....	151
ACT Health—hospital capacity.....	152
Canberra Hospital—patient safety.....	153
Budget—government investment .....	153
ACT Health—treatment delays .....	155
Seniors—rebate changes.....	156
Waste—green bins.....	157
Education—enrolment projections .....	159
Education—reading proficiency .....	160
National Multicultural Festival—service of alcohol .....	161
ACT Ambulance Service—government support.....	162
Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders—Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm ...	164
Government—ethical contracting.....	164
Homelessness—government policy .....	166
Health—investment and planning.....	168
ACTION bus service—route changes .....	184
Office for mental health .....	205

### Adjournment:

Tuggeranong—government services .....	220
Women's march.....	221
Women's sport.....	223
National Trust heritage walks—Mt Stromlo .....	224

## Wednesday 14 February 2018

**MADAM SPEAKER** (Ms J Burch) took the chair at 10 am and asked members to stand in silence and pray or reflect on their responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

### Petitions

*The following petition was lodged for presentation:*

#### **Car park closure in O'Malley—petition 3-18**

By **Mr Hanson**, from 81 residents:

##### **To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**

This petition of certain residents of the Australian Capital Territory draws the attention of the Assembly to the ACT Surveyor-General's notice that the public car park adjacent to blocks 23 and 24 of Section 31 O'Malley is to be closed. These 3 portions now form block 25 which is to be sold under the Indicative Land Release Program.

The residents signed below petition thus:

That the Assembly instruct the Office of Surveyor-General to extend the closing date for lodgement of objections to the closure of the public car park on Pindari Street;

That the Assembly withdraw block 25, Section 31, O'Malley from sale and development under the ACT Government's Indicative Land Release Program on the basis of increased traffic and noise, excessive and dangerous on-street parking on residential streets and the need for preservation of the stand of mature native trees and species seedlings;

That the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate undertake genuine public consultation and present its justification for the release for sale and development of this site as a community facility.

*The Clerk having announced that the terms of the petition would be recorded in Hansard and a copy referred to the appropriate minister for response pursuant to standing order 100, the petition was received.*

### **Ministerial response**

The following response to two petitions has been lodged:

#### **Mount Taylor access—petitions 18-17 and 27-17**

By **Ms Fitzharris**, Minister for Transport and City Services, received 12 February 2018, in response to petitions lodged by Mr Steel on 28 November 2017 concerning improved access to Mt Taylor.

*The response read as follows:*

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 28 November 2017 regarding the petition Nos 18-17 and 27-17 lodged by Mr Chris Steel MLA and received in the Assembly on 28 November 2017, regarding improved motorist, cyclist and pedestrian safety from Sulwood Drive, Kambah to access Mount Taylor.

I am pleased to advise that Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS) Directorate's forward planning has identified and co-ordinated a cross-directorate initiative for a number of improvements to the parking and access provisions servicing Mount Taylor and these will be considered.

TCCS will also be installing car parking directional signs to direct drivers to the Mount Taylor car park off Athlon Drive. These signs will be installed by the end of March 2018.

Thank you for raising this matter. I trust the information provided is of assistance.

### **Car park closure in O'Malley—petition 3-18**

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (10.02), by leave: I am very happy to sponsor this petition. This is an issue that my office and Ms Lawder, as the former shadow minister for planning, have been following for some time. We have received numerous representations from members of the O'Malley community. I would like to read specifically what the petition calls for. It states:

That the Assembly instruct the Office of Surveyor-General to extend the closing date for lodgement of objections to the closure of the public car park on Pindari Street;

That the Assembly withdraw block 25, Section 31, O'Malley from sale and development under the ACT Government's Indicative Land Release Program on the basis of increased traffic and noise, excessive and dangerous on-street parking on residential streets and the need for preservation of the stand of mature native trees and species seedlings;

That the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate undertake genuine public consultation and present its justification for the release for sale and development of this site as a community facility.

I share the community's concerns about the sale of this site. I will go to some of the specifics, but more generally I am also concerned, as are others, that what we are seeing is a sale of green spaces within our suburbs, regardless of what they are zoned—CFZ in this case. This seems to be more about a cash grab by the government than any rational need for this site to be used as a community facility.

I will quote from some of the correspondence that I have received:

A large number of O'Malley residents are very concerned at the ACT government's plan to go ahead with the sale of one of the last neighbourhood green spaces in O'Malley for a community facility. Woden is being turned into a concrete jungle and future ghetto by the actions of the Planning Directorate.

Certainly in the context of some of the concerns raised about the master plan, we are seeing an encroaching development plan in Woden that is going to leave far fewer green spaces for the community.

What the community are asking for is reasonable here. Their specific concerns relate not just to the disappearing green space but also to what the consequence will be of a development on that site. It is unclear what would be proposed. At a briefing at the Woden Valley Community Council recently the directorate suggested that it may be a childcare centre.

Questions are raised from that. Firstly, is there a need for a childcare centre on that site? My understanding is that there are a number within the vicinity, a number that do not have full places. Also, it is an odd site. It is somewhat out of the way there in O'Malley.

But it is already a problematic environment in terms of through traffic and parking. Certainly, the response from the directorate staff about what they would do when they get rid of their car park in O'Malley—that they would just police the place better—falls down when you realise that a lot of the people that are parking there in O'Malley have diplomatic plates on their vehicles. The enforcement of that is problematic. Some of the solutions being proposed to mitigate what will be an increase in parking and an increase in traffic are patently unworkable.

Residents are very concerned. Some of those streets in O'Malley are already being used as a rat run by people trying to avoid Hindmarsh Drive. I quote again:

This poorly planned sell-off of community facility sites is symptomatic of the reckless planning and disregard for long-term residents and ratepayers in Woden and other areas.

I said at the beginning of my speech that this is an area my office has been following for some time. I actually wrote to the planning minister on 14 June last year. This is before anything had been notified, but residents had seen surveyors out on that block doing something. I quote from the letter I wrote:

I have received representations from a constituent in relation to open space in the older part of O'Malley. My constituent has raised concerns in regard to the possibility of a development on the corner block bounded by Numeralla and Pindari Crescent and Kareelah Vista in O'Malley. They advise that they recently observed surveyors measuring the corner block, but when asked, the surveyors did not want to comment on what development may be planned.

This reminds me of what happened on the PANDSI site in Holder. Exactly the same thing happened. Surveyors were sighted. Members of the community came to the

opposition and said, "We have seen surveyors. Can you tell us what is going on, please?" Mrs Jones wrote to the Chief Minister asking, "Are there any plans for development on the Holder site?" The Chief Minister wrote back and said, "No." What we found out was that that was not true. What we now know is that a development application has been lodged for public housing on that site.

What Mrs Jones got was a letter from the Chief Minister saying, "No, that is not true." I actually got nothing back from Mr Gentleman. I wrote on 14 June; no response. So I then wrote again on 28 September. I said that I had made representations on 14 June, that 30 business days had passed. In fact, significantly more than 30 business days had passed. I asked, "What is going on?" No response. I then wrote again on 22 November. I said that I wrote on 14 June, that I wrote on 28 September and that there was no response. I asked, "What is going on?" There was nothing from the minister.

In consultation with Ms Lawder, who was then the shadow planning minister, she wrote earlier this year, with a similar representation, asking, "What is going on?" There was no response. There were four letters from the opposition from the period of June last year and still no response from the minister.

We hear from this government about consultation. We talk about open government. What we have here from the planning minister, and from the government more generally, is a pattern of behaviour. When there is a clear plan from the government to develop a suburban site and members of the local community ask, "Can you let us know at least what is going on?" we either get letters from the government that are misleading, that are untrue, or we just get a deliberate silence from the minister so that the community is kept in the dark.

That is a disgraceful way to run a government when what is clearly happening is that either sites are flogged off to make room for public housing, as a result of the sale of the Northbourne sites, or in this case a site is flogged off when there seems to be no clear plan. There may be, but we are just not being told about it.

I am very disappointed. Members of the community are very disappointed not only in the fact that O'Malley is going to lose this site, a piece of green space that is going to cause problems for parking and traffic within O'Malley, but also because of the despicable way that this government is now treating its community by either misleading them or failing to give them information about their own community, about what is happening in their suburb.

I support the position of the O'Malley community to put a pause on this, to stop what is being proposed until we have a very clear consultation process that is open, that addresses all of the issues from the residents or, if it cannot address those issues, this is taken off the table. We hope that the government respond to this petition in a more timely way than they have responded to the four pieces of correspondence from the opposition.

**MS LE COUTEUR** (Murrumbidgee) (10.10), by leave: I find myself in the unusual position of agreeing with an awful lot of what Mr Hanson has said. We both attended

the Woden Valley Community Council meeting, which I think was a week ago. The thing that struck me most in that was the government being repeatedly asked, “If there is a demand for community facilities, what do you think is going to be built there?” I was stunned that there was no response to that.

Community facilities planned for Canberra are precious. We all know that. We have had lots of conversations about this in this place. I cannot believe that the government would just say, “We have no idea what should happen to this.” I think Mr Hanson’s comments about the community consultation, or lack of it, are unfortunately fairly much on the mark this time. I hope that the government listens to the petitioners from O’Malley and the rest of the community and does better on this site.

**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) (10.12), by leave: I thank members for their comments today. I want to read to them what the EPSD’s website says about the particular block that is being discussed today. It states:

The site is zoned CFZ and development on the site is restricted to developments permitted under the Territory Plan ...

There is a list. It states:

**Permitted** developments on this site ... include:

- Business agency ...
- Child care centre
- Community activity centre
- Community theatre
- Cultural facility
- Educational establishment ...
- Emergency services facility ...
- Health facility ...
- Hospital
- Indoor recreation facility ...
- Office ...
- Place of worship
- Public agency ...
- Religious associated use
- Residential care accommodation ...

Under the precinct code, supportive housing and a retirement village are permitted as well. The website goes on to state:

**Response to community feedback**

On Friday 15 December 2017, residents surrounding Block 23 Section 31 O’Malley attended an information session about the release of the site for development.

It then goes on to talk about community engagement updates. In September 2017 there was a letter to the immediate residents notifying of the onsite investigations. In November a letter was sent to surrounding residents notifying of the project and how to stay informed. In November again, there was a project update

email. In December there was an invitation to information sessions. In December again, an information session was held. On 20 December a project update email was sent. On 5 January there was a project update email. On 8 January another project update email was sent. On 25 January this year there was a project update email. On 7 February this year there was a presentation to the Woden Valley Community Council.

It is important that these matters are noted in *Hansard*, Madam Speaker. I think that the engagement from the directorate in the O'Malley area has been quite fulsome. We will certainly be responding to the petition.

## **Lands Acquisition (Reporting Requirements) Amendment Bill 2018**

**Mr Coe**, pursuant to notice, presented the bill and its explanatory statement.

Title read by Clerk.

**MR COE** (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (10.14): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to bring forward the second integrity measure that I foreshadowed last year. The purpose of this bill is to improve integrity in land acquisitions. This integrity measure that I am bringing forward today is necessary because of the repeated failings of this Labor-Greens government to address issues surrounding land acquisitions made by territory entities. The Auditor-General, in her 2016 report into certain Land Development Agency acquisitions, highlighted that acquisitions had been “undertaken without adequate transparency, accountability and rigour”. Since the release of this audit, the Auditor-General has undertaken investigations into the purchases of rural land leases and sweetheart land deals between the Labor government and fellow travellers. Canberrans are very familiar with these issues, and it is clear that action is required.

There is substantial public interest in implementing effective mechanisms to ensure that land acquisitions are undertaken with due diligence. It is also reasonable to expect that the information relied upon when making these acquisitions is available for public scrutiny and debate. This bill aims to bring the requisite transparency, accountability and rigour to all land acquisitions made by a territory entity. This is achieved through requiring quarterly reports to be presented to the Assembly, as well as the public accounts committee for additional probity. This two-tier level of scrutiny seeks to eliminate the opaqueness surrounding land acquisitions and ensures that the necessary protocols are followed.

The Lands Acquisition Act is the key piece of legislation that governs land acquisitions by the ACT government. The process for acquisitions by agreement and compulsory acquisitions triggers certain notification procedures. However, a number of acquisitions undertaken by the territory fall within the exception found in section 18(1)(d) that allows for acquisitions to be effected without pre-acquisition



declarations or certificates under section 21. There are no stringent legislative reporting or oversight conditions for these types of acquisitions in the current legislation. This must change.

It is important to note that this bill does not impede the government's ability to purchase land using any of the aforementioned methods. This bill is not unreasonable or onerous. This bill simply requires public reporting of the due diligence that should be undertaken prior to any acquisition being made.

While the most substantive part of the bill is the creation of quarterly reports, the bill also makes other minor amendments. Clause 4 amends section 19 to insert two notes referencing relevant sections regarding declarations that land is suitable for acquisition. Clause 5 proposes a change to the number of sitting days the executive has to provide a statement regarding an acquisition entered into by agreement. The current legislation allows the executive 15 sitting days to present a statement. However, with the sitting calendar, this process may be drawn out for many months. The bill proposes a reasonable six sitting days time frame for a statement to be given regarding an acquisition by agreement.

The most significant element of the bill is clause 6. This clause creates part 9B and section 104AE that set out the requirements for the quarterly reports to be laid before the Assembly and the relevant committee. Section 104AE(1) outlines the contents of the quarterly report the minister must present to the Assembly. This report must be submitted within six sitting days after the end of a quarter during which a reportable acquisition is made.

The quarterly report given to the Assembly must set out the interest in the land that was acquired, including the identification of the land and the seller, if it was acquired from a corporation or other body. If the land was acquired for public housing, only the suburb of the acquisition is required. The executive or public sector body that undertook this acquisition must be identified, along with the method of acquisition. The compensation paid for the interest in the land, in addition to any other amount paid in relation to the acquisition, such as consultant fees or commissions, must also be included in the report.

Information considered by the acquirer of the land in relation to determining the compensation and other amounts paid must be published. This will include variations and valuations. The report must also outline how value for money was pursued in accordance with the Government Procurement Act 2001, and particularly section 22A of that act. Further information on evaluation and planning for the site, including the reason for the acquisition, must be included, along with how the acquisition meets the requirements of the Planning and Development Act 2007.

If the acquirer is a territory authority, the report must set out how the acquisition upholds the statement of intent under the Financial Management Act 1996 for the territory authority. If the acquirer is the City Renewal Authority, the report must detail how the acquisition complies with directions made under the City Renewal Authority and Suburban Land Agency Act 2017, the objects and functions of the authority, the statement of expectations and the statement of operational intent. Alternatively, if the

acquirer is the Suburban Land Agency, the report must include how the acquisition complies with directions made under the relevant legislation and the objects and functions of the authority.

The report must outline the current and future status of the acquired land under the Territory Plan, including any condition on the crown lease. It must also be demonstrated how the acquisition, including the intended use of land, supports development that is in the public interest and environmentally sustainable. A summary of any information considered by the acquirer, including advice from the Head of Service and directors-general, and any risk assessment, must be included. This quarterly report may be combined with the reports presented to the Assembly by the relevant minister under the City Renewal Authority and Suburban Land Agency Act 2017.

Under section 104AE(3), within 10 working days of presenting the quarterly report to the Assembly the minister must give another copy of the report to the relevant committee, the public accounts committee. This report includes the unpublished identifiers for public housing acquisitions and the names of any private individuals who sold the land to the territory. This information is kept confidential to preserve the privacy of public housing tenants and individual sellers. Section 104AE(4) sets out relevant definitions for the section. Finally, clause 7 inserts terms into note 2 of the dictionary of the existing act.

Whilst this may sound complex, all of this can and should be done at the moment. What we are simply asking is that it is published. I wish to reiterate once again that this bill is not onerous, and I believe Canberrans expect this sort of transparency. The quarterly reports simply require the publication of the due diligence that all Canberrans would expect to be undertaken before hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars are spent on such acquisitions. This is an effective mechanism that allows for multiple levels of scrutiny.

This quarterly report process is an extension of current legislative probity requirements like those in the CRA and SLA act. It is a reasonable response to extend the scrutiny and probity to encompass all land acquisitions made by the territory. This bill is necessary and Canberrans expect it. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Barr**) adjourned to the next sitting.

## **Urban renewal precincts**

**MS LE COUTEUR** (Murrumbidgee) (10.24): I move:

(1) notes that:

- (a) much of Canberra was built between the 1950s and the mid-1980s and Canberra's older Town Centres—Woden, Belconnen and Tuggeranong—are recognised as needing urban renewal;
- (b) urban renewal is more than selling vacant sites and approving very tall buildings—it needs more comprehensive strategic planning and delivery

- approaches that bring together delivery of community facilities, affordable housing, street life, parks, transport upgrades and planning rules;
- (c) urban renewal that is not done well can result in conflict between developers and the community, dormitory centres with low quality of life and missed opportunities on sustainability, affordable housing and active transport;
  - (d) while the city and inner areas are booming, Woden, Tuggeranong and Belconnen Town Centres are suffering from a lack of focus;
  - (e) the Government established the City Renewal Authority to bring better urban renewal to the city and Northbound Avenue corridor;
  - (f) Woden, Tuggeranong and Belconnen Town Centres and the Kingston Arts Precinct are currently managed by the Suburban Land Agency, which is set up to build new suburbs and is not designed to deliver broader urban renewal; and
  - (g) Light Rail Stage 2 will have broader impacts on the Woden Town Centre and surrounds; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to declare the following areas to be Urban Renewal Precincts for the purposes of section 35 of the City Renewal Authority and Suburban Land Agency Act by the end of June 2018:
- (a) Woden Town Centre and surrounds;
  - (b) Belconnen Town Centre and surrounds;
  - (c) Tuggeranong Town Centre and surrounds; and
  - (d) Kingston Arts Precinct.

I want to start off by talking first about our three older town centres—Woden, Belconnen and Tuggeranong. Each of these town centres was designed in a different era for the needs of the community decades ago. These needs have changed. Some of the planning ideas built into the town centres, while they seemed like good ideas at the time, have turned out not to be brilliant ideas.

I will start with Woden, the first town centre after the Griffin plan. In our office we have on the wall an image from the 1960s NCDC plan for Woden town centre. It shows a large number of tall office buildings and a shopping mall surrounded by a literal sea of car parks. In the middle is the Woden square. That plan was successfully delivered, but it means that Woden and Weston Creek residents are missing out on a central community facility and recreation precinct, and on-street life—places designed for shopping, walking and cycling.

Tuggeranong town centre was built slightly differently, around a grid of streets, but with the clear intention that people would move from one site to another by driving from Bunnings to the mall, for example. I do not think planners ever thought people were going to walk again, but these are not the expectations and needs of the current community.

The Belconnen town centre sits between the other two in this age, and it shows. It has office buildings in seas of car parks, but it also has a design based on driving from one spot to another. In line with that approach, the restaurant area along the lake was designed for drive in, drive through or drive to fast-food restaurants rather than pedestrian access.

On top of these issues related to the age of the centres and the changing community needs, each town centre also suffers from specific local issues. For example, Woden town centre has had a long-term decline in community and recreation facilities. Most recently, the CIT closed down, with the result that there is very little tertiary education south of Red Hill, with a small outpost in Tuggeranong. Of course, with the changes from the commonwealth government there are not the office workers that used to be there. Another example in Woden is that the pool is very old and is now overlooked by apartments and some users feel uncomfortable about being watched all the time.

In short, all of our town centres are in need of urban renewal, and it is not just me saying this. The local communities feel it and advocate strongly for change. The government has also recognised this with the master plans it has done or, in Belconnen's case, it has underway. But the ACT Greens believe that not only do these urban centres require urban renewal but we need to do urban renewal better. We need to move much faster on becoming a more compact, more sustainable city and we need less conflict between developers and residents.

There is a tendency to see urban renewal as just selling vacant sites or sites owned by the government and approving very tall buildings. As an example, just recently a very tall building was approved at Bowes Street in Woden, and when I say "very tall", I am not exaggerating. It is 13 storeys taller than the master plan allowed for that site—that is, more than double.

Around all of this the government and the developer talk about how great this is for urban renewal. But it is not that great, actually. Woden already has tall buildings—the one previously known as the MLC Building and now Lovett Tower is tall, and Woden demonstrates that tall buildings are not the solution to all problems. Tall buildings can help, but on the other hand they can also lead to streets which seem isolated and unsafe and are dark.

Similarly, over the last few years Belconnen town centre got a number of new tall apartment buildings. This has contributed a bit to renewal, but not as much as I think the people of Belconnen hoped it would. The streets are still dead out of hours. I am told that local residents prefer to drive short distances around Belco rather than walk in the dark. The restaurant area is still mostly drive in or drive through fast food.

Urban renewal that is not done well can result in conflict between developers and the community, dormitory centres with low quality of life and missed opportunities on sustainability, affordable housing and active transport. Real urban renewal needs a comprehensive approach that covers community facilities, affordable housing, street life, parks, transport and planning rules. Canberra residents do not live with their lives neatly divided into boxes like land release, planning approvals and transport. They

live in Phillip or Kambah or Florey or wherever. They go to their local town centre and they are painfully aware of the lack of coordination.

Belconnen residents go to the town centre and they see that the Westfield bus station works well because it was coordinated with the shopping centre, but the Belconnen community bus station is isolated because it is not, at least as yet, integrated with the surrounding development.

Woden residents go to Woden town centre and see a bus interchange desperately in need of renewal. They have been hearing for years that it will be fixed, but very little has changed, apart from the fact that the police station has been bulldozed and has now been left as a patch of gravel. When they hear the news that a huge tower has been approved next to the interchange, they worry that the tower will not be at all coordinated with buses and light rail, that the light rail and buses may not be conveniently coordinated with each other, and that they are going to end up with more mess, more lost opportunities and without sun in the town square.

Affordable housing, of course, is another thing that is not going to happen by accident or just by leaving it all up to the development industry. Often what tall towers include is entirely high-end apartments. These of course are a valid part of our housing supply; I am not arguing against them. But they do not meet the needs of many of those who are struggling to afford a home, whether it be rental or purchase. In particular, the town centres need to provide housing for retail and essential service workers so that they can live close to where they work and not be forced into the fringes, where high transport costs will eat into their wages.

So what needs to be done? For the city and the Northbourne Avenue area, the government has already recognised the need for government processes to deliver more comprehensive urban renewal. It has set up the City Renewal Authority and provided it with a diverse set of skills and responsibilities. For example, in the last few weeks it announced grants to “contribute to the vitality of Canberra’s city centre through place-making”. That is great; I am absolutely in favour of it. But Woden, Belconnen and Tuggeranong town centres could all use that sort of love as well and they also deserve it.

Woden, Tuggeranong and Belconnen town centres are looked after by the Suburban Land Agency, and this agency has a completely different focus. Its job is to do the engineering and sales work required to deliver land in our new suburbs. This is important work, and we need an organisation that does it and does it well. But the question is: does it have the skills and focus required for our town centres to thrive? I do not believe it does.

The community sees at present that urban renewal is being driven by developers. This is why we need an organisation to push the long-term community needs, and that is the role of government. It is not putting the care and energy into urban renewal, and it appears to the community that that role has been taken over by developers.

Jobs are a great example of the need for a different skill set. Town centres really need jobs to thrive. One of the big problems for Woden town centre over recent years has

been the federal Liberal Party cutting public servants. An organisation like the City Renewal Authority would have the skills to formulate an ACT government response that brought together landowners and government agencies. An organisation focused on land sales rather than renewal is just not skilled to do that sort of work.

Another really striking example is the Kingston arts precinct, and that is why I included it in my motion. The Kingston arts precinct should be an arts precinct—arts led. It should have a focus on getting the right outcome for the arts. Leaving it with the Suburban Land Agency means the focus is going to be on the sales process. I am worried—and I know that many people in the arts in Canberra are worried, as well as many people in the local Kingston community—that what we are going to get is a property development which sells well but does not do much for arts or the local community.

I have seen Mr Barr's amendment, and the government will say that master plans do the coordination required, and they have got a point, but it is only part of a point. Master plans can only do one stage of the coordination required. They do the plan and the vision, and that is great, but they do not do the day-to-day work of making things happen. That requires staffing and an organisation that is clearly responsible. The way the system works now, after the master plan is done, the coordination ends and the gaps really begin.

In conclusion, I will talk about what will probably happen if my motion does not pass today. Firstly, the Chief Minister's city-first focus will see the city get attention and grow. That is great, of course, for those of us who use the city and it is great for our tourism industry, but it is not great for the town centres that have been falling behind and will continue to do so.

Secondly, we will continue to see projects rolled out that are not coordinated—planning approvals double the height specified in the master plan, for example; new tall buildings next to narrow, clapped-out footpaths designed for another era, when the idea was that everybody would drive; and missed opportunities to deliver affordable housing for our young people, our service workers and our older people who are no longer in full-time employment.

Thirdly, we will continue to see developers having an undue say in how development happens in Canberra. Developers should not be leading urban renewal. This is why we need the City Renewal Authority to take advantage of its legislation, which enables it to declare precincts and take over Woden, Belconnen and Tuggeranong town centres. That is why, of course, I believe all members should vote for my motion.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee) (10.36): Any opportunity to talk about the future of Woden is a welcome one. I am relentlessly optimistic about Woden's future. Our government is focused and we are committed to urban regeneration in our town centres, and particularly in Woden. It is really pleasing that we are already seeing the signs of regeneration starting to occur and renewed confidence in Woden town centre. I know that some people like to be pessimistic about Woden. This constant pessimism is not constructive. Talking Woden down does not make our town centre a better place.

There is no doubt that Woden has had a tough five years. As I revealed through my freedom of information request to the federal government, the total public service headcount in Woden reached a high of 6,099 under Labor in 2013 and fell to a low of just 4,771 under the Liberals. That has left many of the buildings in the town centre empty and in need of redevelopment. Despite these setbacks, there is a significant opportunity to make Woden a better place: not just a place for work but a place for people to live and a place for community. This was the focus of discussions last year at the Woden roundtable that we hosted, which has since led to the finalisation of the Woden town centre Territory Plan variation. The vision and implementation of the plan continues to inform our approach and real measures to support regeneration.

There is no doubt that government has a significant role to play in urban regeneration. Our government has a strong track record of investment in Woden: refurbishments to older buildings, including the Health Directorate's building on Bowes Street and Access Canberra in the Cosmopolitan building; relocating 1,000 ACT public servants to the Woden town centre; building the new performing arts centre at Canberra College; building the oval and cricket training centre at Phillip; the investment of \$3.2 million in the budget last year to free up valuable community space on the mezzanine level of Woden Library; building a new bus depot for Woden; improvements to active travel, with cyclepaths and footpaths in the town centre; and investment in public transport, with the new green rapid service and the new purple rapid service due to begin this year. In addition to this, we are investing in the single most significant infrastructure project in Woden's history: light rail stage 2.

Over the past month the government's micro park initiative has also come to Woden. The reimagining and experimentation in the use of public spaces is making an impact in the city. It is great to see the government taking that approach to other locations. It was also great to have arts minister Gordon Ramsay on the south side late last year to kick off a conversation with the community about an arts presence in Woden. This is something that I look forward to working with him on this year, with the local arts community. So the ACT government is working actively to make Woden a more attractive place to live and work, and our work and our investments will continue.

While the ACT government is significantly investing in the future of Woden, it is also pleasing to see new private sector investment, with four major new developments either planned or under construction in the town centre core. The fact that we have seen a flurry of interest in new residential projects for the town centre since the announcement of light rail stage 2 shows the transformative effects the project will have for Woden and also demonstrates the growing confidence in the town centre.

As I engage broadly with the Woden community, I get a very strong message that the redevelopment of buildings in the town centre is a priority. Sixty-nine per cent of people that responded to my Woden renewal survey wanted to see old buildings in the town centre demolished or adaptively reused.

The government is not selling off a lot of land in Woden, as is suggested, because there is not a lot of land in Woden for the government to sell. It is mostly privately owned. Ultimately a large part of Woden is privately owned and private investment is

needed to revitalise the C and D-grade buildings, many of which have been left empty by the commonwealth. There was certainly a lot of collective joy in the Woden community in response to reports that the Alexander and Albemarle buildings may be repurposed into residential apartments, though of course we await detailed plans to be brought forward.

As our population grows, and it is now at 7,000 people per year, we must have increased density, and urban densification should be focused in our town centres. In Woden's case, having people living in the town centre core will help to revitalise the area, local businesses, cafes and restaurants.

The independent planning and land authority recently approved the transit-oriented residential development at 15 Bowes Street in Phillip. Not only is this one of the first residential developments directly in the town centre core but also it is next to Woden bus interchange and the future site for the light rail stop, providing residents with direct access to public transport. It will see an addition of 700 residents living in the core area, providing increased after-hours activity, surveillance of public spaces and additional retail space fronting on to the bus station, providing demand for existing businesses in the area and improving the general character of the eastern edge of the town centre. And there is huge opportunity, with light rail coming to this site, to see further improvements made to the bus interchange to integrate those services and new developments around it.

More residences will also help to provide a variety of living options for people in Woden: for young people looking for apartment living close to services and transport, and for older residents looking to downsize as well. So private investment in the regeneration of Woden town centre is part of the solution for making the town centre a more vibrant precinct for people to live, work and recreate in.

The government is aware that the territory's tax policies are one of many factors that impact on the decisions to develop or redevelop precincts like Woden. Along with the issues like zoning and planning rules, construction costs and market demand, tax settings, such as those in relation to the lease variation charge, do play a part in determining the development mix in Canberra.

In a market as complex and significant as the property market, it is very important to ensure our policy settings are properly calibrated and working in the same direction as the government's and community's broader objectives. If we are keen to accelerate urban renewal in Canberra's town centres then we need to make sure that there are not unreasonable hurdles in front of development.

The government has been talking to industry and other stakeholders about how the ACT's current policy mix interacts with development decisions. Both the Chief Minister and the minister for planning have previously indicated being open to some reform of LVC, and this was certainly part of the discussions that we had at the Woden roundtable that we hosted last year.

The government has been very clear that it supports the principle of the lease variation charge, that the community should have a share in the windfall gains associated with



rezoning and redevelopment, but that there are tangible reforms worth considering, particularly around the timing of the payment. I understand that the government's thinking on this is well advanced. I would certainly welcome reforms that can make a difference in places like Woden.

We as a government will continue to invest in and put in place the tangible measures that support investment in Woden, and I will continue to be a strong advocate for the Woden community to support urban regeneration in our town centre. Woden residents can look forward to the future with optimism, because we are already seeing the green shoots of the renewal occurring. Our government is focused. We have a master plan in place for the town centre and we are committed to implementing urban renewal in the town centre and investing in city building infrastructure like light rail. Confidence will only continue to build in our town centre as a result.

I am sorry to Ms Le Couteur that I cannot support this motion without amendments, particularly the Oprah Winfrey section of: "You've got a precinct! You've got a precinct! You've got a precinct!" I think, as a member for Murrumbidgee, that in order to get the focus into Woden we cannot turn the entirety of Canberra into an urban renewal precinct. I think that this motion, as it stands, lacks focus on the specific policy measures that will actually deliver the vision for Woden town centre. I have mentioned what some of those measures could be today. I look forward to any amendments that may be brought forward to the motion.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the planning and urban renewal committee, who inquired into Territory Plan variation 344, and for their recommendations. I think that it does reflect a level of deep thinking, but I do not believe that this motion reflects that thinking.

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (10.45): I am not going to talk about our planning vision for Woden and the other town centres; I am just going to address the motion. What we see here in the first instance is a bit of grandstanding from the Greens. What we see here is the ongoing struggle for relevance. What we see here is Ms Le Couteur from the Greens trying to convince the people of the ACT that she does care about planning and urban renewal and that she and her colleague can force the government to do things that they otherwise would not have done.

My message to Ms Le Couteur would simply be, "You are the government. You are in the tent. From the moment you signed the power-sharing agreement with ACT Labor, you became a part of the government." My message to Ms Le Couteur would be, "Don't come in here masquerading as a functioning crossbench. This is a coalition over here."

If Ms Le Couteur has some planning ideas of this nature, surely she would be better served by discussing them with her colleague Mr Rattenbury and having him take them to cabinet. That takes me to the actual gist of the motion. The original unamended motion from Ms Le Couteur achieves nothing. If the government, as suggested by this motion, declares our town centres as urban renewal precincts, the practical result is nothing. There is no regulatory change. There is no change to taxes

and charges. There is no change to the planning process for anyone wishing to knock down something and build something better.

We all know that the wide belief of industry is that if the lease variation charge were abolished there is a high likelihood that wonderful new buildings would spring up left, right and centre in our town centres. But somehow those opposite cannot get past their ideological hurdles, although from the discussions I have had with Mr Gentleman and even the comments from Mr Steel—who, it must be said, is quite passionate about Woden town centre, and I do admire that passion—I look forward to this impending LVC announcement, as I know many others in the community do.

There is an assumption from Ms Le Couteur that if we push the regulatory responsibility from one agency to another, magically things will happen, even though there is no change whatsoever to the planning framework. The only result from Ms Le Couteur's original motion is that she gets to appear in a public space saying that she has done something, when in reality we have done nothing.

I am new to the planning portfolio as a shadow minister. When this motion came to me and the party last week, I said to my colleagues that at the end of the day I was looking here for the best possible policy outcome and that, where possible in this space, we really must strip the politics away from it. I have consulted as widely as I could in the short time available. I have spoken to industry and community members. I have met with Ms Le Couteur. I have met with Mr Gentleman. I have tried to find a way to support this motion, but I cannot.

I am relieved to see that the Labor Party has shown the contempt for this motion that I think it deserves. The amendments put forward by Mr Barr diminish this motion to a fluffy piece of nothing, really. Although we have enormous problems with the decision and the process of the splitting of the LDA and the way that it has been done, and although we do not wholeheartedly agree with parts 1 and 2 of the amendments to come, the notes to that section, we will be happy to support the government's amendments on the basis of their watering down the original motion to a meaningless Greens soundbite.

I do not share Mr Steel's optimism for Woden town centre, but, as I said earlier, I admire his passion in the space. I know that he is working hard in that space, as are some members of the government, and I look forward to things improving in Woden Town Centre.

**MS CODY** (Murrumbidgee) (10.49): I thank Ms Le Couteur for putting Woden and other town centres on our agenda today, not because I support her motion as it is written but because I believe we should be clear and honest about our views on this and other planning issues. I have never met a person who believes that Woden town centre is what it could and should be. I understand that some of our other town centres are also ageing.

There are a lot of good arguments to be made about a history of planning failures. In the case of Woden town centre we have inherited many issues, dating back, as Ms Le Couteur pointed out, to the 1960s. If we had a chance to do Canberra over it

would look very different. I would build something that looks more like Burley Griffin's plan. But lamenting the past is not what we are here to do. We should not be spending our time endlessly making condolence speeches for a Canberra that never was. Sure, there are votes to be had in nostalgia, but we should never pander to it. Promising to return Woden town centre to the way it was not in 1975 is the sort of lie we should never allow to be put out in the community.

What we all need to be doing now is talking up the exciting potential of the Woden centre. Yes, we can put forward different ideas, but the message to the community and investors should be positive. With light rail coming to the area, the largest single infrastructure project undertaken in the ACT, now is the time for private companies to invest. We are already seeing exciting and well-designed new developments slated that boast of being on the light rail route.

Our focus should be on the future of these town centres. We cannot fix the damage done in planning before self-government or by the withdrawal of activity under the Howard and Abbott Liberal governments. Ours is only to focus on the future. We need to make sure we are developing Woden town centre in context. In that imagined past, Woden was the only town centre on the south side. There are also Weston Creek, Tuggeranong and Lanyon, and I think it is correct to ensure services and facilities are appropriately spread between all instead of concentrated on one.

Too often we hear support for renewal in theory but opposition to every proposal in practice. I know that Mr Gentleman and this government have a comprehensive renewal program underway, and when I consider the impediments and risks to that renewal I can only list a few. Firstly there are the Senate shenanigans of Mr Seselja. From what I saw in the *Canberra Times* his strategy may be to delay and wreck light rail stage 2. If he is allowed to succeed, Woden and Canberra more broadly will be the losers. Secondly, there are those loud nimby voices who scream for renewal but scream louder in opposition to everything we do. There is always the risk that such voices can put off the developers and businesspeople whose investment we need to deliver on renewal. While I have complete confidence in the wisdom of the Senate ignoring the Seselja shenanigans, the damage done by naysayers is far harder to prevent.

Descriptions of Woden as unattractive, lacking in facilities and without cafes, restaurants and bars are chasing away the customers and the businesses. We know that that just is not true. There are so many great businesses operating now and there is so much more potential across the centre. The hardworking businesspeople of Woden deserve better than to have their efforts belittled. The government understands the problems faced by Woden and other town centres. It has a plan, a process and the commitment to deliver on urban renewal. This process includes ample consultation through which everyone in our community gets a chance to have their say. That is the best process for improving our town centres, not scaring away new investment and chasing the customers away.

I am proud of this government's commitment to renewal not only in Woden but also across other Canberra town centres. I look forward to our continuing on this path and

supporting further renewal for Woden town centre in particular and for all our town centres across the ACT.

**MS CHEYNE** (Ginninderra) (10.55): I thank Ms Le Couteur for bringing on this motion today, as I am always very happy to talk about Belconnen town centre and its future. As a member for Belconnen, and as a resident of the town centre, I know that its vibrancy and renewal are something I am not only passionate about but have driven and will continue to drive. I want to address some of the points that Ms Le Couteur has raised about the town centre, particularly given that I actually live there—I have lived there for most of my life in Canberra—and therefore spend a lot of time there and have some real lived experience, including with all of the changes that have been underway, particularly over the last decade.

There is a significant amount of change underway in the town centre. From a government or a public perspective, where do I begin? We have the University of Canberra public hospital; we have a significant land release program; we have the Belco bikeway, which is an election commitment, well underway. Another election commitment that I know has support right across the chamber is Belconnen Arts Centre stage 2. We have some changes to public transport right across the city that will affect Belconnen town centre. And, of course, as many members in this place would know, I would be delighted to see, and am actively pushing for, stage 3 light rail to Belconnen town centre.

From a private perspective, we have seen newly reinvigorated businesses like the Basement and Pot Belly, which have been around for a while but have some new owners and some new investment there. If people have not been there recently, they might be in for a great surprise, particularly now that Pot Belly has its own brewery. We have seen an enormous amount of development in the town centre, and we have thousands of new residents. Despite what Ms Le Couteur has said, I believe there is, and am myself living with, a new sense of community in the town centre.

Remarkably, I still hear people who do not live in apartments saying that apartments are not friendly places to live. I can tell you from personal experience, having lived in Altitude apartments for five years now—I think my anniversary of living there is actually today—that this is not true. I know many of the residents in my Altitude apartment block; it has 300 units but I do not just know the people on my floor. There is an active body corporate, which is a great way to get to know people. One of my former neighbours, who I did not know before we met in our apartment block, became a hugely active member and key player in my campaign for election. Another example relates to a time when my dog decided to take himself for a walk on his own. Someone I had never met but who had recognised me and my dog spotted my dog, grabbed my dog and brought my dog to my front door because they knew where I live. They did that within minutes, with him in tow. That shows that there is a real sense of community in apartment blocks.

I know other apartments in the town centre have similar experiences. Ms Le Couteur's colleague Minister Rattenbury will know about the community garden grants, one of which went to the Sentinel apartment block in the town centre. I visited their community garden just before Christmas. This community garden is available to all of

the residents there. It is a really great meeting place but also a great way to connect with neighbours and to enjoy the spoils. It is thriving there and I really commend Sentinel for all the work that they have done to help build a sense of community in that block.

In walking around the town centre, despite what some may think, it is not dark, scary or lonely. The town centre is well lit. As someone who exercises her dog at all hours of the day and night, I know that there is always someone around offering a friendly smile or hello. I have never felt nervous, particularly now. I do note that some people might still prefer to drive around the town centre, but it is a pretty big town centre. We have some excellent shopping facilities in the town centre, but some of those are quite a distance away from each other. You might not know that it is more than a kilometre to walk between Belconnen Fresh Food Markets and Westfield. That is a very long way to carry quite a lot of shopping. But all it takes is some ideas and regeneration.

For example, following lobbying from me a few years ago, Westfield Belconnen changed the hours it opened its doors at its Benjamin Way entrance—that is the entrance that faces most of the new apartment blocks, including my own—from 5.30 pm to 9 pm, which made a huge difference. It meant that fewer people are driving because they can now access it rather than having to go right around the centre, which, as you might appreciate, is huge. So some little things can go a very long way.

While there is significant change that has happened and that is underway, there is more coming. I agree with Ms Le Couteur that we can do more in our destination areas like Emu Bank. I do not think it was necessarily designed for fast food and drive-throughs, but that is what we have ended up with there. I have been on the record for many years now saying that, while I like fast food as much as the next person, I am not sure that drive-throughs and car parks that are literally adjacent to the lake are the best use for that space.

I know that the moving of some federal governments like ComSuper have caused concern, as has the closure of some of our bars. Regrettably, just over the weekend, Ha Ha Bar & Dining Room and La De Da announced that they are shutting for good. Hopefully, they will be sold and, as a venue, will continue to make a huge contribution to the town centre, but that is absolutely regrettable. I know there is also some concern about the future closure of Myer, but Westfield Belconnen is very confident about what could be done in that space.

We have a Belconnen town centre master plan, which I believe still holds the record for the greatest amount of community consultation. That Belconnen town centre master plan does need to be implemented; we need to see those Territory Plan variations to help effect some of those changes. We can also make sure we are doing some things through the other directorates that do not necessarily require variation; for example, Transport Canberra and City Services. I look forward to continuing my conversations with Minister Fitzharris.

With all of this change underway and the potential ahead, colleagues may recall that during the successful community cabinet that was held in Belconnen late last year I called for a Belconnen town centre showcase or a market day. With the significant

amount of change, businesses and the broader community, I believe, will welcome a sense of the full picture as well as an opportunity to contribute and maybe get a bit of stimulation for what the potential could be in the town centre. After raising the idea with my colleagues late last year during that community cabinet, I wrote to the many businesses and organisations in the town centre. I can tell you that there are hundreds. My hand was very sore from signing all those letters, but, not surprisingly, we received really strong interest in this proposal.

Today, I am pleased to share that work is now beginning to get underway on this showcase or market day for later this year. We have invited organisations like the Canberra Business Chamber to partner with us to help realise its potential as an idea. The showcase or market day will be an opportunity for ACT government directorates as well as businesses, community organisations and other interested parties to present to the community and to each other about their current and planned contributions to the town centre. It has the potential to provide a full picture of what is happening in the town centre, to encourage all members of the community to ask questions and get up to speed about the changes underway, and to reinforce and reinvigorate activity in the town centre.

I am grateful that the showcase has already been recognised as an idea with considerable merit. I am pleased to have the government's support and I have confidence in its ability to create greater awareness and engagement across the community about the changes underway in the town centre and its huge potential. I look forward to many members in this place, including people who are equally passionate about our town centres, showing their support for it, too.

While I commend Ms Le Couteur's similar passion for town centres, I cannot support the motion in its current form. I look forward to the amendments that will be moved shortly.

**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) (11.04): Firstly, I would like to thank Ms Le Couteur for her motion, which in many ways reflects the government's thinking. As I prepare to address Ms Le Couteur's motion, I would like to invite members to reflect on the many challenges Canberra faces as it grows and transitions into a major city. These challenges are the same as those that face other cities across Australia and, of course, around the globe.

Let me emphasise that the urban renewal and new suburbs we need are essentially about people and communities, so we must get it right. As we go towards a population of 500,000 over the next 20 years, it is increasingly important that we address the challenges of creating livable, resilient and connected communities. We want to celebrate our history while growing into a smart, competitive, attractive and adaptable place for a diverse population. Our success will be guided on how we manage urban renewal through economic prosperity and innovation, accommodate a changing community and build resilience to climate change.

Our changing demographics demand that we become more agile, that we consider contemporary pathways to realise the government's vision for a connected, livable and prosperous city. We are already shifting planning and transport policies to enable the creation of a high quality public realm; encourage active travel options for walking, cycling and public transport; and provide improved housing choice to allow people to age in place in their familiar neighbourhood where they are socially connected.

The actions called for by the discussion earlier on set out the priorities in my 2015 statement of planning intent. Many of the statement's actions are already underway to achieve its priorities of creating sustainable, compact and livable neighbourhoods with improved transport choices. They deliver high quality public places and streets through place making and rewarding design excellence and innovation through an outcome-focused planning system.

The matters called for in this motion regarding the implementation of planning changes for town centres are already occurring. We have a range of planning design and implementation mechanisms in place that we work with our colleagues across government to deliver to our communities. Our city is planned with a range of centres, each individual and each contributing to the greater whole of Canberra. Master planning has set directions for these centres for the future and to provide a hub for the surrounding areas they support but also to promote their own character. It is this character that we need to embrace, enhance and create over time so that the centres remain relevant, sustainable and viable and support the overall connected Canberra.

The 2012 planning strategy for the ACT and transport for Canberra prioritised developing along and adjacent to major transport corridors that connect town centres. These strategies envision better pedestrian, cycling and public transport infrastructure that connects suburbs and centres to each other. The government has started a review of the refresh of the planning strategy to address key government priorities and major changes in Canberra since 2012. Those include planning for urban renewal and the shift to a more compact and sustainable city; planning for Canberra's future transport network and light rail; and planning for net zero emissions by 2050, and for climate change.

The review is closely aligned with the concurrent reviews of the transport for Canberra strategy and the ACT climate change strategy. The integrated approach across the three strategies provides the opportunity to deliver on many whole-of-government outcomes. It will ensure that current and future government infrastructure investment is carried out in an efficient, fiscally responsible and coordinated manner. The Canberra community and industry will play an important role in helping to refresh the planning strategy to deliver a compact, competitive, connected and sustainable city for the future.

The 2012 planning strategy called for master plans to be prepared in response to place-specific needs of the Canberra community. The master plan program is a response of the government's strategy to create a more compact, efficient city by focusing urban intensification in town centres, around group centres and along major

public transport routes, and by balancing where greenfield expansion occurs. Town and group centres across the city have benefited from the master plan program. The plan is setting directions to facilitate change and create stronger communities for our town and group centres, rural villages and transport corridors.

The master plans set strategic directions, with objectives and strategies to facilitate development and change in a particular area over time. They work within the context of what is important about a place and how we can enhance its character and quality. This is done in consideration of the character of the centre and the opportunities and constraints of that context. The opportunities are the positives where we can create and innovate to enhance these centres.

Implementation of many of the recommendations and directions set out in master plans for these centres will be realised over the longer term, as they are dependent on capital works funding from the ACT government, investment decisions by private business and land availability. They may be implemented through variations to the Territory Plan, the sale of territory-owned land—land release, if you like—capital works and the uptake of opportunities by private developers and the community.

Since release of the master plans for Tuggeranong, Belconnen and Woden town centres, the government has actioned many of the recommendations related to facilitating land release, public domain upgrades and improvements to pedestrian and cycling infrastructure. These include upgrades to Anketell Street in Tuggeranong, the revitalisation of Lathlain Street and Emu Bank in Belconnen, and the upgrades to the sport and recreation facilities and active travel infrastructure in Woden.

Community involvement in helping to define what is valued for an area is an important part of every master plan's development. We discuss the issues and challenges of each area with its community, but we need to be mindful that not everyone in the community wants the same thing, and we aim to hear from a cross-section of the community while also considering the future community. This helps promote a better understanding about the potential for future growth and the opportunities that urban renewal can offer.

We also engage with key stakeholders, with face-to-face meetings with groups and individuals throughout the planning studies. In particular, I mention the community panel process that was established for the Curtin and Kippax group centre master plans, given the strong community interest in these centres. The community panel process allowed us to draw out a range of issues of concern to the community and address them in a constructive and positive environment. The results are now being tested with the broader community.

Similarly, last year we hosted the roundtable that Mr Steel talked about, focusing on the delivery of the Woden town centre master plan. It brought the community representatives, business leaders and key stakeholders together on the planning, urban renewal and transport issues affecting Woden town centre. While many describe Woden by saying, "Woden—it's okay," the Woden roundtable enabled discussions on residential and commercial opportunities, public and community space, active and public transport, community services and the possible renewal of older buildings. This



was, in my view, a very successful process. The findings have now been used to inform changes to the Territory Plan and are also informing public works currently underway in and around the town centre.

We also use a range of additional engagement and communication methods to engage with as many people as possible, particularly with community sectors that are not often well represented at typical engagement events, such as youth groups and the older generation.

Why don't we use the Woden town centre master plan as an example of how important it is for this government to focus on the future of our town centres? I wish to emphasise that not only is renewal important in these centres but it is already happening. The draft Woden town centre master plan focuses on the renewal of a centre by setting a new standard for development and providing more certainty for developers and the community by identifying key areas for renewal opportunity.

We worked closely with the community to ensure the master plan would consider the needs of the current and future community. The master plan anticipates the opportunity for light rail and therefore recommends high density residential development in the centre and within close walking distance in the Phillip service trade areas and along Athllon Drive. The master plan will recommend changing planning controls for the centre to increase the amount of high density residential land in appropriate locations and improve the urban design outcome for the new developments.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Ms Le Couteur for her motion and the opportunity to show how the government is working hard for a diverse and exciting urban planning agenda to support and facilitate the types of communities that we aspire to for our city.

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Major Events) (11.14): I thank members for their contributions to the debate this morning. We have heard quite a diverse range of views in this chamber on what constitutes urban renewal and what constitutes effective urban renewal, and we have heard in the comments from members quite a diverse range of views on how best to achieve the range of outcomes that we could collectively say we are seeking for different parts of our city.

I will make a couple of brief observations before moving the amendment that has been circulated in my name. It is important that we are relentlessly positive about the future not only of town centres within our city but of Canberra overall. We are in a competitive environment for investment that is sourced from within Canberra and the limited pool of capital that is held within this city that we have available to either government or the private sector. Most of the new capital that will be required to invest in infrastructure and in transforming urban renewal infrastructure will necessarily be sourced from elsewhere in Australia, particularly, and in certain circumstances internationally. What we need to undertake over the coming period is the detailed planning work that the planning minister outlined in his contribution and the practical implementation of that work on the ground.

It is necessary, of course, to balance a range of competing priorities. Ms Le Couteur in her presentation touched on one of the tensions: there are those who view urban renewal and any proposition put forward by a developer as being against the community interest. Even with developments that have unanimous support in this place, we will still find members of the community who believe that everyone in this place has sold out to the developers. We all know that; we have all experienced those conversations in this place.

Equally, I have also participated in and heard discussions where the requirements that certain individuals in the community would seek to place on development render it completely uneconomic, and absolutely ensure that nothing will ever happen. That is possibly their intent; in most instances I think it just stems from a lack of understanding of what is necessary in order to achieve an urban renewal outcome and for a development to proceed.

There is a historic issue that relates to a previous form of development in this city pre self-government, when occasionally it rained money from the commonwealth government. Ian Warden has written quite eloquently about this particular phenomenon. I think he referred to it as “Hodgmania”. Certainly, the reference there was to, as he described him, the “squire of Canberra”, the late Michael Hodgman, who was a Tasmanian federal MP, who, for a time, was the federal territories minister. So he was, as Mr Warden so eloquently described him, seen as the “squire of Canberra”, the one who would, on occasion, sprinkle some gold dust into a particular area. The nostalgia for this era amongst a certain generation of Canberrans is undoubtedly there and will remain for the rest of their lives.

I have come to the conclusion that there is no point in trying to argue with those people as to whether or not the pre or post self-government era is better for livability in Canberra. I think that debate has been had ad nauseam. But I did note in Ms Le Couteur’s presentation this morning the acknowledgement that not everything that was done by the National Capital Development Commission, as it was then, in the era pre self-government has stood the test of time as good urban planning.

Clearly, not every decision that has been made in the post self-government era over the last 30 years, or decisions that will be made in the future, with the benefit of hindsight in 50 years time, will be absolutely spot on. The nature of these issues is that we cannot accurately forecast everything that might happen in the future. But what we can do is put some contemporary planning principles, urban development principles and economic reality at the forefront of our approach to urban renewal, which is exactly what the government is seeking to do through the approach that my colleagues have outlined this morning.

The amendment that I will move to Ms Le Couteur’s motion is quite detailed. Members can read it for themselves. I will not read out every element of it. But it is important to note that there is a very positive future not only for Canberra’s CBD but for each of the town centres.

I want to conclude my remarks today by making one observation about something that I think is important; that is, each of the town centres and each of the areas within the

city that we seek to renew should have its own distinct identity and urban renewal focus. We should not seek a homogenous outcome across the city. In fact, in each of the town centres there will be points of difference, either in the planning rules or in the local community response, desires or outcomes that are achieved.

One principal point of difference that the town centres have over the CBD is their capacity to sustain buildings of some height. We simply have to get over this phobia regarding buildings that are, even by Australian standards, not very tall. By international standards, if you go anywhere else in the world, they would laugh at you if you said that a 12-storey building is high rise. Even a 20-storey building is not high rise, yet we are stuck in this sort of small-town, backwards, 1940s mindset.

We need to move beyond that, and we also need to recognise that short, squat buildings that fill up all of the available space are not necessarily better outcomes than tall, elegant buildings. This is not an argument to say that every tall building is a good building; they have to be well designed. But they can be, and we should not be afraid of some height in some parts of the city of Canberra. For national statutory reasons, that will never be the case in the CBD, so that is a clear point of difference for town centres and it provides some greater economic impetus for investment in those centres as opposed to the CBD or the parliamentary triangle.

Having said that, I move the following amendment that has been circulated in my name:

Omit all words after “That this Assembly”, substitute:

“(1) notes that:

- (a) as Canberra’s built form ages, a key priority for the ACT Government must be a continuous program of urban renewal, coordinated improvements to the public and private realms, that improves amenity, delivers better environmental outcomes and a diversity of housing choices;
- (b) in the 2017-18 Budget, the ACT Government prioritised creating the central business district that Canberra deserves through the establishment of the City Renewal Authority;
- (c) Canberra’s CBD, Dickson and the Northbourne Avenue corridor that make up the City Renewal Precinct are amongst the oldest areas of Canberra, while being Canberra’s key and growing centres of employment;
- (d) the City Renewal Precinct has seen substantial land release for urban renewal with 51 000 square metres released in 2017-18, in addition to major renewal of privately held developments resulting from the ACT Government’s investment in light rail; and
- (e) the City Renewal Authority is delivering a vibrant heart to the city;

(2) further notes:

- (a) the process of urban renewal is delivered through a range of mechanisms, the creation of a dedicated agency is one means to deliver coordinated urban renewal;

- (b) section 36 of the *City Renewal Authority and Suburban Land Agency Act 2017* sets clear criteria for the inclusion of land in an urban renewal precinct. These criteria include the requirement to consider advice from the authority and from the Minister responsible for the *Planning and Development Act 2007*;
  - (c) the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate and the Suburban Land Agency play a key role in planning and delivery of urban renewal across the city;
  - (d) Transport Canberra and City Services plays a central role in urban renewal through investments from light rail to footpath and playground improvements;
  - (e) the ACT Government continues to work with communities in the town centres, businesses, investors and residents to deliver coordinated urban renewal;
  - (f) the Government has developed Master Plans for many centres that provide a high level plan setting out objectives and strategies to manage development and change over time;
  - (g) Master Plans are developed in close consultation with local communities; and
  - (h) Master Plans set out how an area can develop into the future and take a comprehensive approach that covers future development, community facilities, street life and upgrades of public places, parks, walking and cycling networks and planning rules; and
- (3) calls on the Government to:
- (a) implement changes to planning controls for town centres consistent with the finalised master plans that will facilitate renewal including:
    - (i) activating existing streets and public spaces;
    - (ii) providing new opportunities for commercial and residential development in appropriate locations close to public transport, shops and services;
    - (iii) improving town centre roads, intersections and active transport routes; and
    - (iv) providing new areas of open space and parks;
  - (b) ensure resources are in place to coordinate the delivery of the Master Plans across Directorates and to ensure ongoing consultation with the community during implementation, including resources for each of the following:
    - (i) Woden Town Centre;
    - (ii) Belconnen Town Centre;
    - (iii) Tuggeranong Town Centre; and
    - (iv) Kingston Arts Precinct; and
  - (c) develop a Master Plan implementation program, and aligning with the annual reporting timeline, publish yearly updates to the Assembly on progress with implementation of each Master Plan.”.

I commend the amendment to members.

**MS LE COUTEUR** (Murrumbidgee) (11.23): I will speak on the amendment and close the debate. I thank you all very much for your contributions to the debate. As a whole, I think that basically you are arguing for my motion, insofar as the conclusion from everybody is that to do urban renewal well requires considerable care. Many different aspects have to be looked at, and not just the planning rules, the cycleways or the height of buildings et cetera. A holistic look at all of the issues is required. That is what, as I understand it, the CRA was set up to do for the city area. That, hopefully, will work very well.

My contention basically is that the town centres deserve the same degree of care and attention, and, if you do not mind me using the word, love, as our city centre. That is the contention behind what I am saying. Most of you have actually somewhat argued in that way, although I do appreciate that my motion will not be passed. However, I think it is a little bit better than a “fluffy piece of nothing”, despite what Mr Parton may say.

It is great that we have had some more discussion on Woden. I am surprised that we did not have it yesterday, with the Territory Plan variation; nonetheless, it is good to keep talking about some of the positive things that can be done for Woden, Belconnen and Tuggeranong, all of which are going through a process of renewal and need more care, love and attention.

I felt the most interesting comment that was made in the whole debate was Mr Barr’s, when he said we had to be relentlessly positive. That could be a topic for a more fulsome debate at some time in the future, because that is a way of approaching life, but I do not know that it is actually the best one. The future, hopefully, will be good, but we need to have some serious deliberation, rather than being relentlessly positive, in terms of deciding what paths we may choose to move on for the future. Nonetheless, I found that to be a very interesting contribution.

I am pleased at least that the amendment will be passed. One of the positive things about it is paragraph (4), which states:

... develop a Master Plan implementation program, and aligning with the annual reporting timeline, publish yearly updates to the Assembly on progress with implementation of each Master Plan.”.

This deals with a lot of the problems with the urban renewal that is happening in our cities, in our town centres and in our group centres. The community is really involved, the master plan is done and then nothing happens. We know why nothing happens, and that is why I moved my motion. It is because the people in ACTPLA who are tasked with doing it go on and do something else. It has led to a hotchpotch; things may be implemented but they may not be. There is no-one actually driving it to see that they are. That was the purpose of the motion.

At least under this proposal the community will have some feedback as to what happened to the hard work that they did, and the comments that they made about what they wanted to happen in their town centre. I will repeat this because it is so egregious: the master plan for 15 Bowes Street had a 12-storey limit, while ACTPLA has approved 26 storeys. It is hard for the community to feel that they are being respected in that situation. I do not think this is as much an argument about the height as about why we have community consultation if it is not going to be respected.

The other good thing about Mr Barr's amendment is that it covers more areas, because more areas have master plans than just the town centres. I refer to Mawson and Weston in my electorate. That is also positive. I thank members for their contributions, and I look forward to better urban renewal happening in Canberra in the future.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **ACT Ambulance Service—resourcing**

**MRS JONES** (Murrumbidgee) (11.28): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) ACT Ambulance Service has a minimum crewing level of 10 emergency ambulances for each and every shift plus two demand crews each 24 hour period;
- (b) of the 730 shifts in 2016-17, only 427 shifts met this minimum level, while 303 shifts were below the minimum; and
- (c) 41.5 percent of ACT Emergency Ambulance shifts in 2016-17 were below minimum crewing; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

- (a) explain to the Assembly why ACT Ambulance Service is grossly under resourced; and
- (b) advise the Assembly by the last sitting day in April 2018 of the dates and shift types of each emergency ambulance shift which fell below minimum crewing in 2016-17.

My motion today outlines a straightforward, factual matter, one of significant problems in our Ambulance Service. Our Ambulance Service is made up of quite incredible men and women who work selflessly and tirelessly for our community in our times of greatest need.

The service has what has been for many years termed a minimum crewing level, which is determined by historical and predictive data analysis and reporting. The ACT Ambulance Service's minimum crewing level is defined as 10 ambulance crews during each and every shift, with an additional two demand crews per 24-hour period. These demand crews work shifts between 7 am and 11 pm.

There are two shifts per day: a 10-hour day shift, and a 14-hour night shift. Therefore, we have 730 shifts per year. Of the 730 shifts in the 2016-17 financial year, only 427 met the minimum crewing level. That means a very significant 303 shifts, or 41.5 per cent of all shifts for the year, did not have the minimum level of crewing determined should be the case. This is a fact.

It is clear that the government has been caught out. It has been caught out overseeing a significant shortfall in resources provided to our Ambulance Service and, given the timing of the answering of my question on this matter, it has been caught out trying to keep it from the public until a positive spin could be put on it.

I first asked the minister about minimum crewing levels in our Ambulance Service on 22 September last year. I asked the minister if there were any emergency ambulance shifts since 2015-16 that fell below minimum crewing levels. As the minister well knows, answers to questions on notice are due in 30 days. But in that time the minister made many attempts to avoid, delay and deflect.

The 30-day deadline came and went and there was still no answer. One week, two weeks, went by; still no answer. More weeks, more months, no answer. By day 47—that is, 17 days overdue—the minister had not answered my question. So I followed up in the annual reports hearings with questions taken on notice in the JACS annual report hearings, and they were due in 10 business days. That deadline came and went. Still no answer!

Then we hit day 130, almost five months. One hundred and thirty days after receiving my question, the minister had finally had enough time to find a political response and, strangely enough, neutralised the answer—the shocking information that had to be given. The minister waited until he had other news to distract from the damning information. He announced new recruits and published a media release outlining new response time results and new ambulance recruits on the same day as the negative information was due to come out in the answer to my question on notice.

The media release, titled “New staff will help ACTAS meet its aspirational target of having 10 ambulance crews at the ready at any one time, and a further two ambulances available during peak periods”, went on to say:

In 2016-17, ACTAS operated approximately 427 shifts with 10 or more crews, and 303 shifts with fewer than 10.

The minister’s media release was dated 30 January 2018. When did he sign the answer to my question on notice? It was, surprisingly, 31 January 2018—a disgusting display of rank political games and a complete disrespect for the rules and practices of this place.

The minister’s language is also changing. In a classic Barr government move, the minister, having been caught out failing to meet his own minimum crewing levels, the term “minimum crewing” seems to be now being taken out and replaced with “aspirational target”.

I am here to tell you that the workers of the ACT Ambulance Service and the people of Canberra are not that stupid. They know that ambulance officers are regularly expected to work overtime after a 10-hour day shift or a 14-hour night shift. Those officers are constantly receiving a message from head office asking them to work longer because the service is short on crews. This is not a sustainable practice and it will take the minister a long time to sort this mess out.

It is indicative of the Barr Labor government and this minister that we would then shift the goalposts. The slogan at the next election should be “lowering the bar” or “if at first you don’t succeed, shift the goalposts”. How can the minister seriously have overseen a system that is short staffed over 40 per cent of the time? There are lives at risk.

I would like to acknowledge the very generous and professional nature of our emergency services workers—very similar to our police service, very similar to many of our people who work in the prison. I had to call an ambulance in recent years when my child pulled a blanket on his head and was grey and nearly died, and I know the hard work that these workers put in each and every day to keep people in Canberra alive. They are the very best people we have. They are dedicated, kind and caring people. They are like so many in our community services roles. They put their bodies and their minds on the line for others. They are likely to give in service of others even when they have very little left to give themselves.

But this government and this minister take advantage of their good natures and their good hearts and push them to continually do more and more. It is not only poor personnel management that will lead to long-term effects on workforce and workloads; it is also unjust and exploitative.

This minister has no idea what is happening under his nose or, I suspect, he would not have allowed it to happen. He is very happy to take the good side of the job—photo ops with these hardworking people—but the interest seems to be more one way. It is not about the emergency services or the community they serve. Getting ministers to act around here can be like cranking up an old antique car. First you have got to put in the crank shaft, give it a whirl and tell the minister there is a problem.

The only reason I know about these problems is that workers have talked to me. It is not a complicated business. I make myself available. I sit down and talk to people and I listen to them. I did not know this was a problem a year ago. I have just been available to people. I believe getting an appointment with the minister can be quite difficult for people in these services.

It is like when I alerted him to the fact that the firies needed portaloos. “No, nothing to see here, nothing, nothing.” A few months later: “Oh, wait, actually there is a problem,” and lo and behold we have tried to fix it. The minister owes the community an explanation. He owes the selfless men and women of the Ambulance Service an explanation.



I am calling on the minister to explain why he has allowed our Ambulance Service to become so grossly under-resourced that last year over 40 per cent of shifts were under minimum crewing level. Did the minister not know what was happening inside his own portfolio or is he so incompetent that he thinks having enough staff 60 per cent of the time is a good enough system?

There is a great deal to explain. However, knowing the way things go, he will not give an explanation. There will not be an apology and there will no doubt be an attempt to tell me that I am wrong or my colleagues are wrong and then claim that there is not a problem. He will claim that the new recruitment was always coming and that we should never have had any concerns. He will also say that they are meeting response times. Yes, but at what cost? At the cost of the wellbeing of ambulance workers and the cost of proper workforce management?

In this government's and this minister's normal way, he will come into the chamber, as I already knew when I wrote this speech a few days ago, and deflect the situation, try to shift debate to an area he wants to talk about. The minister will move an amendment to the motion to turn it into something completely different to what it actually is. I am glad to say I am slightly wrong there; he has kept the first half of my motion in his amendment.

He will make the case when he is done that nothing is wrong, nothing to see here, and are we not a wonderful government? It is becoming a tired old trick used here where the government uses its numbers to try to erase or change history, erase a poor record. The community is getting sick of the spin, sick of the self-protection, sick of an old, tired government trying to find a reason to blame others for lack of competence and lack of interest in basic workforce planning.

I will not be giving up. No matter how much political spin is put on the mess, you have been caught out. I just hope and pray that it does not take a more serious crisis for you to take this matter seriously. Maybe the minister has too much going on; maybe this is not the best role for him; maybe he needs to get help. Nonetheless, not meeting community expectations or basic workforce management is not good enough for the people of the ACT.

The Chief Minister earlier this week excitedly talked about the 7,000-person increase in Canberra's population over the last year, and we know from the last election campaign that the strong population growth—11 per cent over the past five years or 5,000 people a year, we kept hearing—justifies the spend on the tram. But at the same time was Minister Gentleman paying attention to it? Our population continues to grow and grow, and the minister let our Ambulance Service be short staffed for over 40 per cent of the time.

So I am also calling on the minister to advise the Assembly by the last sitting in April of the exact dates when the Ambulance Service was below minimum crewing and whether it was a day or a night shift. The public deserves to know this information. They deserve to know why the government left them vulnerable—because they could not be bothered undertaking proper workforce management or they just did not think

it was necessary? The business of emergency services, in particular our Ambulance Service, is often a matter of life and death, and I am sure I do not need to remind you of that.

I note that the minister has circulated an amendment and, after a conversation, has circulated an amendment to his amendment. His amendment talks about maintaining the service, time frames and community expectations, and I accept that this more positive information is probably accurate. Nonetheless, the amendment seeks to take out my request for an explanation as to how we got to this position in the first place.

The minister has also agreed in the “calls on” section to add that he will monitor the wellbeing of and support for our front-line service staff. What I am here to tell you is that they are not going very well at the moment. At least some of them are definitely suffering from the number of requests they get for overtime, and I am pleased to see that he has amended his motion to include that.

I foreshadow that I will then move an amendment to introduce a clause (d) which asks for an explanation as to how we came to this position, because it is not good enough to just say, “Whoops, I do not have enough staff; now I am going to start recruiting,” or “I am going to do continued and increased recruiting,” which I welcome. However, I think that in fairness and justice to the people of the ACT we do in fact require an explanation. I thank the minister for the changes to his amendment, which we will support, and foreshadow an additional amendment.

**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) (11.41): I thank Mrs Jones for the opportunity to speak about the great work the ACT Ambulance Service does each and every single day. As Mrs Jones has indicated, I have circulated an amendment to her motion, and I have done this because there are particular comments and lines in Mrs Jones’s motion that are simply untrue. I move that amendment now:

Omit all words after “That this Assembly”, substitute:

“(1) notes:

- (a) ACT Ambulance Service (ACTAS) currently aims for a minimum crewing level of 10 emergency ambulances for each and every shift plus two demand crews each 24 hour period;
- (b) of the 730 shifts in 2016-17, only 427 shifts met this minimum level, while 303 shifts were below the minimum; and
- (c) 41.5 percent of ACT emergency ambulance shifts in 2016-17 were below minimum crewing;

(2) further notes:

- (a) for the sixth year in a row, ACTAS response times were the best in the country as reported in the Productivity Commission’s 2018 Report on Government Services; and
- (b) the annual Ambulance Patient Satisfaction Survey shows the ACT Ambulance Service consistently meets community expectations; and

- (c) the December 2017 announcement that the ACT Government will recruit 23 additional paramedics and deliver two new ambulances, in addition to the recruitment of 11 paramedics currently underway; and
- (3) calls on the Government to:
- (a) review the minimum crewing level to determine whether it remains an appropriate guide to allocate ambulance resources to meet variable levels of demand;
  - (b) monitor ambulance resources and staffing to ensure continued strong performance by ACTAS as measured by response times and patient satisfaction; and
  - (c) monitor staff wellbeing to ensure continued support for our frontline service staff.”.

Community safety will always be one of this government’s highest priorities, which is why we are providing the support and the resources for our front-line personnel. The government acknowledges that the demand on our ACT Ambulance Service is at the highest level ever. Demand for ambulance response in Canberra has increased by 25 per cent since 2012-13. Demand is driven in part by overall population increase but also by an increase in the ageing population. This is a common issue for ambulance services across all jurisdictions.

Despite this increase in demand over the past five years, the ACT has continued to record the best response times in the country, as well as the highest levels of patient satisfaction. Let me reiterate that: the ACT has continued to record the best response times in the country during this time, as well as the highest levels of patient satisfaction. It is due to the professionalism, hard work and skill of the women and men of ACTAS that our response times have remained the fastest. However, with increasing community demand it is important that our paramedics, ambulance officers and staff have the right support to do their jobs well and safely.

For this reason, in December last year I announced a major funding boost to help our ACTAS staff to continue to maintain the highest standards of service delivery in the nation. The package is made up of a number of parts, the first of which relates to the government’s election commitment to provide an extra ambulance crew on the road. This part of the announcement allows for the recruitment of 15 paramedics to commence in the 2018-19 financial year and the purchase of two new ambulances with powered stretchers.

The second part allows for the immediate employment of an additional eight paramedics to enhance the current roster and support relief arrangements. The intention of this part of the package is to allow for greater access to staff leave whilst maintaining our rostered staffing levels. These additional eight paramedics have already commenced.

I want to touch on that point: I want to talk on rosters and leave. Having worked shift work for 11 years I understand completely the pressure on paramedics to achieve their rosters, and I understand their desire to be able to take leave when needed. Of course, the response to that is working overtime shifts to cover that leave, and I thank them

for the work they do, having done similar work myself. The remaining vacant paramedic positions to fill the normal attrition vacancies are expected to commence in two intakes in March and May 2018.

The third part of the announcement funds an additional mechanic to support the ESA workshop and enhance our capability as we continue to increase the size of our fleet. The action taken by the government in relation to this matter demonstrates its commitment to ensuring that Canberra continues to be one of the safest communities in the world to live, while also supporting the welfare of our dedicated ambulance workers.

In relation to part 2(b) of Mrs Jones's motion, I note the request to advise the Assembly of the dates and shift types of each emergency ambulance shift which fell below minimum crewing in 2016-17. I cannot agree to this request on the basis of advice that providing this information would require a considerable amount of ACTAS staff time and resources and would unreasonably redirect them away from the important functions that they do now.

A considerable amount of time has already been spent by ACTAS staff in providing Mrs Jones with the raw figures in answering question on notice No 662. I note Mrs Jones's comments in relation to the time taken to provide the answer. I advise the Assembly that my office went backwards and forwards with her office to assure her that we were trying to provide her with all of the details necessary. It took quite a bit of time to get that done because of the data that had to be retrieved.

There are two ambulance shifts per day, as we have heard—day shift and night shift—which equates to approximately 730 shifts per year. In 2016-17 ACTAS operated approximately 427 shifts with 10 or more crews, and 303 shifts with fewer than 10. However, I am advised by the ACTAS chief officer that during known periods of low demand ACTAS has accepted operating with fewer than 10 emergency ambulance crews. For example, if it is known that there are not enough staff to roster to crew 10 emergency ambulances in the middle of the day, every effort is made to backfill the rostered shifts. The same effort to backfill rostered shifts might not be applied for night shifts during the middle of a working week. In these instances, ACTAS accepts operating with fewer than 10 emergency ambulance crews in the knowledge that the high standard of care for the community is maintained.

While the ACTAS chief officer informs me that this arrangement has been manageable, demand is increasing. With our commitment to the welfare of our dedicated ambulance workforce in mind and to help them continue to serve the community, we announced the extra staff late last year. Like all front-line services, ACTAS continually monitors its policies and procedures to ensure it is providing the best possible care for the community. As my amendment notes, ACTAS will continue doing this. As my amendment also notes, ACTAS will review its crewing levels to determine whether the current minimum remains an appropriate guide to allocating resources.

The ACT community can have the highest confidence in the performance of their Ambulance Service. I take this opportunity to thank the ACTAS chief officer and all

ACTAS staff for their continued efforts to care and protect the Canberra community. For Mrs Jones to say that ACTAS is grossly under-resourced is nothing but scaremongering. As I have just explained, ACTAS has been managing well. But with demand increasing, and expected to keep increasing, the government has taken action to support our committed ambulance workforce into the future. This will ensure ACTAS can continue to meet the community's increasing expectations.

In closing, the women and men of ACTAS do a great job each and every day. They have no greater champion than me as minister for emergency services. I acknowledge and respect their skill and dedication, and this government will continue to prioritise supporting them and the work they do to care for the Canberra community.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Kurrajong) (11.49): I welcome the opportunity to discuss our Ambulance Service in the chamber today. I certainly agree with plenty of what Mrs Jones has said on this particular issue: our Ambulance Service is critically important; it needs to be well-resourced and well-managed; it is a service where performance can literally mean the difference between life and death. I also agree we have hardworking, committed staff in the ACT Ambulance Service. They do a tough job, but it is also a very important job. We have all at times either read in the press or heard ourselves the stories of ambulance officers being assaulted when they go to help people. I find it extraordinary that when they are there trying to save somebody from either an accident or sometimes self-inflicted situations they have to face that sort of threat. That is very disappointing and underlines how tough the job can be.

I have also heard great stories about how rewarding it is in the sense of people's gratitude to ambulance officers. That is obviously a reward they do not expect but is there in knowing they have made a significant contribution to people's lives when they most need it. I guess both ends of the spectrum are there for our ambulance officers in terms of the challenges and the rewards they face.

I also have no disagreement with the first part of Mrs Jones's motion: she has identified a metric that the Ambulance Service is using and which is not being met a fair proportion of the time. That is the metric which measures whether there is a full crew of ambulance staff on a 24-hour shift. As we have discussed today, that means 10 ambulances and two demand crews. That is relevant information, and Mrs Jones has made some good inquiries and brought interesting information to the attention of the public and the Assembly. I was not aware of this particular metric about ambulance staffing until now, and it has prompted me to seek out some information from the minister and his office about it.

I do not agree with the conclusion Mrs Jones draws from this information, however. She has asserted that the ACT Ambulance Service is grossly under-resourced. I do not believe that to be true. Mr Gentleman has gone into this in some detail. The stand-out fact for me is that the response time of the ACT Ambulance Service is the best in the country and has been for many years running. That is surely the important measurement when it comes to ambulances. They are called on for emergencies and they need to respond quickly, and the data shows us that they are doing that in a very effective way.

Other ACT ambulance statistics are also impressive, including the quality of the service as perceived by the patient—that is, patient satisfaction. This is a figure at around 97 per cent, and for any industry that is an extraordinary level of satisfaction. Particularly in a modern age when people are very willing to express their dissatisfaction, that that reflects very well on the Ambulance Service and their dedication to serving the needs of Canberrans.

As has been discussed today, the government has also committed significant additional resources to ambulance services. These are listed in the budget review which was made public yesterday—funding of over \$10 million. The resources will fund the recruitment of 20 new paramedics and a new mechanic, in addition to the recruitment of 11 paramedics already underway.

The issue is obviously more nuanced than Mrs Jones has presented in her remarks. As the answer to her question without notice points out, ACTAS uses a deployment matrix to guide and inform the best placement of its resources at any one time. ACTAS also goes through periods of high demand and low demand. One can imagine for example, that 4 am on a weekday is regularly less busy than, say, weekend periods. It makes sense to me that there would be flexibility in the use of resources, acknowledging that there are periods of low demand. Resources, of course, should always be used as efficiently as possible. As Miss Burch said in her dissertation yesterday, we do not want to waste government resources, after all.

It seems to me that Mrs Jones is really just using hyperbole in an attempt to stir up fear about the Ambulance Service as a way to try to maximise her perceived political interest. I would probably be supportive of a motion that was reasonable and honest about the situation, something that identified the issue of an unmet metric and asked that it be addressed: how is the government going to improve or review it, or is the metric itself somehow not an appropriate measure? That is essentially what the amendment presented by Minister Gentleman does—it acknowledges the issue of minimum crewing, which Mrs Jones has accurately identified in her motion, but it provides a fuller context of the situation in the ACT Ambulance Service.

The amendment also calls on the government to review the crewing level requirement. I think that is an appropriate way forward and a good outcome. As the minister pointed out in his answer to Mrs Jones's question on notice, the staffing measurement originates in historical and predictive data analysis and reporting. It may not be a pertinent measure of performance. I am interested in seeing the further analysis that the government presents following its review.

I should add that I expect this will be a genuine review of whether this staffing metric is actually appropriate and whether it makes sense. If it remains a relevant metric, I expect the review will determine what changes are needed to ensure it is properly met. That is not a question I know the answer to; it will be assessed by people in the ACT Ambulance Service with expertise and experience in this area.

In the context of this review I would like to see the government also look at this issue through a lens of health and wellbeing—that is, I think that they should consider

whether the staffing levels mean ambulance staff are overworked and experiencing additional stress and whether their physical and mental wellbeing is negatively impacted. This is already a stressful job. Not only do staff have a right to be healthy and happy in their job, but having staff that are stressed or overworked ends up negatively impacting on service delivery.

Mrs Jones's motion also asks that the government identify every date and shift which fell below the minimum crewing level. I understand this would be a very onerous and resource-intensive task. The minister has spoken to that today, outlining that it would essentially require the manual checking of every shift. That would divert resources from the Ambulance Service, which I believe should be focused on delivering ambulance services to the people of Canberra. I am unclear exactly what Mrs Jones hopes to get from this information in this format when it will divert resources from important work in the ACT Ambulance Service, so we are not prepared to support that part of the motion.

I note that Mr Gentleman has circulated an amendment, after some discussions in the chamber today. The amendment includes an addition of looking at the issue of support and monitoring the wellbeing of front-line staff. They are comments I already had in my prepared remarks, and this is an important point. I am pleased to support that addition to this motion.

I think Mr Gentleman's amendment is fair. It retains the essential points that Mrs Jones has made in her critique. I think it is right to assess whether this metric is the right metric. If the ACT Ambulance Service is delivering the best response times in the country—and we know it is—that says to me we have a very effective system. So whether this metric is the right metric is a good question. Throughout areas of government there are measures that exist, but whether they are good measures is sometimes the debatable point. It is certainly something I am exploring with my directorates, to see whether some of the performance indicators we have are the right ones.

I have heard the opposition sometimes quite fairly critique some of the measures that exist as being measures of input rather than output or outcomes. These are real debates we should have, and I think this is one of those occasions. Now we are focused on this metric, let us have a look at whether it is the right one or not. That is an important part of Mr Gentleman's amendment—that that metric will be reviewed to determine whether it remains an appropriate guide to the allocation of ambulance resources. On that basis the Greens will be supporting Mr Gentleman's amendment today.

**MRS JONES** (Murrumbidgee) (11.57): I move my amendment, which has now been circulated, to Minister Gentleman's proposed amendment:

Add:

“(d) explain how we have arrived at a position where the Service has been under minimum crewing 41.5% of the time in the previous financial year.”.

Members will note that on their tables there is a copy of my amendment to Minister Gentleman's amendment, inserting a paragraph 3(d). I never thought I would get to the point of being able to do these things. It asks the minister to explain how we arrived at the position where the service was under minimum crewing for 41.5 per cent of the time in the previous financial year.

I understand the arguments of everybody on the other side of the chamber that that measure may or may not be appropriate. It is, nonetheless, the measure that the government put in place for their own service. There has not been an explanation in the debate to this point as to why we had that measure in the first place, although I have given an explanation. It is stated in the government's documents that that was based on a decision that was made about that being the necessary minimum crewing for the ACT.

While I understand that there may be a revisiting of it, I will still term that a changing of the goalposts because I am assuming, without any information to the contrary, that those minimum crewing levels were in place for a purpose and with some study behind them. I am not saying that measurements should never change or should never become more meaningful. But at this point in the debate there has been no reason given why that really is not a decent measure of a service which is increasingly under demand from an increasing population. I still think it is incumbent on the minister to explain to the community why we have got to this point.

In the debate Mr Rattenbury asserted that my bringing this motion here today was about me. That is very flattering, but in reality I have sat down with ambulance officers. I was not aware of minimum crewing levels until it was raised with me by members of the Ambulance Service. It is reasonable for them to raise it because they are obviously convinced that it is at least a reasonable measure of staffing requirements.

Minister Gentleman made it very clear in his speech that there are times when there are not enough staff to achieve minimum crewing levels and that there is a need to backfill. That need to backfill is what I am alerting the minister to. The Ambulance Service officers are saying that it is putting them under too much stress. I accept that the government has come up with a solution, for the time being, to that ongoing problem. But there has not been an explanation as to why we arrived at that position in the first place and really as to why we would change the measure.

We might get to that in a future debate or a future ministerial statement, but at this point I still think the community deserves an explanation now that this information has come to light, which is not something that I have made up or something, as Minister Rattenbury suggested, I have created to make myself more popular. I actually have a genuine concern for the men and women of the Ambulance Service, as I think the minister probably does as well. But I do not think we are serving them as well as we could be up to this point, and they deserve an explanation.

**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) (12.01): I will not be supporting this addition to my amendment, for a number of reasons. Firstly, I gave a very good explanation of why the minimum crewing levels have not been met in my answer earlier on, when I spoke to my amendment to Mrs Jones's motion. Secondly, we said in my amendment that we will be reviewing this particular measure. Thirdly, in regard to Mrs Jones's comments now about backfill as an ongoing concern or ongoing problem, backfill is a normal operational procedure for shiftwork.

**Mrs Jones:** But not to that level.

**MR GENTLEMAN:** This is what I am trying to point out. Those of us who have worked shiftwork and those of us who have an understanding of workforce capability will tell you that if a shift becomes vacant it needs to be backfilled. It is a normal operational procedure that happens in every shift operation across the country, whether it be in police forces, whether it be in the Australian protective service that I worked in, where I did duty room rosters for quite a number of years, or whether it is in our ACTAS system here. It is a normal operation procedure where you backfill someone that is taking leave, whether it is emergency leave or whether it is recreational leave. It is a matter of operational procedure. I will not be supporting this second amendment.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Kurrajong) (12.03): I will speak briefly to Mrs Jones's amendment. The Greens will not be supporting this. I believe, consistent with the additional comments that Minister Gentleman just made, that this point is implicit in a review of whether or not this is an appropriate measure.

**MR WALL** (Brindabella) (12.04): Madam Speaker, this is classic cover-up 101. This is a case of a minister that is failing on many fronts in his responsibilities for ensuring that the ACT is well covered by an ambulance service that is appropriately equipped. We are not arguing over whether or not the maximum staffing threshold has been met through the year, or whether the ideal staffing threshold has been met through the year. This is the minimum staffing threshold.

Experts within the ACT Ambulance Service and the ACT Emergency Services Agency—the minister's own departments—have come up with a minimum figure of what is required to resource the Ambulance Service in this territory. Based on that, for the previous financial year this minister has failed to ensure that that is provided, not on one instance, not on two instances, but by his own amendment he highlights 303 shifts in the financial year that were under the minimum staffing standard. That means that Canberrans were at risk on no less than 151 days of the year. That is assuming that they were working on concurrent shifts. Potentially, almost every day of the year there was inadequate staffing in the Ambulance Service.

Bundle that with a health system that is beyond breaking point, that is not meeting minimum standard deliveries and that has waiting lists longer than years, and think of what impact that might have on an ambulance service. We are failing even to staff that adequately. That is an epic failure on this minister's part and an epic failure that is systemic of this Labor government.

Instead of the minister coming in here and saying, “We need to do better. This is what led to the problem and this is what we are doing to fix it,” he comes in here and says, “Let’s move the goalposts to something that we can actually meet. Let’s not fix the problem. Let’s not address the underlying issue. Let’s simply throw money at it and move the goalposts.” That is appalling.

The minister has also failed to explain what happens when an ambulance is not deployed to a call. I note that the Ambulance Service is performing well in meeting its response times for jobs that it is deployed to, but when an ambulance is not available my understanding is that it often refers to our other emergency services, particularly our ACT Fire & Rescue crews, to respond as first-aid responders to an emergency call.

What impact is the under-resourcing of ambulance services having? It is shifting work to another emergency service, to work not in their core area but instead to bolster the inadequacies of this minister’s performance in managing the Ambulance Service. We have an ambulance service that is 41.5 per cent of the time below its minimum staffing resource, putting an additional burden on to the fire services.

I know a number of people that work in both specialties and they are good people. They work hard and they see it not just as a job but as a vocation. They go over and above to serve the community that they represent in their roles. They will always do the best job that they humanly possibly can because they know people’s lives are in the balance. But when they are not given the support by ministers and the government as a whole to be properly resourced, to be properly equipped to do their jobs effectively, that is letting the community down to a monumental standard.

The minister has made a decision to hide behind the smoke and mirrors of extra money and moving the goalposts without actually taking any responsibility for his shortcomings, without explaining to this Assembly and without giving this Assembly the respect that it deserves by actually submitting himself to some scrutiny and explaining why things are not performing as they should. By his own metric, he seeks to use the numbers, reject the motion, amend it to suit himself and hide behind the moving of goalposts and simply throwing more taxpayers’ money at a problem that is systemic and that is not going to be fixed.

Question put:

That **Mrs Jones’s** amendment to **Mr Gentleman’s** amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 9

Noes 12

Miss C Burch  
Mr Coe  
Mrs Jones  
Mrs Kikkert  
Ms Lawder  
Ms Lee

Mr Milligan  
Mr Parton  
Mr Wall

Mr Barr  
Ms J Burch  
Ms Cheyne  
Ms Cody  
Ms Fitzharris  
Mr Gentleman

Ms Le Couteur  
Mr Pettersson  
Mr Ramsay  
Mr Rattenbury  
Mr Steel  
Ms Stephen-Smith

Amendment negatived.

**MRS JONES** (Murrumbidgee) (12.13): I find it disappointing that the party who are supposed to represent the wellbeing of workers and who will put that out at every opportunity will vote against a measure to explain to the workers of ACTAS, our Ambulance Service, how it is that we came to a position where their lives are so untenable in their own work that they are calling out for help from the opposition. It is interesting that yet again the Greens are in lock step behind the government in helping them to hide the reasons why they are failing and not explaining themselves properly to the community.

We are not here because we are some kind of gods and goddesses. We are here because we are elected by the people to serve them. It would be good of the minister to actually pay attention to the rights of the people of this community, to know when the government is failing them, to know why that has occurred and to explain, to apologise and to commit to fixing the problems that we have in our ambulance service.

I reiterate that this problem is not a problem that I have created or that I have formulated for some sort of political benefit. This is something that has been brought to me by the men and women in the Ambulance Service. It has been brought to me clearly because they do not think that anyone on the other side will listen to them. That is a damning situation.

As Mr Wall pointed out, when an ambulance is not available the first responders are the fire service. I know this, for example, from having had a conversation just this week with people at Raiders Weston Club. When they recently called an ambulance for someone who was having medical difficulties in their facility, the fire service turned up. Good for them that they had someone available to help them, but it is another example.

I would also like to draw the minister's attention to the fact that he has stated in his answer that, because time lines are clearly being met, there is not too much being asked of employees in this service. That clearly is not true. They are only being met because of the very good nature of the people who work in this area. I implore you to consider their wellbeing a little more carefully than has happened to this point.

I am pleased to hear that there will be additional recruitment rounds. I hope that we will see an easing of the problem. I am convinced that the government will find a way of measuring their own achievements that makes it look less bad for them, but I still think that there is a wide gap in this debate, which is an explanation as to how we got to this position in the first place. In closing, I am sad to see that politics has won out over good workforce management. I hope we will see a resolution to it. I am sorry to see the government covering up their own mistakes again.

**Mr Gentleman's** amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **Health—investment and planning**

**MS CHEYNE** (Ginninderra) (12.16): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes the ACT Government's commitment to meeting the health and wellbeing needs for Canberrans now, as well as into the future, including through the following initiatives:
  - (a) the 2017-18 ACT Budget investment of \$1.6 billion for health care and wellbeing;
  - (b) improving timeliness and access to emergency health care through the \$23 million Emergency Department expansions;
  - (c) \$6.3 million for elective surgery procedures to help patients access treatment within recommended timeframes;
  - (d) for the sixth year in a row, ACT Ambulance Service response times are the best in the country and will be boosted by recruitment of 24 additional paramedics, as well as two new ambulances, in addition to the recruitment of 11 paramedics currently underway;
  - (e) \$12.4 million to build a new primary health care centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans in the inner south for which planning is already underway;
  - (f) \$1.5 million for new grants to incentivise more bulk-billing services in Canberra's south, complementing local primary care health services;
  - (g) \$3.4 million for two additional mobile dental vans to provide for better dental care;
  - (h) \$4 million in new resources specifically for preventative health initiatives in addition to establishing Year 7 health checks for students and new school based immunisation programs;
  - (i) establishment of a three year homebirth trial recognising the role of individual choice in safe birthing options;
  - (j) establishing a clinical genomics service in collaboration with Australian National University;
  - (k) \$436 000 over three years for participating in Molecular Screening and Therapeutics (MoST) Trial, a rare cancer treatment trial;
  - (l) participation in the Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis HIV prevention trial;
  - (m) upgrades to the helipad at The Canberra Hospital (TCH) in 2017;
  - (n) improving inpatient access to medical imaging and wait times;
  - (o) investment to increase and develop the ACT Health workforce including \$36 million for more nurses and a targeted approach to attracting specialists;
  - (p) operational efficiency improvements within the ACT Health Directorate to increase capacity to deliver health services and minimise patient wait times; and
  - (q) the dedication of the ACT Health workforce to strive to deliver excellent health outcomes for Canberrans through the efficient delivery of services across our health settings;

- (2) further notes the ACT Government focus on investing in evidence-based mental health and suicide prevention services, with \$23.8 million provided for mental health initiatives in the 2017-18 ACT Budget, including:
  - (a) \$2.9 million to establish a new Office for Mental Health to coordinate the delivery of mental health services;
  - (b) \$13.8 million to deliver new rehabilitation beds at the Dhulwa Mental Health Unit; \$5.3 million to invest in a range of targeted programs and services to improve the mental health of Canberrans in the community, including Headspace and the Detention Exit Outreach Program; \$1.8 million to reduce the incidences of suicide in our community through funding for the Black Dog Institute's Life Span Suicide Prevention Program; and
  - (c) expansion of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service Consultation and Liaison Service at TCH to provide services seven days per week;
- (3) further notes the activity underway through the Territory-wide Health Services Framework to plan for the delivery of health services to:
  - (a) meet current demand and future population growth;
  - (b) deliver better coordinated, integrated care which is patient-centred;
  - (c) create specialty service centres to coordinate across the continuum of care;
  - (d) leverage the expertise of health stakeholders and the community; and
  - (e) develop a framework for patient care navigators who assist patients with chronic and complex health conditions; and
- (4) calls on the ACT Government to continue its significant infrastructure investment and planning taking place to ensure we have the right services to meet demand and population growth now and into the future, including through:
  - (a) \$95.3 million for infrastructure improvements and maintenance through the Upgrading and Maintaining ACT Health Assets project;
  - (b) opening of Canberra's first dedicated rehabilitation hospital in 2018 with \$16.1 million in the 2017-18 Budget to ensure it is open and ready to care for patients from 2018;
  - (c) establishing the new \$500 million Surgical Procedures and Interventional Radiology and Emergency Centre at TCH;
  - (d) \$3.3 million to undertake a scoping study into the health service and infrastructure requirements for outpatient and hospital-based care on the north side;
  - (e) opening the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm to provide support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people affected by drug and alcohol;
  - (f) \$70 million expansion of the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children;
  - (g) \$14 million for new nurse-led walk-in Centres in Gungahlin and the Weston Creek region, as well as a health centre in the inner north;

- (h) upgrades to the Dickson Health Centre through the 2016-17 Budget; and
- (i) \$17.3 million for significant upgrades to acute aged care and cancer facilities at TCH.

Canberra is growing—faster than anywhere else in the country, in fact. Our population is sitting at around 409,000 and growing by 600 people a year. The trend is set to continue, and it is hardly surprising. With excellent work and study opportunities, thriving arts and hospitality scenes and some of the country's most beautiful landscapes on our doorstep, Canberra is an incredible place to live. It is little wonder that people are moving here in droves and staying here to raise families.

Of course, one of the most important government services to support the safety and health of our region is our health system. We are a great place to live in that regard, too. Canberra is one of the healthiest cities in Australia. We have the highest life expectancy, our kids have the equal lowest obesity rates, we have a lower incidence of nearly all cancers and we lead the nation in immunisation coverage across all age groups. When someone in our community does happen to get sick, they can call on our world-class health system to help them get better.

Last year ACT Health treated over 100,000 patients, and our services are seeing great improvements. ED waiting times are decreasing and the number of GPs that bulk-bill is increasing. The number of hospital beds in the ACT has increased significantly over recent years and we have more nurses, more midwives and more medical practitioners per head of population than the national average.

We are dedicated to bringing about even more improvements in health care for our community. That is why the ACT government is investing in an innovative and effective healthcare system that will serve the growing Canberra community now and into the future. Our health system is based on a strong network of health infrastructure to ensure all Canberrans have access to the day-to-day medical care that they need, as well as world-class hospital services for more complex issues. We are improving existing facilities, opening new health services and reducing wait times to better serve the Canberra community.

We will invest \$95.3 million in infrastructure improvements and maintenance through the upgrading and maintaining ACT Health assets project. This significant commitment of funds clearly recognises the importance of ensuring that our existing infrastructure is properly looked after and continues to perform at the highest level. The government is also committed to bringing in new technology and resources to Canberra to ensure our health system keeps pace with community expectations and medical advancements.

I am extremely proud of the progress we are making in building the \$212 million UC public hospital, delivering world-class rehabilitation health services in my electorate. The hospital will be Canberra's first dedicated rehabilitation hospital, encompassing both physical and mental rehabilitation services. Construction of the hospital is at full steam and we committed \$16.1 million in this year's budget to ensure the hospital is ready to open its doors later this year. I was delighted to visit it a

few months ago. I have had so many comments from around the electorate about not only what a great facility it will be but also how well it fits in with the surrounding landscape.

The Canberra Hospital will also be getting significant upgrades. It will be home to the new \$500 million surgical procedures and interventional radiology and emergency centre—SPIRE. This transformative facility will enable the continued delivery of world-class health services as our population grows. SPIRE will deliver more hospital beds, more elective and day surgery spaces and state-of-the-art surgical, procedural and imaging facilities.

I could go on, and I will. There is \$70 million to expand the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children, \$17.3 million for significant upgrades to acute aged care and cancer facilities at the Canberra Hospital, and upgrades to the helipad at Canberra Hospital last year. Our investment in hospital infrastructure has been quite staggering.

But it does not stop there. Many of us—touch wood—only need to be admitted to a hospital a few times in our lives. In those instances it is comforting to know that we are being treated at the highest possible standard, with access to the very best facilities. However, it is just as important that when we do become quite unwell or our kids come off second best in an adventure on the playground we have easy access to affordable and effective health care.

From my own personal experience, I can attest to the wonders of nurse-led walk-in centres in such instances. Offering free, high-quality health care without an appointment, nurse-led walk-in centres fill the gap between the first-aid kit and the GP for minor illness or injury. The nurse-led centres in Belconnen and Tuggeranong have proven extremely effective in supporting community healthcare needs and taking the pressure off our GP and hospital systems.

While I have not come off second best in the playground, I have certainly had to be there for a range of things, including strep throat, and I have always been seen very quickly and very professionally. I actually look forward to going there because I know how smooth and easy it is. We want more Canberrans to have easy access to these straightforward and effective walk-in centres. We have committed \$14 million to open new nurse-led walk-in centres in the Gungahlin and Weston Creek regions, as well as a healthcare centre in the inner north.

After my own experience with the Belconnen walk-in centre, I have been singing its praises to constituents and friends. I even recommended to someone on Twitter the other day that that might be where they would like to go next time, after they had a less than great private experience. I am genuinely excited for more Canberrans to have the benefit of a walk-in centre servicing their suburb.

A world-class healthcare system is about more than just building some equipment, though. It is characterised by the quality of the workforce who care for and treat our patients. It is underpinned by an attitude of innovation and creativity that supports and rewards medical developments so that our community has access to cutting edge treatments.

We are living in the age of information and technology, and nowhere can that have a greater impact than in the health sphere. In the ACT we are embracing future technologies and committing funds to support pioneering medical research. It is hard to believe but we are already living in a time when, for a couple of hundred dollars, you can send your spit away to have your genome mapped. Within a couple of weeks you can find out full ancestry information and genetic predispositions. It is mind-boggling, but it is also only in its early stages. It is exciting to look forward to a future when genome mapping moves from identifying risk factors to pinpointing troublesome gene expressions and perhaps even allowing gene mutations to be corrected. Medicine could also be fully personalised for a person's genetic make-up. We can only begin to imagine.

It is an awe-inspiring thought, but we will not get there unless we support our medical professionals and our medical researchers now to bridge the gap to that future. The ACT government is doing just that. We have established a clinical genomics service, in collaboration with the ANU, which seeks to cure complex diseases by sequencing a patient's genome and providing targeted treatment.

We have also recently announced our participation in the molecular screening therapeutics trial for rare, incurable cancers. Under this trial, patients in the ACT suffering from rare cancers will benefit from a trial of cutting-edge personalised treatment, thanks to a new partnership between the Canberra Region Cancer Centre and the world-class Garvan Institute of Medical Research in Sydney.

The ACT government is proud to invest \$436,000 over three years in the trial. The trial will commence early this year and close to 100 patients will be able to participate. Under the trial, eligible participants will be able to access therapeutic medicines that are targeted to their specific genetic information. We know that the use of such new, targeted drugs leads to higher response rates, fewer side effects and better outcomes than traditional methods. We want to explore these methods for our community.

This type of precision treatment is poised to revolutionise medicine, and we are making sure that Canberra is at the forefront of these developments. These will not only benefit our patients but also provide opportunities for our health professionals to work on the cutting edge of medicine, making Canberra an even more attractive place to work, live and stay.

As I mentioned earlier, the quality of our healthcare system rests on the shoulders of the men and women who staff the wards of our hospitals, treat our community in suburban health facilities and work in our labs looking for the next breakthrough. The value of their skill, compassion and tireless efforts to serve the Canberra community cannot be understated. As our city grows, we must continue to support our health professionals and ensure that our medical facilities are adequately staffed, for the benefit of both our community and the health staff who serve them. That is why the ACT government is investing in increasing and developing the ACT Health workforce, including \$36 million for more nurses.



Canberra is thriving. I know I say this all the time, but it is true. We are set to see significant population growth over the coming years. We are investing heavily in our health system now, to make sure that we can continue to deliver the highest quality health care for Canberrans. We are getting ahead. We are upgrading and improving our existing infrastructure. We are building new, cutting-edge facilities to provide more specialised treatment options. We are investing in pioneering research to bring the future of medicine to our city. And we are investing in our health workforce to make sure we have the numbers to properly serve the Canberra community and to provide exciting opportunities for staff to spearhead medical advancements.

There is so much activity underway throughout the whole ACT to meet and serve the health and wellbeing needs of Canberrans now and into the future. There have been significant achievements to date, and I think it is pretty clear from my speech that we have much more to look forward to.

*Debate interrupted in accordance with standing order 74 and the resumption of the debate made an order of the day for a later hour.*

**Sitting suspended from 12.28 to 2.30 pm.**

## **Questions without notice**

### **Planning—housing choices**

**MR COE:** My question is to the Minister for Planning and Land Management. Minister, in your discussion paper on housing choices, you have asserted that Canberrans can no longer aspire to a suburban block and implied that Canberrans are now embracing a compact Canberra and a multi-unit high density residential lifestyle. Minister, why are you ignoring your own survey which said that 91 per cent of residents clearly want to move into a dwelling on its own block?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Mr Coe for his question. The housing choices discussion paper is a very important step in looking at the way Canberra can move to being a more compact city with more focus on what future Canberrans want to live in. It is important that we have this discussion with the Canberra community.

In regard to the detailed question Mr Coe asked about the survey, the survey was responded to with comments from the public saying that they wanted change for residential zones in the ACT. It is important that we take that back to the community and talk to the community through the housing discussion paper, particularly in the collaborative way we can do that through the collaborative hub and the discussions that we have had with community councils, for example.

**MR COE:** Minister, why are you overriding people's residential preferences by saying that most Canberrans want to live in high density blocks when it is clearly not the case in your own survey?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** When we did the statement of planning intent, we went to the whole of Canberra and talked about future living for the ACT. We had 26 workshops right across the ACT, with different demographics. All of those indicated they wanted to see a denser Canberra, as I mentioned earlier. With that, and with quite a wide demographic, from elderly groups to younger demographics, all of them wanted to see less greenfields development and more densification for the city. We are responding to that, and we have gone out with the housing choices discussion paper to hear further about what the Canberra community wants to see.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, what will you do to help Canberrans realise their dream, as stated in the Winton survey, of having a detached house in which to raise a family?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I will not pre-empt what the housing choices survey and workshops come out with. But what we are seeing so far are very different aspirations for living in the territory. There are many people, as Mr Parton has just said—and I welcome him to the planning portfolio—who want to live in single residential detached dwellings, but there are many others who want to live in denser accommodation, indeed, in apartment-style accommodation. But there are also many others that want to live in the missing middle, and those are the townhouse-style or row-style accommodations that we see in other cities.

With the workshops for the housing choices discussion paper, we hope to see the Canberra community come back with more detail, working with us on the future of housing in the ACT.

### **Recycling—container deposit scheme**

**MS LE COUTEUR:** My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services and relates to the ACT container deposit scheme. New South Wales media reports that containers were ineligible for collection due to strict requirements that containers be empty, uncrushed and unbroken and have their original label attached and readable. Will these requirements also apply to containers under the ACT scheme?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I thank Ms Le Couteur for the question and look forward to the introduction of the container deposit scheme later on this year. Yes, as I have stated on a number of occasions, it is very important that we have a container deposit scheme here that aligns with the New South Wales scheme. But it also has to meet the specific requirements in the ACT. On the question of the cans themselves, yes, we will be following the New South Wales scheme.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** How will the cost to the—I am not sure of the right terminology—the return agent be paid? Who will in fact bear that cost?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Of course it is part of wider reforms around product stewardship which we see right across the country in a number of different industries. That is some work that is underway at the moment. It has been significant. There has been both public consultation and very targeted stakeholder consultation. With both the network operator and the scheme coordinator, work is continuing to identify precisely that

mechanism to do that. Of course it will be a 10c refund to those people who are returning the container.

**MS CHEYNE:** Minister, what are the benefits for the territory under the scheme?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I thank Ms Cheyne for the question because this is a scheme that will benefit the ACT as it has benefited South Australia for many years, and many people in New South Wales are also looking forward to this. It has a number of benefits. One is to take a significant stream of litter out of our environment. Something that so many people right across our community often speak to me about is littering in our community, and they see clearly a number of particular containers that are the main cause of this littering.

*Mr Wall interjecting—*

**MS FITZHARRIS:** It will have an impact on the litter in our environment and will also have an environmental benefit for the—

**Ms Cheyne:** On a point of order, Madam Speaker, I would like to hear the answer to my question.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you, Ms Cheyne. I think she is referring to your interjections, Mr Wall, so can you cease them, thank you. Minister, you have a minute left.

**MS FITZHARRIS:** In addition to the public amenity benefits there are also significant environmental benefits through those containers no longer being in the public litter stream and clogging up our waterways and our parks. In some cases they potentially pose a danger to users of our waterways and parks. It also has significant benefit for community groups. As we have seen in South Australia over a number of decades, they have benefited greatly from the scheme. They use the scheme as a fundraising opportunity and community-building activity. It is an important source of fundraising for community groups.

New South Wales is also benefiting from the scheme. I see today that there is a call from the opposition to have more vending machines available across New South Wales so more people can participate in the scheme. More people in the community want to participate in the scheme. There is a call for it in New South Wales because more communities right across New South Wales want access to this scheme.

Of course, it is also an important part of product stewardship and industries taking responsibility for their waste. *(Time expired.)*

### **Planning—affordable housing**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Minister for Planning and Land Management. Minister, the *Canberra Times* recently reported: “Canberrans flocking to Queanbeyan as rent prices surge”. The same report observed a “massive influx of Canberrans at inspections” over the border. Another report said that rents skyrocketed eight per cent

in a year. Minister, why are you pursuing policies that are making it increasingly difficult to live in Canberra unless you are on a certain income?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I refute the allegation in the question. The simple fact is that people are not flocking across the border.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, how many people do you estimate have been compelled to buy or rent outside of—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Parton, I had trouble hearing your first question because of your colleagues. I would ask: can we hear your supplementary? Thank you.

**MR PARTON:** I am sorry; I tend to be a little soft. Minister, how many people do you estimate have been compelled to buy or rent outside Canberra due to your government's policies?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** None. We see population growth in the ACT of some 7,000 people. That is our population growth. The government is also pursuing a land release agenda of 4,000 per year. So we are well prepared for population growth in the ACT. I cannot see why people would want to go across the border when we have a fantastic city to live in. We have accommodation that is affordable, and house prices are affordable, too. If you look at the prices in New South Wales, Madam Speaker, you will see that some are far more expensive than we see in the suburbs where you and I live in Tuggeranong, for example.

**MR COE:** Minister, what modelling has the government done with regard to the foreign tax that has now been placed on foreign investment here in the ACT with regard to the impact it will have on the private rental market?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I do not have the detailed modelling in front of me but I will get hold of it and present it back to the Assembly.

### **ACT Health—hospital capacity**

**MRS DUNNE:** My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. Minister, you advised the Assembly through answers to questions on notice that the Canberra Hospital was continuously over 90 per cent full during the months of July, August and September 2017. You also informed us that the hospital was at alert level 3 continuously for the months of July, August and September 2017, meaning that there was disruption of critical services during that period. Minister, has the hospital been at alert level 3 at any stage between 1 October 2017 and today?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I will take the question on notice.

**MRS DUNNE:** While you are taking that question on notice, I presume you will have to take this one on notice, because you are not briefed. Has Calvary Hospital been at alert level 3 at any stage between 1 July and today?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I will take that question on notice.

**MR WALL:** Minister, how often was the Canberra Hospital over 90 per cent capacity between 1 October 2017 and today? I assume that is on notice as well.

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I will take that on notice; that is a very detailed question.

### **Canberra Hospital—patient safety**

**MRS JONES:** My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. Minister, I refer to a recent case where a woman successfully sued the ACT government for compensation. She had presented to the Canberra Hospital emergency department suffering from salmonella poisoning in December 2013. A drunken man was placed unsupervised in a bed next to her. The man sexually assaulted the woman after she took medication and fell asleep. Justice Elkaim ruled that “the warnings to the defendant stemming from his conduct upon and after his admission were such that he simply should not have been placed in the same ward as the plaintiff”. Minister, given that the man’s behaviour was a clear warning sign that he was a danger to other patients, why was he placed, unsupervised, in a bed next to another patient and, in particular, a woman?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I note the resolution of this case occurred very recently. I will take the question on notice, knowing that it has been the subject of a recently completed legal case.

**MRS JONES:** Minister, what duty of care does ACT Health owe to patients to treat them in a safe environment free from foreseeable harm?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Clearly ACT Health has a strong duty of care and upholds that with great professionalism and seriousness. Clearly in this incident in 2013 I recall where that did not happen, and it has been the subject of resolution in the courts recently.

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, what have you done to satisfy yourself that a similar event could not happen again at the Canberra Hospital or are you just simply unbriefed?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Advice from my directorate is that all measures have been taken to ensure that this cannot happen again.

### **Budget—government investment**

**MS CHEYNE:** Chief Minister, the government has just delivered the budget update, which I see includes even more new investment in city-building infrastructure. How is the government investing for Canberra’s growth?

**MR BARR:** I thank Ms Cheyne for the question. Members would be aware that the ACT’s population growth has been well in excess of other states and territories in recent times, and that has led to a need to contemplate a population of half a million

about five to 10 years sooner than earlier demographic models might have predicted. This has necessitated a significant infrastructure program to meet that future population growth and to ensure that the quality of life that Canberrans enjoy—that is, the best in the world—is maintained and, indeed, enhanced where possible.

We have made significant investments in transport infrastructure, our health system, our education system and community and municipal services and infrastructure in order to meet the needs of not only the existing 410,000 residents as measured by the ABS in the 2016 census but looking ahead over the next five to 10 years. With population growth of somewhere between 7,000 and 10,000 a year expected, we will very quickly reach half a million people.

A variety of priority infrastructure projects has been funded in the 2017-18 budget and, in some instances, projects are brought forward or feasibility and forward design accelerated through the budget update. As we move into the 2018 budget round and with an expected increase in the rate of population growth with 10,000 new jobs created in the city last year and the very strong correlation between the strength of Canberra's labour market and the rate of population growth, there is every reason to anticipate very strong need for infrastructure spending in the coming decade. We are making the investments now as well as restoring the territory's fiscal position. (*Time expired.*)

**MS CHEYNE:** Chief Minister, how are the government's investments in Canberra contributing to a strengthening economy and more job opportunities for Canberrans?

**MR BARR:** We saw economic growth as measured by GSP of 4.6 per cent in the 2016-17 fiscal year. Jobs growth was in that order as well. This, as I say, is expected to continue over the short to medium term. Ten thousand new jobs for Canberrans during 2017 is a significant achievement for the territory economy. We are now at a point where, with the lowest unemployment rate in the nation, the number of job vacancies is roughly equal to the number of unemployed people in the city at this point in time.

There is no doubt that we are going to see skill shortages in some areas and we are going to see some upward pressure on wages in certain industries. That, I think, is a very positive thing for aggregate demand in the economy. We certainly look forward to seeing some wage increases. The biggest employer in the city would contribute to that, and certainly should contribute to that, through the successful conclusion, one would hope, of some better EBAs. We look forward to finalising our own, with our workforce, in the first part of this year.

**MR STEEL:** Chief Minister, why is delivering a balanced budget important to the ACT's capacity to continue investing as our city grows?

**MR BARR:** The ACT has a very strong balance sheet, being one of only three states and territories in the nation with a AAA credit rating, and we do pay very close attention, in the setting of the territory's budget each year, to the strength of our balance sheet, our net financial liabilities and of course the territory's debt profile.

The single largest component of that, as members would be aware, is the billion dollar loan that we were forced to take from the commonwealth government when they abrogated their responsibility to Mr Fluffy home owners. The people of the ACT, through the territory government, have borne that responsibility solely. That is a very significant burden for the people of the ACT. The commonwealth having walked away from that responsibility when all this occurred under their responsibility pre self-government is disappointing.

Nevertheless, we are continuing to manage both the pay down of that debt back to the commonwealth as well as a record infrastructure program for the city: investment in public transport, in health infrastructure, the SPIRE Centre, the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children. We are making the big and significant long-term investments to support this growing community and we will continue to do so through the budget update and through this year's budget and future budgets in this parliamentary term.

### **ACT Health—treatment delays**

**MISS C BURCH:** My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. Minister, I refer to an article in the *Canberra Times* of 31 January 2018 about long waits for pain management assistance in the ACT. The article featured an interview with an endometriosis sufferer who said that she waited two years for her first appointment with the pain management unit and long waits for follow-up appointments. She states, "If you don't have money then your treatment options are very limited. Basically my treatment is defined by my bank account." Minister, why do women with endometriosis and other people with painful conditions have to wait so long before they can get an appointment with the pain management unit?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I thank Miss Burch for the question. Certainly, that did appear to be a long wait for the pain management unit. But it is important to note that the pain management unit is working very hard to bring some of those wait times down.

**MISS C BURCH:** Minister, what is the government doing to assist low income earners to access the pain management assistance they need when they need it?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** The government is making many efforts to assist low income people in particular to be able to access healthcare services. The pain management unit is working on new procedures and is also working closely with primary healthcare providers so that pain management issues can be managed in a number of different ways. Having the territory-wide health services framework is an important part of making sure that all the relevant parts of our health system are working closely together, from our nurse walk-in centres to our GPs, our community healthcare centres and our hospitals, as well as our important outpatient clinics such as the pain management unit. Work is well underway on the territory-wide health services framework.

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, what actions were taken regarding pain management prior to the up-scheduling of codeine on 1 February this year to address the short-term issues created by that change in scheduling?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** The codeine up-scheduling was a decision that I supported. I note that significant funding was provided to the Pharmacy Guild from the commonwealth government to have a significant education and awareness campaign through community pharmacists, who are often clearly on the front line of people seeking medication, whether prescription or non-prescription. There has certainly been a significant discussion with community healthcare providers, community pharmacists, GPs and pain specialists.

One of the significant findings from the Therapeutic Goods Administration in its decision which came into effect earlier this month was about the efficacy of using codeine for pain management. There was significant national debate about the efficacy of codeine in particular, and the ability of all healthcare providers to let their patients know that they have other options, whether that be prescriptions or other pain management strategies.

### **Seniors—rebate changes**

**MS LAWDER:** Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Veterans and Seniors. Minister, on page 65 of the 2017-18 ACT budget review, tabled yesterday, there are changes identified to the seniors spectacles scheme. The change will deliver a saving of only \$180,000 over three years. Given that the age of eligibility for the seniors card has also recently increased, seniors in the ACT may well feel that they are being hard done by. Minister, what consultation was undertaken prior to the decision to wind back the spectacles scheme, and with which organisations did you consult?

**MR RAMSAY:** I thank Ms Lawder for the question and I welcome her to the portfolio as the shadow minister for seniors. I note that the spectacles subsidy scheme is actually not something that sits within the seniors portfolio; it is something that sits within the treasury portfolio. However, I draw to your attention that there have been not only changes in relation to the spectacles subsidy, which has for a number of years, going back long before I was a member here, been known to—

**Ms Lawder:** Point of order, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Resume your seat, Mr Ramsay.

**Ms Lawder:** The question related to what consultation was undertaken and with which organisations. I ask that the minister respond directly to the question.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Can we stop the clock while we go through the point of order. Chief Minister on the point of order.

**Mr Barr:** I am not on the point of order. The question is actually in my portfolio, so I will assume the responsibility for answering.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Are we changing the responder to the question?

**Mr Barr:** I assume—



**Mrs Dunne:** If we want an answer, yes.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Yes.

**MR BARR:** The consultation on the concessions program was undertaken, as members would be aware, I think in 2015 and 2016. It involved consultation broadly across the Canberra community.

I would make two statements in relation to this matter. Firstly, there is no change to the spectacles subsidy scheme, which provides up to \$200 once every two years to eligible ACT residents. But to qualify for the scheme, the ACT resident must hold a Centrelink or DVA pensioner concession card or healthcare card. The seniors spectacles scheme was a non-means-tested scheme that provided a seniors cardholder, so a non-means-tested cardholder, with a \$35 rebate towards the cost of spectacles once every two years.

We have maintained the targeted measure that pays \$200 towards spectacles for those who are Centrelink and DVA concession cardholders. What has been abolished is a non-means-tested scheme that provided a \$35 rebate once every two years.

**MS LAWDER:** Treasurer, how many seniors will be affected by the changes to the seniors spectacles scheme?

**MR BARR:** A relatively small number, given the size of the saving. The concessions review sought to target concessions at those who need them, and who qualified for those concessions by virtue of their income status. Non-means-tested concessions such as this one were recommended to be phased out.

**MISS C BURCH:** Treasurer, why is it that your government is always able to find money for pet projects and yet you are unable to provide basic services and support to the most vulnerable within our community?

**MR BARR:** This was a non-means-tested program. The government provides and targets its support to those who need it most. For the new member's benefit, the budget update provided a \$50 annual boost to the utilities concession for those lowest income Canberrans. What we have sought to do through the detailed analysis of the entire ACT concessions program is to better target those resources to those who need them most.

I would have thought that the new member, in light of her inaugural speech yesterday, where she spoke at length about the need to better target government spending, would in fact support a measure like this.

### **Waste—green bins**

**MR STEEL:** My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Can the minister update the Assembly on the take-up rate for the government's green bins program in Weston Creek and Kambah?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I thank Mr Steel very much for his question about the take-up rates for the green bins program in his electorate. I am very pleased to let members know that, with respect to registrations, in addition to Weston Creek and Kambah, Tuggeranong residents can now also receive the green bin service, which opened ahead of schedule last year. Similarly to the pilot in Weston Creek, the service has been very popular with Tuggeranong residents as well, with over 9,000 residents registering for the service. The initial delivery of green waste bins to Tuggeranong residents commenced in January, and the service started in late January.

As you know, Madam Speaker, as both you and Mr Steel have wonderful gardens, there are well-established gardens in Weston Creek, Kambah and Tuggeranong. I am pleased that we can make it easier for the community to dispose of their green waste in a responsible way. I was also very pleased to note that the territory has extended its contract with a local company, Corkhill Brothers, for the collection and processing of green waste, and associated services such as customer service.

**MR STEEL:** Can the minister update the Assembly on progress towards the planned city-wide rollout of green bins?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Certainly I am very happy to update the Assembly on the proposed schedule for the city-wide rollout of green bins. Of course members would be aware that the government has committed to rolling out these green bins to all suburbs in the ACT. We received very positive feedback from the community on this great service and the benefits that it provides.

The pilot kicked off in Weston Creek and Kambah in April last year with more than 8,000 households taking up the offer of a green bin. We used the insights learned from the initial pilot to inform the city-wide rollout of the service. This commitment is running ahead of schedule and every suburb in the ACT will have access to a green bin by mid-2019. This means that we will complete delivery of our 2016 election commitment a year ahead of schedule.

Belconnen residents will be the next to receive green bins, with the Belconnen service commencing later this year. The remainder of Canberra will have their bins from July 2019, including suburbs in the inner north, inner south, Hall, Gungahlin and Molonglo.

The procurement for the whole-of-Canberra green bins rollout has started and was published on the Tenders ACT website in early February. The tender is open for six weeks and concludes on 22 March.

**MS ORR:** Minister, what waste management and environmental benefits will the full rollout of green bins provide to the ACT?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary question. Indeed, there are many benefits in having access to a green waste bin: it will save the community both time and money. Residents in Weston Creek and Kambah generated over 1,280 tonnes of garden organic waste collected between April and December last year, with a continuing incredibly low rate of contamination of 0.05 per cent. I thank very

much the residents of Weston Creek and Kambah for being so diligent with green waste and also the service providers for doing such a good job in educating the community. I am sure the low contamination rates will continue in Tuggeranong along with residents ensuring they place their garden organic waste in their green waste bins.

Access to a green waste bin will save families time and money while also having a number of environmental benefits. The new bins can help divert some of the 5,000 tonnes of garden waste going to landfill each year. Waste collected from green bins will be processed, recycled and made available through commercial providers. Garden waste that is sent to landfill can generate methane greenhouse gases as it decomposes underground. The impact of methane is considered more than 25 times more damaging to the atmosphere than carbon dioxide.

### **Education—enrolment projections**

**MS LEE:** My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development. Minister, in respect of school enrolment projections you are quoted in the *Canberra Times* of 13 February 2018, yesterday, as saying:

You can project as far as you can but sometimes human behaviour can be a bit fickle, so you do as much planning as you can to take into account what you think's going to happen then you have to make adjustments along the way ...

Minister, given consistent increases in enrolment numbers in Gungahlin schools, why did you or your directorate not plan for additional permanent classrooms?

**MS BERRY:** The ACT government has made commitments on expanding schools in Gungahlin. Four of those schools were included in that commitment. Three of those schools' expansions have been completed and one is on its way to completion. What I said and what I was quoted as saying in the *Canberra Times* is true: you plan as much as you can for increased growth within different areas of the city.

But if the opposition is taking a view that the government should not be investing in areas of growth in the ACT, like in the north of Canberra and in Belconnen, then I would be happy to see their discussion paper on that.

**MS LEE:** Minister, what role does the twice-yearly school enrolment data play in your projections?

**MS BERRY:** Of course it plays a role, as with any planning that the ACT government takes around school capacity across the city. The data that is taken into account includes the census data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, planning, building work that is happening, people moving into different areas and, of course, school capacity data as well.

**MISS C BURCH:** Minister, how is "fickle human behaviour" having an effect coincidentally across every school in Gungahlin?

**MS BERRY:** Gungahlin is very well known as an area of high population growth, and changes in human behaviour that affect where people are choosing to live is behaviour that I would describe as something that is sometimes hard to predict. The government does what it can to make sure that we meet the needs of the community, including in those growth areas like north Canberra, Gungahlin and Belconnen.

### **Education—reading proficiency**

**MR WALL:** My question is to the minister for education. The progress in international reading literacy report released in December last year showed that the ACT was the only Australian jurisdiction to lose ground. The ACT recorded a greater number of students below the proficiency standard than in the same test five years ago. In contrast, the rest of Australia improved in its performance. The ACT lost the top position in Australia to Victoria. Minister, why is the ACT losing ground when the rest of Australia is gaining ground in reading and literacy?

**MS BERRY:** ACT schools have always held a very good position as far as our numeracy and literacy are concerned. We have always led the country. We still lead the country. The rest of the country is now keeping up. What we want to do now is have a conversation with the community about how we can broaden the horizons of every student and continue to improve on the excellent outcomes of our schools in the ACT.

**MR WALL:** Minister, why are 18 per cent of students rated as low or below standard in reading? What types of students are most likely to be in this category?

**MS BERRY:** I have said on a number of occasions that this data is point-in-time data. It measures a period in time of a child's learning and a specific part of a child's learning. Whilst it is important to have a look at this data, it is more important to have a look even deeper into what children are experiencing in our schools and how we can provide the best possible education, a fuller education that includes English, literacy and numeracy but also—

**Mr Wall:** If she had the literacy to actually interpret the data, she would realise she is doing a rubbish job.

**MS BERRY:** I am very happy to hear Mr Wall again trying to claw back the education portfolio from Ms Lee and continue on this path of making it miserable for kids in schools by testing them every five minutes of the day and then judging them and talking our schools down.

*Mr Wall interjecting—*

**MS BERRY:** We will not do that in the ACT government. We will always talk up our schools in the ACT—

**Mr Gentleman:** Point of order, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Yes, Mr Gentleman.

**Mr Gentleman:** Mr Wall has continually interjected while Minister Berry has been trying to answer his question. I ask that you bring him to order, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I remind members that ministers should be heard in silence or, at worst, in relative silence. Do you have anything else to add, minister?

**MS BERRY:** No thank you.

**MS LEE:** Minister, why is the government failing to act on improving literacy and numeracy, given that national and international studies are consistently showing that the ACT is losing ground?

**MS BERRY:** The ACT government has not failed to act.

### **National Multicultural Festival—service of alcohol**

**MRS KIKKERT:** My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Minister, in an ABC radio interview on 24 January you said that concern over responsible service of alcohol monitoring was one of the reasons for this year's ban on community organisations selling alcohol at the Multicultural Festival. The Liquor Act exempts non-profit organisations with non-commercial liquor permits from this requirement. Why have volunteers from multicultural community organisations been singled out for concerns over potential lack of RSA training when the law clearly allows for this?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Mrs Kikkert for her question and for her ongoing interest in the Multicultural Festival, an interest that I am sure all members of this place share. I am sure that all members will be enjoying the Multicultural Festival this weekend, which will be a fantastic festival.

I want to emphasise that the organising team for the festival has worked very hard over the past couple of years to make the festival as inclusive and as family friendly as possible. It continues to act on feedback not only from stallholders but also from festivalgoers to ensure that the festival is as inclusive a place as possible. In that context, responsible service of alcohol is not only about having a qualification; it is about ensuring that alcohol is served and consumed responsibly across the festival footprint.

We have of course had mixed feedback both from stallholders and from festivalgoers about the atmosphere at the festival. I know that people have talked about the number of arrests made at last year's festival being low. But I do not think that arrests are necessarily the only indication of how we want people to behave at our Multicultural Festival. So this measure has been taken, as I have said many times, in an attempt to ensure—

**Mrs Kikkert:** On a point of order, Madam Speaker, my question refers to why volunteers from multicultural community organisations have been singled out for concerns over potential lack of RSA training when the law clearly allows for this, not raving on about inappropriate things that have nothing to do with the question.

**Ms Berry:** On a point of order, Madam Speaker, I do not know that “raving on” is an acceptable parliamentary description of the minister’s response to the question.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** There are lots of words used. That is probably in the acceptable category, although impolite, so there is no point of order. Minister, you have 30 seconds left if you have anything further to add.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I directly refute the premise of the question that volunteers have been in any way singled out.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Will the ACT government now ban all non-profit community organisations from obtaining non-commercial liquor permits for other Canberra events?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** That question does not relate to my portfolio.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, why did the ACT government decide that a blanket ban on all multicultural community organisations was a better way to address this potential concern rather than allowing Clubs ACT to continue to provide its free RSA training?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** As I have said multiple times in relation to this issue, the decision was taken in relation to response to feedback from a range of stakeholders and it was a decision taken to try to ensure that the festival is as family friendly, as inclusive and as welcoming a place for all Canberrans as possible. It was a decision taken to try to reduce the amount of alcohol available on the footprint. It was one of the decisions that could have been taken in terms of how that it is achieved. We will take feedback from stakeholders following this festival in terms of how this particular decision has been implemented and its impacts and we will consider this again for next year’s festival.

### **ACT Ambulance Service—government support**

**MS ORR:** My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Minister, how is the ACT government supporting our Ambulance Service?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Ms Orr for her interest in emergency services right across the ACT, in particular our Ambulance Service. Our Ambulance Service is the best in the country, as outlined by the report on government services data released last month. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of our paramedics and everyone in the ACT Ambulance Service for the hard work that they do in providing such an excellent service to Canberrans.

The ACT government is committed to supporting the ACT Ambulance Service to continue providing nation-leading ambulance services to the Canberra community. We know that Canberra is growing quickly, so we are already working to invest strongly in the future of the ACT Ambulance Service and keep it up to the high standards that Canberrans rightly expect of their emergency services. In December last year, I announced that the ACT government would fulfil its election commitment for more front-line ambulance resources with the recruitment of 23 new paramedics and two new ambulances. This is in addition to the recruitment of 11 paramedics already underway. This support demonstrates the ACT government's commitment to meeting continued increases in ambulance call-outs while supporting the welfare of front-line employees.

**MS ORR:** Minister, is the support of the ACT government translating into good performance in our ambulance response times?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary. The ACT community can have the highest confidence in the performance of their ambulance service. The support of the ACT government has resulted in strong performance by the ACT Ambulance Service in key measures such as response times and patient satisfaction. For the sixth year in a row ACT Ambulance Service response times are the best in the country according to the latest Productivity Commission report on the delivery of government services.

Patient satisfaction is also important, and the ambulance patient satisfaction survey shows the ACT Ambulance Service consistently meeting community expectations. This is in the face of increasing demand for emergency services in Canberra. These results are a credit to the professionalism and dedication of the women and men of the service and the wider ACT Emergency Services Agency.

**MS CODY:** Minister, how is the ACT government supporting the wellbeing of our individual paramedics?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Ms Cody for her interest in the welfare of our emergency services people. Ensuring that our emergency service employees and volunteers have the right support to do their jobs well and safely remains a top priority for the ACT government. Increased demand and call-outs put pressure on the welfare of our committed ambulance workforce, who, even on a normal day, are called on to respond to difficult and distressing situations which would test most of us.

For this reason the safety and wellbeing of our paramedics is front of mind in ensuring that we appropriately resource our ambulance services. As well as the additional staff and vehicle resources that I have already mentioned today, I am pleased to inform the Assembly that the new manager, welfare programs commenced with the Emergency Services Agency on 13 February. The manager, welfare programs has been tasked with developing a peer support program for ESA. This work will be guided by the experience of a successful similar peer support program developed by the Queensland Ambulance Service. This initiative is one further example of the support the ACT government is providing for our valued emergency services staff.

**Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders—Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm**

**MR MILLIGAN:** My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. The government has spent \$11.7 million on the development of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm. Yesterday you reported during question time that only one program had been conducted at this facility since it opened in early September last year. Minister, why has the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm been used for only 20 days out of the 153 days since it was opened?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I thank Mr Milligan for his question and note, of course, the government's significant investment in the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm. I am disappointed that it took some time to open the bush healing farm, but we were extremely pleased last year. For those people present at the opening of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm, it was a significant moment.

There has been one client group go through the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm but, as I also have advised the Assembly, there is quite an extensive process for application and a number of different groups involved in assessing the applications for the next cohort of clients to go through there.

That work is currently well underway. The second program, due to begin in April, will be another 12-week program. We look forward to the learnings from the first one as well as, as I indicated last year, the involvement of the Healing Foundation, who continue to work with ACT Health on developing the model of care and improving the service provision at the bush healing farm.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, why did you spend \$11.7 million on a building that has been used so rarely?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** We had an investment of \$11.7 million in an exceptional facility. I think that Mr Milligan, who has visited the facility, would agree that it is a beautiful setting. They are wonderful buildings and they allow for us to grow and expand our services over time so that we can reach more and more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our community who need the sorts of services we will be providing more and more of at the bush healing farm.

**MRS DUNNE:** Minister, when are you going to make a decision about providing a residential drug and alcohol treatment facility for the Indigenous community in the ACT?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** As I indicated yesterday, it is part of ongoing discussions with ACT Health.

**Government—ethical contracting**

**MS CODY:** My question is to the Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations. Minister, what steps is the government taking to ensure that the ACT government awards contracts to businesses that meet the highest ethical and labour standards?



**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Ms Cody for the question. The ACT government does recognise that it can play an important role in delivering better outcomes for Canberra workers. That is why the ACT government has committed to delivering a secure local jobs package to provide greater transparency while making clear the government's expectation that the companies it purchases services from are behaving ethically in their dealings with workers and indeed subcontractors.

Too often over recent years we have seen evidence, both locally and nationally, of employers entering into sham contracting arrangements exploiting visa workers and avoiding their industrial workers compensation and taxation obligations. Quite simply, these are not the sorts of employers to whom government should be giving their business. And that is why we have recently launched a public consultation on the design of a secure local jobs package.

The proposed package will streamline existing procurement requirements, create clear requirements for businesses tendering for government work, treat workers fairly and uphold their workplace rights and safety, enhance compliance and enforcement measures through a new unit within government and provide a clear, transparent process for resolving issues that arise with respect to ACT government contracts. The measures introduced in the package will provide the ACT government, as a purchaser of services, with greater assurance that the businesses it contracts with treat their workers fairly and comply with their industrial relations and employment obligations.

This government makes no apologies for standing up for the rights of workers in this city. Canberra is a city with a strong belief in fairness and I think the vast majority of Canberrans would agree that their taxpayer dollars should go to companies that abide by their industrial obligations, take workplace safety seriously and pay workers fairly.

**MS CODY:** Minister, what compliance and enforcement measures are proposed to ensure that these ethical and labour standards are upheld?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Ms Cody for her supplementary question and for her longstanding interest in this matter. While the key focus of the proposed package is working with businesses to ensure that they meet higher ethical and labour standards, the package also includes a range of compliance and enforcement measures which ensure that these standards are upheld.

The package proposes the establishment of a compliance unit within government to oversee, monitor and review the measures introduced. The key role for the unit will be to monitor and report on compliance actions to establish an evidence base for targeting future compliance activities as well as monitoring companies' records for consideration of future tendering opportunities.

The compliance and enforcement mechanisms under the secure local jobs package will leverage off and enhance the existing industrial relations and employment certification strategy—IRE, as it is known. Under the package, an entity will be required to hold an IRE certificate in order to be awarded ACT government contracts for certain categories of contracts, expanding it from the current requirement only in relation to construction.

The secure local jobs package proposes the introduction of a so-called strikes approach whereby businesses would be awarded strikes against their IRE certificate when they have been found to be in breach of industrial relations and employment obligations. This would operate as a deterrent and ensure that there are consequences for businesses that fail to comply with their obligations.

Another important component of the secure local jobs package will be the introduction of clear and transparent processes for the resolution of disputes that arise in relation to government contracts. This will include clear processes for responding to complaints and/or allegations that are raised with respect to breaches of industrial relations conditions and employment obligations.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Minister, how will the code benefit local businesses?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Mr Pettersson for his interest in this matter also. The secure local jobs package will benefit local businesses that do the right thing by their workers by legislating a level playing field for businesses competing for government work. This will mean that unscrupulous businesses will not be able to undercut those businesses that are doing the right thing. Indeed, many of the complaints we receive at the moment about the behaviour of contractors come from other businesses.

Tougher compliance checks will proactively identify businesses seeking to give themselves a competitive advantage by avoiding their industrial relations and employment obligations. The secure local jobs package will also benefit businesses by streamlining existing procurement requirements to make it easier for businesses to bid for government projects as well as providing a clear, transparent process for businesses to resolve issues that arise with respect to contracts.

Further, local businesses will benefit from changes to the IRE certification recognising a business's good record. Under the proposed package, varying time periods for the validity of IRE certificates would be introduced. So the length of an IRE certificate awarded would depend on a contractor's history of compliance with industrial relations and employment obligations. Those who do the right thing will get a longer IRE certificate awarded. The proposed package will also benefit local businesses by recognising those that do more for their workforce through training, enhanced employment participation and health and wellbeing activities.

It is clear that the proposed secure local jobs package will both promote job security and ensure that government contracts are awarded to those companies that meet high labour standards but will also create an efficient, clear and transparent governance regime that is the right thing for businesses who do the right thing by their workers. It is very hard to see what the opposition could object to in that list, and yet they do.

### **Homelessness—government policy**

**MR PETTERSSON:** My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, can you provide the Assembly with an overview of the recent

findings from the report on government services relating to the performance of the ACT's specialist housing and homelessness services?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. The report demonstrates that the ACT government's focus on intervention and prevention in the homelessness sector is helping Canberrans to maintain housing and gain employment or receive training.

It is important to highlight today some of the data that comes out of the report. The ACT has the strongest results in the country; we have been linking employment and education opportunities to those who have been seeking help through the specialist homelessness services. After receiving support, 32 per cent of people seeking assistance were employed or enrolled in educational training, including 26 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is important to note that that support is more than just about providing housing support; it is about making sure that people have other ways that they can get support from these organisations.

This demonstrates that the ACT is doing quite well compared to other jurisdictions in helping people to get into housing, and to maintain that housing as well. The results show that this coordinated approach to tackling homelessness is working to support some of the most vulnerable people in our community.

The data shows that the ACT is doing well. Of course, at the housing summit and through the conversations that I have had over the past year, we recognise that there are ways that we can improve, and I look forward to continuing to engage with the Canberra community on ways that the ACT government can do that.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Minister, what does the report show about the level of rough sleeping? What services are available to Canberrans who are sleeping rough?

**MS BERRY:** Homelessness comes in many forms but one of the hardest and toughest challenges can be supporting people to make the transition from sleeping rough into some more permanent housing. The ACT provides more homelessness accommodation per head of population than any other jurisdiction, something that we have maintained for many years.

St Vincent de Paul's street to home team actively seeks out and engages with rough sleepers to make sure that they are provided with the support they need. OneLink, the ACT's human services gateway, attends the early morning centre and the Griffin Centre each week to speak to clients and to connect them up to services as well.

It is great to see that we were able to launch those expanded services that were funded by the ACT government late last year. I know that those increased hours will be able to support those people in our community who most need that work.

At the centre of these services are the people: the people who spend all that time doing all that incredibly valuable and challenging work meeting with people and making sure that they are linked up to the correct services to ensure that they are getting the support they need.

**MS CHEYNE:** Minister, what do the results of the report show about the provision of social housing in the ACT?

**MS BERRY:** It is important that this information is shared with members of the Assembly today. Ninety-nine per cent of new allocations of public housing were to households in greatest need. That compares with 74 per cent nationally. Again, the ACT government is leading the way in supporting people in our community who most need it. These are very strong results, particularly the ACT government's commitment to helping those who need housing most, particularly those people who are experiencing homelessness, escaping domestic and family violence and living in unhealthy situations, and people for whom housing is simply unaffordable.

Seventy-five per cent of public housing tenants are satisfied with the assistance that they received from government. This was shown in the national social housing survey, which also had very good results for the ACT government. Compared to 80 per cent and 90 per cent respectively nationally, 89 per cent of people in public housing and 92 per cent of those living in community housing reported that their current location meets their needs. There was also a great improvement in tenant reports about the condition of their homes. This reflects on the effective work that the public housing renewal program is doing as well. The \$600 million investment through the public housing renewal program is building 1,288 new homes. We are already past the halfway mark, which is on track for a 2019 completion.

Members will have noticed the display upstairs, a photographic exhibition done by photographer Hardy Lohse that tells the stories of public housing tenants who have bravely and courageously allowed him into their homes, to share their homes and their experiences as tenants who were part of the tenant relocation program. I encourage members to go up and have a look at the exhibition.

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

## **Health—investment and planning**

Debate resumed.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee) (3.30): I would like to thank Ms Cheyne for bringing this motion forward. It is an inescapable fact that our city is growing, now by just under 7,000 people per year. To ensure that we are a livable city, we need to continue to make sure that we have access to good quality health care when it is needed.

As a Labor government, we are taking the responsible steps to plan, invest and build the hospitals, walk-in-centres and quality healthcare services that our city needs. We are doing so to meet current demand and the future growth of our city and our region. Looking after the good health of our growing city means modernising and expanding upon our quality health system. All across our city, we are doing exactly that, and this motion captures very well the really significant work that is being undertaken by our government in delivering our 10-year health plan that will accommodate the health needs of every Canberran in the future. Whether they were born today, whether they

were raised in this city or whether they just moved here yesterday, all Canberrans will benefit from the investments we are making in their health.

With our growing population comes the need to strengthen our health system into the future. One of the best ways to ensure this is by supporting our highly appreciated medical practitioners. The latest figures from the Productivity Commission's report on government services sees Canberra ahead of all states and territories, with the second highest rate of medical practitioner employment per 100,000 people. Consistently we have seen that our government is committed to introducing new opportunities for medical practitioners to exercise their much-valued skills here in the ACT. We also have a long-term plan to continue to address our medical workforce needs through a targeted workforce attraction strategy, especially for specialists.

We also want to see the general practitioners in our community have the opportunity of providing more affordable and accessible healthcare services to Canberrans. That is why our GP bulk-billing grants, which are now open, will help to deliver on the south side, an area where we know bulk-billing rates are low. The grants, of up to \$350,000, will provide an incentive to general practitioners, psychologists and other allied health care professionals to increase their bulk-billing rates. Through these grants, we are recognising the important role of GPs and allied health professionals in the health system, and we are providing the support necessary to ensure that they can offer affordable health care on the south side.

Woden is home to our regional hospital and many health services. Our government is investing in the expansion of the hospital and modernisation of facilities with the new surgical procedures, interventional radiology and emergency centre, the SPIRE centre. This is a very significant investment in infrastructure in the Woden Valley. While the whole of Canberra benefits, those of us who live near the hospital on the south side have the convenience of being close to the major hospital in our region and the excellent services that it provides to our community, services and facilities that will expand under our government.

The new SPIRE centre will also significantly boost the number of operating theatres at the Canberra Hospital, with dedicated theatres available for elective surgery, more complex procedures, trauma and emergency surgery, and dedicated theatres for maternity, gynaecology and paediatric surgery, which will in turn support our hospital to manage increasing demand and support more surgeries. This will provide increased capacity and allow for better management of emergency and elective surgeries to avoid delays and rescheduling as our community continues to grow.

While we are meeting our targets for the number of elective surgery procedures performed each year as our region grows, there is pressure on our waiting times in the short term. That is why yesterday's announcement that our government is investing \$6.4 million to reduce elective surgery waiting lists is so welcome. We can expect an additional 600 patients to come off the waiting list by the end of this financial year across all categories of elective surgery.

Even without the SPIRE centre being built, the number of hospital beds has increased significantly across the territory. According to the ROGS data, between the

2011-12 financial year and the 2015-16 financial year, the number of hospital beds in the ACT increased significantly, by around 17.8 per cent. The latest available data also revealed that the ACT outperformed the national average of the rate of available hospital beds.

To support the needs of our medical practitioners and growing population, the government is investing in a healthier future for Canberra. By undertaking smart, forward-thinking investments, we will make our already strong healthcare system even better. To help see continued positive trends in the employment of medical practitioners, midway through this year the University of Canberra will see the opening of our University of Canberra rehabilitation and research hospital. This significant health investment will become Canberra's centre of rehabilitation research and education and provide the foundations for research to help future medical practitioners in the ACT and around the world. With the increasing ageing population in the ACT, this is a well-timed and much-needed investment that will see our health system equipped to deal with future capacity and demand.

Canberrans continue to be some of the healthiest people in the country. While, unfortunately, smoking continues to remain a leading cause of preventable illness and death in Australia, the latest figures from the Productivity Commission's ROGS found that 14.8 per cent of adults were daily smokers across Australia, but that Canberrans were still the least likely to smoke, with the lowest proportion of daily smokers aged 18 years and over.

Nonetheless, the government has continued to send a very clear signal to the community and acknowledge the dangers of smoking for our health. After significant community consultation, last year the Chief Minister and the minister for health made the decision to designate public transport waiting areas smoke-free. Our government's decisive and community-informed actions in preventing smoking will continue to support the health system's first-class operation into the future by protecting Canberrans from the harm of preventable illnesses.

Canberrans also continue to live longer than ever. According to the latest statistics, again from ROGS, Canberrans are expected to live to the age of 83 years and two months. To place this into context, we are expected to live longer than people in any other state or territory, and our life expectancy at birth beats the national average by almost a year. Canberrans have consistently provided a high average life expectancy at birth. This is something that comes as little surprise to me, because I hear regularly from my constituents about the fantastic care that is provided through the Centenary women's and children's hospital.

Our government wants to give young Canberrans the best start in life, whether it is through education or through our healthcare system. We are doing this through investing in and supporting the health and wellbeing of our youngest citizens. We have much to be proud of. The ROGS report reveals that the ACT has more nurses and midwives per head of population than the national average. To support the fantastic work of these medical practitioners and health professionals, the government will oversee the expansion of the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children. This

is a significant investment in Canberra's youngest citizens and their families, and will see the creation of a new ward to help accommodate 40 new maternity beds.

Our government also has a strong focus on keeping children active. The report on government services shows some sad statistics regarding just how many kids are missing out on being active, and on high obesity levels. Fortunately, in the ACT our children have the equal lowest rates of obesity in the country. Our government recognises that this is an important thing to address. Fantastic initiatives such as the active streets and ride and walk to school programs are greatly assisting ACT children to do their recommended period of physical activity every day.

We need to help keep our youngest and most vulnerable Canberrans as healthy as possible. Our government will continue to provide the best practice examples for immunisation in all age groups. We lead the nation in immunisation coverage across all age groups. This year students will, for the first time, be offered meningococcal W vaccinations free in the ACT. We will also continue to provide free whooping cough vaccination for expectant mums. I apparently had whooping cough when I was a baby, so I think this is a really important measure.

From birth to old age, health has remained a top priority for the government. We live the longest, smoke the least and deliver quality health services through our hospital and our medical practitioners. As our population continues to grow, the government's 10-year health plan is ready to meet the incoming demand. It is looking to the future and it is a smart investment in the future healthcare needs of the territory. We will continue to strengthen our existing system to ensure that all Canberrans live long, happy and healthy lives. This motion captures well the significant investments that our government continues to make to ensure that the health of Canberrans is a priority. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

**MRS DUNNE** (Ginninderra) (3.40): Madam Speaker, I am surprised that Ms Cheyne has chosen to bring this motion on health this week, given that it is becoming obvious that our health system is in a state of crisis. We know how things work in government on private member's day. Backbenchers are told to go off and talk about the issue of the day that is the most important, and it seems that Ms Cheyne has been given a hospital pass on this one and has really drawn the short straw to have to come in here today and defend Labor's history on health.

Labor's history on health is a poor one, considering that when Labor came to government the ACT had some of the best waiting times in the country and it now has some of the worst. And there are many other things that I will touch on that show why the ACT health system is facing a crisis under this Labor government. It is not a reflection upon the people who work in the system but it is a reflection upon the system that this government has created.

The motion that Ms Cheyne has put forward does not tally with the lived experiences of my constituents, who frequently call me, send me letters and email, and talk to me at the shops about their concerns about the health system. My constituents raise concerns about long waiting lists for elective surgery and hidden waiting lists to see

specialists. My constituents alert me to the long waits in the emergency departments of our hospitals.

One constituent advised me that patients were being placed on trolleys in the Canberra Hospital when she was there in July last year. Another constituent told me about how she was assured that it was all right that there were patients in trolleys in the corridors because they had nursing staff especially dedicated to looking after the patients on trolleys in the corridors.

We have been told that the Canberra Hospital was on alert level 3 continuously for months last year, continuously through July, August and September. This involved essentially a threat to the disruption of the services of the Canberra Hospital. My constituents have raised concern about problems with the mental health system, which I will speak about later today. No doubt those opposite will sing hosannas to the praise of the health minister and the health system, but the people of Canberra are singing a different tune.

On Thursday last week we heard of one patient who referred to her time on the elective surgery waiting list as being akin to an episode of *Fawlty Towers*. She discovered that she had not been on a waiting list when she thought that she had been, and she had to wait for ages for a procedure for varicose veins. She went for a year thinking she was on the waiting list before she was actually added to the waiting list. It took two years after that for her to receive her operation. This woman told the ABC, "This is the nation's capital. Surely we can do better than this." That is a view that I have echoed more than once in the past. This is the nation's capital. We are a First World nation. Surely we can do better than this.

Last Saturday the *Canberra Times* reported the horrendous story of a disability pensioner who was faced with the possibility of waiting five years to see a urologist before she could get on a waiting list to have a procedure. This woman is now facing the prospect of funding the operation herself from the minimal savings that she and her husband, both disability pensioners, are able to put together. These are people who still have children to look after, and they have to scrimp and save even more to pay for this procedure.

The problems in urology have been exacerbated by the loss of accreditation for urology training in 2014 due to concerns about the culture of the program in ACT Health. At the time, the hospital said the removal of accreditation would have no impact on clinical care. While accreditation has been restored, there has been an ongoing impact on clinical care for urology patients. They are just not getting it.

I now turn to some of the points in Ms Cheyne's motion. Ms Cheyne refers to the investment of \$1.6 billion. This is a reference to health expenditure. As the Productivity Commission report into government services 2018 recently showed, the ACT government has nearly tripled its expenditure in the nearly 10 years between 2006-07 and 2015-16. By contrast, other jurisdictions and the national average show a doubling in expenditure. But despite the tripling of our expenditure in hospitals, pretty much like tripling our rates, the people of the ACT are not getting a commensurate increase in services.



Ms Cheyne's motion refers to timeliness in emergency care. Yet our performance in emergency department waiting times is still amongst the worst in the nation, with our performance in urgent and semi-urgent cases well below the national average for 2016-17. That is when we have the data. We did not have the data for that for the previous year. We have now been advised that Canberra Hospital has been on alert level 3 continuously through the July quarter last year, so performance on waiting times in emergency departments will have gotten worse. But those things are not being reported currently, because the minister does not have the data.

Our performance on elective surgery was the worst in the nation for 2016-17. Evidence suggests that the problems have gotten worse since then, with stories of patients waiting for long periods of time for elective surgery. The government has decided to spend \$6.3 million to provide additional surgery for patients in the remainder of the financial year but it has not told us how it will appropriate that money. This is good news for those patients who will receive surgery but it will not address the problem of patients on the hidden waiting list.

I refer to the comments by Dr Steve Robson, the head of the Australian Medical Association ACT branch, reported on 23 December in the *Canberra Times*. He says:

"It was a shock to read it's in the position it's in, but we're all keen to help" ...

"What has to happen is that the health department needs to look very carefully on efficient use of the theatres" ...

"It's possible to do a lot more operating in the same time period at a private hospital.

"Generally there are the same surgeons in the private system, but there are greater efficiencies in the system" ...

"We need the capacity to not only do the operation but to care post operatively"  
...

The government's measures do not tackle the problems identified by Dr Robson and do not address the problem that our operating theatres lie dormant for many hours every day. Even if they did up the number of operating hours, they do not have the beds or capacity to provide postoperative care. This government is in a whole measure of pain in relation to elective surgery waiting lists, a thing which under their tutelage has gone from the best in the country to the worst in the country.

Ms Cheyne's motion calls on the government to open the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm. Where has Ms Cheyne been? Where was she? Did she not get an invitation to the opening of the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm either? The Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm was opened last year. But it does not provide any detoxification or rehabilitation beds to the community as was promised 10 years ago by Jon Stanhope. Yesterday the minister advised us that a non-residential training course was held at Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm between 14 November and 14 December and that we will see another one hopefully in April. By the time we get to the April program, the system will have been operating for about 200 days and it will have been operating effectively for 20 of those 200 days.

Ms Cheyne's motion also refers to \$1.5 million of new grants to intensive bulk-billing services in Canberra's south. You would think that if a government backbencher was going to put together a motion about the government's achievements they would get the figures right. It is \$1.05 million. This is an interesting development, because this was an election commitment. Treasury costed it at an additional \$1.05 million, and the minister talked about that in her press release the other day, but we are almost two years from that announcement and the government has not got an idea how to implement it, which is why it is going out to the community for ideas about how it might spend their money.

Ms Cheyne having been given this hospital pass, obviously her heart was not in it. She also has the outrageous cheek to refer in the motion to the helipad upgrade. We had to upgrade the helipad because it was one of the four extreme risks in the ACT health system's maintenance system that needed to be fixed. The government should not be claiming credit for having let the helipad get into such a bad state of repair. And what are we going to do now? The money that has been set aside for fixing the switchboard that caught fire last year: is Ms Cheyne going to claim that that is important expenditure and trumpet it as a great achievement by the government? The great achievement of this government was to let the infrastructure get into the state that it was in so that we have to spend the money that we are now spending.

Ms Cheyne's motion refers to the surgical procedures and interventional radiography and emergency centre at the Canberra Hospital. This facility will not see the light of day until at least 2020 and maybe beyond that. If the Canberra Liberals were on the government benches now, we would have already started on the upgrading of building 3, a project that was championed by Ms Gallagher, this minister's predecessor but one, but abandoned by the government in favour of light rail. This was a project supported by the AMA and this is the project that the people of the ACT need, not something that is put off to the never-never beyond the next election.

In 2008 the then health minister, Katy Gallagher, referred to a "tsunami in health" that would arrive about 2016. That health tsunami has arrived, and this government is not ready for it. Indeed it will not be ready for it for another five years at the earliest. Ms Cheyne's motion refers to the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children. The reason we are upgrading the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children is that it was built below capacity in the first place. When the hospital for women and children was first announced the health minister at the time, Ms Gallagher, went to great pains to explain to people that there would be not one extra bed. There would be not one extra crib. It would be a new facility with better circulation space but there would be not one extra bed, and that was seen as a virtue. We are spending money to extend the women's and children's hospital because it was below spec when it was opened.

Ms Cheyne's motion refers to nurse-led walk-in centres. The minister for health advised in her answer to question on notice No 611:

A direct correlation between hospital Emergency Department ... activity and Walk-in Centre ... activity is not possible, because the issue is multifactorial.

The minister has also advised that the present cost for nurse-led walk-in centres is \$188 per presentation, compared to \$37 for a bulk-billing GP. Do not shake your head, minister. If it is wrong you have misled the Assembly, because you gave that information in an answer to a question on notice. It has been pointed out that that number has come down from, I think, \$196 to \$188, but it is not much of an improvement. And if you challenge the \$188 figure, you need to come in here and correct the record, because if you challenge that figure you have misled the Assembly. So you had better be very careful about what you say about those figures.

The government has spent millions, and will spend millions more, on the nurse-led walk-in centres despite the fact that there is no evidence that they have a positive impact on emergency department waiting times. In short, the government has tripled the amount it spends on health, and the minister is very proud of that and makes no apology for that, but the money is not being spent efficiently or effectively. The community is not getting better services, as shown by the key performance measures and indicators such as elective surgery waiting times and by the things that they do not report on.

I will give you one example, very close to home. I got a phone call the other day from my son, who said, "I just got a phone call from the hospital. They want me to come in for a gastroenterology appointment." This was the week before last. He remembered that in November 2016, so 15 months ago, at a clinic he was advised that he needed to see a gastroenterologist because he had now moved from a paediatric clinic to an adult clinic and he had better see an adult gastroenterologist. The lady on the phone told him, "It is a long time, and you will get in to see someone in April, but our priority is really for category 1 patients and you're not a category 1 patient; you're a category 2 patient. But because you've been waiting so long we thought we'd better prioritise you as well." My son had no idea what this woman was talking about but he faithfully reported it to his mother, who happens to be the shadow minister for health. So we know why there are problems in the gastroenterology waiting list, why there are 300 people, 75 per cent of whom are waiting more than optimal times to see a doctor.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Kurrajong) (3.57): I am pleased to speak on the importance of a comprehensive health system that provides care for everyone in our community where and when they need it. Of course, it is important that we invest in our hospital facilities so they can meet the needs of our growing population, and Ms Cheyne's motion provides an extensive outline of the significant funding the government is providing in this area. We see this commitment through the expansion of the Canberra Hospital emergency department, the establishment of Canberra's first rehabilitation hospital, investment in the SPIRE centre, and the expansion of the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children.

As our city continues to grow we need to invest in acute services to respond to increasing demand. As Minister for Mental Health, I note we have also made investments in acute mental health services, including the opening of the Dhulwa mental health unit, and a commitment to establish an acute in-patient mental health unit for children and adolescents as part of the Centenary hospital expansion.

We turn to our acute services for care in times of emergency or crisis and we must ensure that those services are available in those times of need. However, while these services are important, they are not the best or most efficient place to provide care for the majority of people. There is no doubt that Canberra's health system faces challenges. The burdens on the health system and the resources needed to support it are increasing. It is simply unsustainable for us to try to meet all of this increasing demand by focusing solely on acute care.

When the Greens talk about the health system we are talking to a much bigger picture than just the hospital. The ACT Greens believe that fair, equitable and universal access to quality health services is a basic human right, and we believe an effective health system must be based on primary and preventative health care, including health promotion, disease prevention, and early intervention. The social and financial costs are so much greater if we do not provide care at the earliest possible moment.

Our community needs and deserves a high quality, free and professional health system that extends beyond the hospitals and encompasses every stage of life. The community needs access to health services that continue to take the pressure off our hospitals, focusing on preventative services and improving access for vulnerable groups and people. That is why the Greens are committed to reducing barriers to access to primary and preventative health services.

Wherever possible, we should create avenues for people to interact with our health services before they become unwell. This approach is the most efficient way to improve health outcomes and reduce healthcare costs. This approach requires us to consider the full scope of our health system, from home and community care services to nurse-led walk-in centres to outpatient clinics and health promotion activities. All of these pieces of the puzzle need to be considered as parts making up a whole, and the coordination between these services is essential to ensuring that the finite resources available are being used as effectively as possible.

The concept of health and wellbeing also extends beyond the health portfolio. Healthy living is a much broader concept and goes to issues of transport, education and the environment, to name just a few. The ACT Greens want a whole-of-government approach to achieve improved health outcomes for individuals and communities because we know that that is the only way we can ever truly respond to the social determinants of health and thereby reduce the ever-increasing pressure on acute services.

The social determinants of health are the circumstances in which people are born, grow up, live, work and age and the systems put in place to deal with illness. These circumstances are, in turn, shaped by a wider set of forces: economics, social policies, and politics: issues like housing, poverty, access to healthy foods and many other conditions. When we look at the health system in this way we can see how vital it is not only to fund hospital-based services but also to ensure that access to primary health care and community-based services is universal.

At the last election the Greens called for the development of a comprehensive preventative health strategy to build and expand on the work of the healthy weight initiative, and this is being progressed as a commitment under the parliamentary agreement. Initiatives like this change our focus from a perspective of treating disease to instead focusing on keeping our community healthy. This is a subtle shift, but the outcome is that we will end up reducing the incidents of potentially preventable illnesses such as heart disease, type 2 diabetes and obesity rather than having to treat them once they have already developed.

While many of the initiatives which provide prevention and early intervention services will lead to savings for our health system in the long term, they often require an upfront investment. While it may sound like a contradiction, we need to understand that sometimes you need to spend money to save it later. This investment logic also applies to the targeting of actual front-line services. By increasing funding to preventative measures today we can reduce expenditure on chronic conditions later.

The problem is that while the evidence to support this approach is clear, it is all too easy to get caught up in the immediate and very real needs of today rather than making long-term investments that will be of overall benefit to our community as well as the budget bottom line. I am pleased to see that the government's commitment to preventative health has been backed up with investment with \$4 million of new resources provided for these initiatives.

As I mentioned earlier, the investment in programs to address the social determinants of health will need to come not just from ACT Health but from across the whole of government. Housing is one example that has both direct and indirect consequences on a person's physical and mental wellbeing. The structural features of a home and whether you have a roof over your head can have a direct impact on your physical health. At the same time, issues associated with affordability can lead to a fear of eviction and instability which can impact on a person's mental health and can have flow-on impacts on engagement with education or employment.

Our understanding of health and wellbeing needs to be broad enough so that when we discharge people from our health services we are confident their social circumstances are not going to contribute to them coming straight back in again. Responding to the underlying causes of poor health is of benefit to the person involved and also helps improve the efficiency of our health system, reducing pressure on acute services and saving costs in the long term.

These social circumstances can also extend to issues such as social isolation and loneliness. While everyone can feel lonely from time to time, long periods of loneliness or social isolation can have a negative impact on physical and mental health. This is an issue we need to be increasingly aware of as Canberra continues to grow to ensure that everyone across our city can be connected with the community. There are many ways the government can help improve social connection, including through investing in public transport, supporting local community groups and providing access to community facilities.

As I have mentioned already, many of these issues do not impact on just physical health outcomes but can also lead to significant mental health concerns. Noting the growing demand for mental health services across the territory, mental health and suicide prevention remain continued priorities for the government and for me, and this commitment is demonstrated by the creation of a standalone mental health portfolio for the first time in the territory. In 2017 we laid some important ground work with the consultation on the office for mental health—which we will discuss shortly—as well as the establishment of the mental health advisory council and securing over \$23 million in funding for mental health services through the 2017-18 budget.

As Ms Cheyne's motion notes, a significant amount of this funding is being invested in community level programs, including support for Headspace and the detention exit community outreach program. The government has also recently announced additional funding to support Menslink to expand services to 10 to 12-year-old boys. We are increasingly hearing that there is a need to respond to mental health issues in younger and younger age groups. As the minister I will continue to work with service providers, parents, schools and other key stakeholders to identify new ways we can provide early intervention support.

In addition to our continued investment in mental health services, Ms Cheyne's motion highlights a number of other community-based health programs that I want to touch on briefly. Funding for two additional mobile dental vans is a key item in the parliamentary agreement which will provide greater access to dental care for low income Canberrans. Access to dental care is a prime example of the issue I was speaking about earlier, with many people stuck on public dental wait lists for so long that their condition worsens and they end up requiring emergency treatment. This is not an issue unique to the ACT, but I am pleased to see the government making this important investment. We know poor dental health can impact on physical health more broadly so an early intervention approach is crucially important in relation to this service.

I would also like to make a brief comment on the government's commitment to establish a homebirth trial, giving greater individual choice to expectant mothers and families. While the establishment of the trial is a positive move, the eligibility criteria remain very restrictive and participation is limited to those who live within close proximity of the Canberra Hospital. Of course the safety of those who participate should always be the highest priority. But at the same time the Greens would like to see further consideration given to how the eligibility criteria could be broadened and the program could be made more accessible for those interested in having a homebirth.

This motion highlights the government's commitment to improving the health and wellbeing of people in the ACT. The Greens believe a commitment to a better health system starts with strong investments in prevention and early intervention services, particularly those provided through primary and community care. Our aim should always be to help Canberrans stay well and out of hospital. For those who need acute care our system should be designed to support them to get better as fast as possible and then provide them further support in the community. Upfront investment in health promotion and prevention activities helps make our health system more efficient in

the long term. Not only do these initiatives help save costs down the line but, most importantly, they also improve health outcomes and therefore improve people's quality of life.

Broadening our understanding of health care beyond the clinical sphere is also important so we can respond to the social determinants of health. The provision of housing, employment, access to education and a clean environment have a significant impact on our overall health and wellbeing. This approach to health is about more than just the treatment of disease; it is about investing in the overall health and wellbeing of our population. The Greens will support this motion, and we look forward to further investments in primary and preventative care to drive benefits and efficiencies across our health system in the future.

**MS FITZHARRIS** (Yerrabi—Minister for Health and Wellbeing, Minister for Transport and City Services and Minister for Higher Education, Training and Research) (4.08): I thank Ms Cheyne very much for bringing forward this important motion on this very important issue and I particularly value her interest in health and the health and wellbeing of our community. As her motion outlines, in this term of government there have already been significant achievements right across many aspects of our health system. The investments this government has made build on previous investments and ensure that our community remains one of the healthiest in the country.

Health is one of the top priorities for the Barr Labor government, one made clear by our ongoing investments in health services, infrastructure and our health workforce, all with one purpose: to keep our community as healthy and as well as they can be by providing access to health care when and where people need it. This is true across all aspects of the health system, from tertiary services to community-based services, to rehabilitation services and importantly in prevention. It is also relevant across all government departments. It is also important to work with our broader community and with the private sector because it is in everyone's interest to have a healthy city.

A healthy community is evidenced in the most recent *Report on government services*. As Ms Cheyne and you, Mr Assistant Speaker, have outlined, we have the highest life expectancy, living close to a full year longer than the national average at 81.3 years for men and 84.2 years for women. I am pleased to say we also have been reducing smoking, with fewer daily smokers, now down to seven per cent.

In relation to children, as has been noted, we have the lowest rates of childhood obesity in the country. This has come from significant and focused investment in prevention. We have further good news. We are leading the country with the highest levels of immunisation.

We do have an excellent health system in the ACT that continues to deliver more and improved services and upgraded facilities. We are providing improved access to our community along the spectrum of healthcare services, from acute care services at the city's and the region's major tertiary hospital, the Canberra Hospital, and at Calvary Public Hospital, Bruce, including inpatient and outpatient care, to the soon-to-open rehabilitation hospital at the University of Canberra, providing essential rehabilitation

and mental health services in a beautiful, purpose-built facility, to our community health centres, the hospital in the home and of course our nurse walk-in centres.

ACT Health's focus on delivering a territory-wide health services framework will also provide the backbone of patient-centred care across the system and across all facilities in this city. Our partnership with primary healthcare providers is also vital, and we continue to work with GPs and representative organisations, and to partner and in many cases co-fund with the Capital Health Network more innovation in the primary healthcare sector. Just this week we have opened grants to improve bulk-billing rates in areas in our city we know have less access to bulk-billing GP services.

My focus on preventive health will continue and I look forward to continuing to work with our higher education and research partners and partnering with them to grow their health capacity and to employ the many highly skilled graduates our universities and CIT train, from junior doctors from the ANU, to nurses, physios and other allied health graduates from the University of Canberra, the Australian Catholic University and CIT.

In so many areas we continue to provide excellent, high quality, compassionate, patient-centred care but we must continue to improve. There are a range of ongoing reforms that, coupled with significant investment in health, are a part of continuing our improvements to our health system.

I acknowledge that there are areas where we have come from behind and where we simply must do better. And we are. On many measures, we continue to improve. For example, if you look at the improvements in median wait times at Canberra hospitals between 2012-13 and 2016-17, these wait times have reduced by one-third, from 44 to 30 minutes. This is the biggest improvement in the country over this period, and the proportion of patients seen on time, at 62 per cent in the previous financial year, has also improved. I am pleased to say the ACT has made one of the biggest improvements in the country in this area as well. This demonstrates that we are on the right track and we are doing a lot right.

I am very focused not only on continuing to make the right health investments for our community but to make sure our system performs well and continues to improve, with the aim of keeping our community as healthy as they can be.

Today I would like to build on Ms Cheyne's motion and provide more detail and outline a number of the significant activities underway to improve the integration and redesign of services across primary health care, community-based care and the care we deliver in our hospitals, as well as our commitment to health service delivery and ensuring we have the health infrastructure we need for a growing city.

The government is taking steps to ensure that we have the right services to meet demand and population growth now and into the future. The territory-wide health services planning work is well underway and will change the way health services are delivered. ACT Health is creating new clinical centres to both coordinate and integrate patient-centred care. This will provide a continuum of care which will make



it easier for patients to navigate primary health care in the community as well as care in the hospital and everything in between.

Each centre will have a centre plan, speciality service plans and patient and family focused models of care. These plans will outline how health care will be delivered through a collaborative, coordinated approach. This new evidence-based approach operates in the interests of patients, first and foremost, making sure they receive care that meets their needs.

As members would be aware, the territory-wide health services planning work has a new advisory group which was established to contribute to finalising the framework and the speciality services planning work currently underway. The advisory group is an important forum for health stakeholders, community organisations and consumers to provide advice so that we can establish the clinical centres and associated plans. I was delighted to attend and open the first meeting of the advisory group earlier this month.

Members have heard me speak in this place on our achievements in preventive health, including through our programs focusing on active living and healthy eating, immunisation, as well as the recent \$4 million commitment specifically for preventive health work, which includes developing a preventive health strategy. Investing in prevention activities to prolong and increase our wellbeing cannot be underestimated, especially given their impact on reducing the burden of chronic disease, demand on the health system and of course an individual's quality of life. I have already mentioned our lowest rate of childhood obesity, which make it clear that our plans and programs to improve health in our community through prevention programs are working. We want to build on this.

This Friday I will open the CBR Innovation Network's active healthy Canberra event, to continue our journey to position Canberra as a centre of excellence for preventive health. We will bring together organisations to identify opportunities that can benefit our city in new ways.

We have an opportunity here in Canberra to show the world that we can be more innovative and collaborative in our approach to preventive health care. This builds on significant work that has led the nation on preventive health, including the ground-breaking towards zero growth policy and the healthy weight initiative. It also complements work across my portfolios, especially transport, in an effort to build an integrated public transport system and increase walking and cycling, as well as working with our higher education institutions to encourage research and innovation in preventive health.

As I announced yesterday as part of the budget mid-year review, the government is boosting funding for elective surgery. We are investing an extra \$6.3 million to provide for extra surgery, helping patients access treatment within recommended time frames. Each year Health completes more elective surgeries, with 12,826 patients receiving elective surgery in 2016-17, over the previous target. We are meeting our targets for the number of procedures performed each year, which demonstrates that

our system is working. But, as we grow, demand increases and patients become more complex. This is putting pressure on our wait times.

This additional funding will enable ACT Health to achieve even more elective surgeries in this financial year. This will be accomplished by delivering more surgeries to public patients through both the public and private systems, by increasing the allocation of operating sessions to those specialities with high demand such as paediatric and adult general surgery, orthopaedic surgery, urology and gynaecological surgery.

We also will invest in one of the most significant investments this government will undertake: the surgical procedures, interventional radiology and emergency centre in the Canberra Hospital precinct, which you spoke about, Mr Assistant Speaker. I am very pleased to advise that SPIRE will be designed to completely align with our territory-wide health services planning so that care is coordinated, integrated and specialised for patients and their families and that the infrastructure to support this will be based on this framework.

SPIRE will also showcase the ACT Australia wide as the place for progressive state-of-the-art health services using new technologies as it will provide greater opportunities for research and training of our health professionals. We have already begun funding this investment and we look forward to work continuing over the coming years.

I thank Ms Cheyne very much for her motion, and I look forward to talking more and more about the wonderful health system we have, about the improvements that we are making, about the significant investment we will continue to make. Yes, Mrs Dunne is right. I am very proud of Labor's investment in health.

**MS CHEYNE** (Ginninderra) (4.18), in reply: I thank all members for their contributions today, including the banging on the table. Regrettably, I will have to just take a moment to highlight Mrs Dunne's gall in being incredibly impolite to me, when not only was she not present in the Assembly to hear my speech—I understand she had another commitment—but she clearly did not even pay me the courtesy of using her two-hour lunch break to review my 12-minute speech on Assembly on demand.

**Mrs Dunne:** I did not have a two-hour lunch break because I had another commitment.

**MS CHEYNE:** Excuse me?

**Mrs Dunne:** I did not have a two-hour lunch break. I had another commitment.

**MS CHEYNE:** I do not see why you could not have found 12 minutes or got your staff to find 12 minutes to review my speech. I find that incredibly impolite.

I had planned to refute her arguments but I struggled to follow what ended up just being really her venting her spleen, if we want to keep using health analogies. What is

it, Mrs Dunne? Is the ACT government investing too much or are we investing not enough? I struggle to follow.

**Mrs Dunne:** Plainly you did not listen either.

**MS CHEYNE:** I heard you mostly in silence. Pay me the respect.

**MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER:** Please address the Speaker, Ms Cheyne.

**MS CHEYNE:** Mr Assistant Speaker, for someone who was so critical, who banged the table multiple times during her speech, who criticised my motion at length, I have never heard my name used so many times in a 10-minute period. Where is her amendment to my motion? Why will she not amend this motion with her policy alternatives if what we are doing is so wrong? She does not have any policy alternatives. She does not have any. And she is silent now.

**Mrs Dunne:** Just you wait and see.

**MS CHEYNE:** Just we wait? How long have we been waiting for? Fifteen years, that is right.

**Mrs Dunne:** There are some people on the waiting list that long.

**MS CHEYNE:** Excuse me, Mrs Dunne, I heard you mostly in silence, pay me the same respect.

As we have heard, we are seeing great progress across Canberra's healthcare system, from significant health facilities to improved existing facilities, new speciality services, and investment in cutting-edge research and development. Our health system is accommodating the needs of our growing population.

As you can see from the motion before you today, the list of our current and planned activities on this front is long. It is very long. What it means, though, is very clear. It means that we care and we are willing to commit the resources to make sure our health system delivers the very best for the Canberra community.

Looking at our investment in the health sector, it is characterised by the understanding that people's health needs are complex and they are personal. We are conscious that everyone in our community has different health needs and preferences. That is why we are investing across the breadth of health facilities and services, encompassing mental and physical health, preventive and curative medicine and research and development.

This government recognises the power and importance of mental health and wellbeing. It is an absolutely crucial aspect of any healthcare system and, as you heard from the Minister for Mental Health, we have committed millions of dollars for mental health initiatives in this year's budget.

As I outlined in my speech earlier for the benefit of some members, we are also improving emergency and general medicine facilities for the community. We are reducing wait times, increasing bed numbers and improving accessibility. We are upgrading our hospitals and creating a new, dedicated rehabilitation hospital at UC. We are opening new walk-in centres and building facilities for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Needless to say, our investment is comprehensive.

We are not only looking at health infrastructure, though. As the saying goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. That is why we have specifically committed funding for new resources for preventive health services. This funding is in addition to new annual health and wellbeing checks for all year 7 students to identify and treat issues earlier as our kids move into adolescence. We will also have new school-based immunisation programs and will participate in the pre-exposure prophylaxis HIV prevention trial to help high-risk people stay HIV free.

Finally, we are committed to keeping Canberra on the cutting edge of medical research. Advances in gene-based medicine will revolutionise how we diagnose and treat illness, and Canberra is helping us to get there. I spoke earlier about participation in the molecular screening therapeutics trial and our work in collaboration with the ANU to establish a clinical genomics service. I think the future of medicine will inspire awe and wonder at its ability to see and respond to our genetic makeup. I am very proud of the fact that this government is investing in that future.

Something I think we in this room probably can all agree on is that nothing is more important than our health and our wellbeing. I think I can speak for most people when I say that other issues in life pale into insignificance when we or a loved one fall seriously ill.

As a government, it is our responsibility to ensure that Canberrans have access to the best medical facilities and services to help them get back on their feet when sickness strikes, now and into the future. We are investing across the breadth of health services in the ACT to ensure that they are top notch and I have no doubt that our health system will continue to serve our community to the highest possible standard.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **ACTION bus service—route changes**

**MS LEE** (Kurrajong) (4.25): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) a number of bus routes throughout Canberra have been altered or cancelled from 9 October 2017;
- (b) this change was done without any proper consultation with regular commuters or residents in the area that rely on these bus services;

- (c) a significant number of commuters who rely on these services are older and mobility impaired Canberrans who are no longer able to, or cannot, drive; and
  - (d) the new routes service fewer areas and leave many commuters forced to:
    - (i) walk longer distances to a bus stop; or
    - (ii) travel on a service that is less frequent; or
    - (iii) travel on a service that is slower; or
    - (iv) change buses and take two or more bus routes to get to major town centres and hubs like Civic, Woden, Tuggeranong, Gungahlin and Barton; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) apologise to Canberra residents for failing to consult with them about what changes should and were being made;
  - (b) review the effectiveness of the new timetable to assess its patronage and efficiency and report to the Assembly by the last sitting day in March 2018; and
  - (c) restore bus routes altered in the October 2017 changes subject to the findings of the review of the new routes.

Public transport is a key component of local government. It is, in many ways, the lifeblood which keeps the organs of a city functioning. And as a city grows and matures, a good transport network will also need to grow and mature to meet the needs of its people.

My newest colleague, fellow member for Kurrajong and shadow minister for transport, Miss Burch, will go into a bit more detail on our city's needs for transport more generally, while some of my other colleagues will address shortcomings in their own electorates. What I want to focus on, however, in this motion are the 2017 timetable changes to the ACTION bus network and the impacts these changes have made and are making to my constituents in Kurrajong. These changes have highlighted this government's attitude that it knows better than the people of Canberra who use public transport every day. This government has made a key failing in changing bus routes with no or poor consultation with the Canberrans who use the services and, by doing so, has left Canberrans stranded, isolated and baffled at how and why these changes were brought about.

In the inner south, two popular bus routes, the No 4 and the No 5, have been combined into one, monstrous, Frankensteinian route. Under several different route names, the No 5 route has serviced the residents of the inner south for decades. In particular, the residents of what is affectionately known as old Narrabundah have relied on this bus to take them to the city, Russell, Canberra Hospital or the Woden town centre. Similarly, the No 4 route, which connected residents of Red Hill, Narrabundah and Griffith with Woden and the city, was a popular route that many residents of the inner south had come to rely on.

In October last year, all of that changed. The No 5 route was cancelled altogether and the No 4 route was changed in a poor attempt to fill the void left by the cancellation of the No 5. Two bus routes were hastily stitched together to create a monster route by the poor judgement and short-term thinking of its creator. Let us call this the Franken-route.

The Franken-route has a number of issues. First, it is poorly synchronised with the No 6 route, and leaves patrons waiting for nearly 30 minutes for a connection. It no longer takes residents of Narrabundah to where they want and need to go. It travels a long, convoluted route which cuts out many stops. As an example, Dani of Narrabundah observed to me that for her journey home from Woden, she would have to get on the No 6 bus at Woden town centre, travel for 14 minutes, a total of 11 stops, get off at Goyder Street, near Narrabundah College, and either walk home from this stop, a journey of about 1.3 kilometres, or wait 29 minutes for the next No 4 bus and travel on that bus for four minutes, another five stops, to get home. That is a total of 47 minutes for a journey which previously took 10 to 20 minutes. This prolonged wait for a connection at Goyder Street is because the timetable has been so poorly coordinated that the No 6 is repeatedly missing the No 4 by one or two minutes, leaving patrons stranded for half an hour.

Public transport should be accessible to all. However, the Canberrans who rely on buses the most are our young Canberrans who do not have a car; our mobility-impaired Canberrans who can only rely on carers or friends to drive them and so are in need of effective bus options; and our elderly Canberrans who either no longer drive or do not feel confident driving on a daily basis. I note that in the amendment circulated by the minister she has at least acknowledged these vulnerable Canberrans, although I suspect that may be an effect of Ms Le Couteur. In a cold Canberra winter, is this government really asking these Canberrans to wait at a bus stop for half an hour for a connection?

Second, the Franken-route has almost doubled the journey time from old Narrabundah to the city. Frank of Narrabundah says that his commute to work has gone from 15 to 20 minutes on bus No 5 to a 35 to 40 minute journey, and involves either swapping buses or a very long walk. As many torch-wielding villagers have done, Frank has run away from and abandoned the Franken-route and now drives. Susan of Narrabundah is forced to pay expensive parking fees because the alternative, spending the hour each morning and hour each evening that it takes for her to get into town and home, is just not worth it.

The minister may claim, as she has done before, that consultations were conducted; that these changes are only for the better; and that she has received only glowing, positive feedback about the new services. We all know that that is just not true.

Between the hours of 8.15 am and 5.45 pm, every second No 6 bus which arrives at the Goyder Street stop leaves passengers with an almost 30-minute wait between buses. How can the minister look old Narrabundah residents in the eye and claim with any credibility that the new bus network offers more services and connectivity for them?

Third, the decline in the number of stops serviced in the inner south is astonishing. There are many stops—some of them our beautiful, iconic bus shelters—which are now school-only stops. Since 2014, 28 bus stops, 14 pairs, in Red Hill and Narrabundah have had their regular services removed. This results in longer distances for patrons to walk to their nearest bus stop and more money spent by the government in building new bus stops. Why does this government insist on change for change's sake, even at the expense of cutting off essential services for Canberrans who need them most?

Fourth, let us talk about the Franken-route. Rather than providing a vital link for inner south residents to get to the Woden town centre or the Canberra Hospital, the altered No 4 route terminates at the Fyshwick outlet centre. It seems that to this government ensuring that people get to the outlet centre for shopping is more important than having a vital link to the Canberra Hospital. Prior to the election, the proposed green rapid route was just a vague green line on a blurry map of Canberra and failed to let voters know that the services would be at the expense of a vital route through old Narrabundah. How duplicitous and expedient is that?

Fifth, the lack of proper consultation and the dismal failure of the minister to communicate with bus users is just not good enough. In my capacity as their local member, I had my office do a letterbox drop to the residents of old Narrabundah to inform them about the introduction of the No 6 bus and the alteration to the No 4 route. What followed was a flood of correspondence from my constituents, by far the most contact with my office I have had since I was elected. Not only were the residents concerned, bewildered and outraged by the disadvantages from the changes, but the information that my office letterboxed was the first notice they had received of the route changes. Not only would this government rob the people of old Narrabundah of their bus route; it would do so with little or no information, let alone consultation, as to how this change would affect them.

In September, in response to a question I asked the minister about what consultation she and her directorate had conducted prior to the decision to cancel the No 5 route, she said:

Information is being made available to residents now.

That was in September, after the decision was already made. "Now," she said, back in September, after my office had had a flood of complaints from concerned residents. This government's communication leaves a great deal to be desired. Any suggestion that the announcement of the new No 6 route in the lead-up to the 2016 election as consultation ignores the fact that there was no indication that other routes would be altered or cancelled as a sacrifice to implement the new No 6 route.

The minister claims that there are now more buses in Narrabundah than there were prior to October 2017. This is true only as a technicality and ignores the fact that old Narrabundah, a section of the suburb where we know there is a good proportion of our elderly and mobility-impaired Canberrans, now must make do with a less frequent,

convoluted route which terminates not at Canberra Hospital or the Woden town centre but in Fyshwick.

The minister is either not being briefed on the seriousness of the issues impacting inner south residents or she is choosing to ignore them. Or she does not care. I do not care what she believes; my concern is for the residents of inner south. She has a duty to them, a duty that she is clearly failing.

It is not just the residents of the inner south who are bearing the brunt of these changes, however. I have had a number of residents from the inner north express concern about the lack of certainty and communication about changes in bus routes. They are in the dark about what will happen to their existing bus routes when the tram is up and running. Given the sudden changes to bus routes in the inner south with no communication and no consultation, there is angst among inner north residents that their bus services are next for the chopping block. This does not even begin to touch on the areas across the territory that do not even have a proper public bus service, like Oaks Estate.

This is why I bring this motion today. I call upon this government to do three fairly simple things. First and foremost, I call upon the government to apologise to the Canberra residents who have been, and continue to be, severely impacted, for their lack of communication about the bus route changes, something this minister has admitted in this very chamber. Second, I call upon the government to review the changes and to report on these changes. I note that in her response, which was tabled yesterday in response to the petition I brought to the Assembly last year about better connectivity in the inner south, she said that a review is happening, so I cannot understand how she would be opposed to this. Third, subject to the review, I call upon the government to undertake and give assurances to affected Canberrans that their bus services will be restored. This is what a local government that is elected to serve its citizens should be doing, no less. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

**MS FITZHARRIS** (Yerrabi—Minister for Health and Wellbeing, Minister for Transport and City Services and Minister for Higher Education, Training and Research) (4.36): I welcome the opportunity today to speak with the Assembly and outline the work the government is undertaking in relation to our bus network as part of an integrated transport network. As we know, our city is changing. Canberra's population is growing quickly and is expected to reach a population of 421,000 by 2020 and half a million by 2033. To support this growth the government understands that our public transport system must also change to meet the needs of our growing city.

We took a clear policy to the 2016 election to expand the capacity of our public transport network, including the introduction of light rail stage 1 and additional rapid bus services. These initiatives will deliver a better public transport system for Canberra, one that is designed to keep Canberra moving and make public transport a genuine alternative to the car.

This year the government will introduce a new mode of public transport to Canberra with the delivery of Canberra's first integrated and connected public transport



network. Of course, this network is much broader than just light rail and buses. Our vision is for an integrated system, including better active travel links to high frequency services, frequent local bus services that connect people to the rapid network and a range of complementary or tailored services for those in our community who require further assistance with accessing our transport system, particularly vulnerable Canberrans.

The government made an election commitment to expand the rapid bus network, which we began in October last year with the extension of the blue rapid to Lanyon, the introduction of the green rapid from Woden to the city via Manuka and Barton, and the black rapid from Belconnen to Gungahlin. We are delivering what we promised: more services more often, seven days a week.

The government then delivered on another election promise, providing free travel on the new rapid services for the first two months. Over this period almost 28,000 passengers travelled on the black rapid and 100,000 on the green. As of 9 February, the black rapid has recorded over 50,000 boardings and the green rapid over 185,000 boardings. Following the introduction of the new services on 9 October, the black rapid recorded an average of 638 passenger boardings per day and in the first week of February this increased to 877 passengers per day. Upon introduction of the green rapid the service recorded an average of 2,231 passenger boardings per day, which has now increased to 2,712 boardings per day for the first week of February.

Passenger boardings on public transport are increasing year on year, with 17.6 million boardings recorded in 2014-15, rising to 18.2 million boardings in 2016-17. Transport Canberra is on track to meet the target of 18.4 million passenger boardings for the current financial year, with 10.9 million boardings recorded up to 10 February.

We know that when a new network or timetable is introduced it is often common to see an initial drop in patronage. However, in the long term, patronage starts to increase as the public get used to changes and start to take advantage of the benefits. Making reactive changes to our transport network can be detrimental to the overall efficiency and the benefit of our integrated services.

It is worth noting that this initial drop in patronage did not occur after the October timetable change. In fact, patronage across the network has increased by two per cent on each weekday and 10 per cent on each weekend day since its implementation compared to the same period last year. Public notification of changes to services occurred five weeks prior to the changes being introduced. As with previous timetable updates of this nature, there was not targeted public consultation. The last major redesign of the public transport network in Canberra was delivered in September 2014, following an intensive public consultation process. Several timetable updates have been delivered since then, including in May 2015, August 2016 and last year's October update.

Transport Canberra continually receives feedback through the customer experience area, and I would like to take the opportunity to reassure members that this feedback is used in the design of the new timetables where practicable and where it aligns with the objectives of the overall transport network. In addition, as noted in the amendment

that has been circulated in my name, there was also extensive consultation undertaken in 2016 with our community. Almost 5,500 people participated in this. The Canberra community told us they wanted three key things out of our transport system. They would like to see quicker and more direct trips, more frequent and reliable services, and increased peak and off-peak services.

We considered the findings of these consultations, significant access to data through the MyWay data, as well as ongoing customer feedback in the redesign of the October 2017 network. As all members do, I also receive feedback from the community regarding their experiences with bus travel, and considering all of this feedback together is an important part of our work to enhance and adapt the network.

It is critical that Transport Canberra, as our city's public transport agency, is able to manage the network and resources not only to meet the changing needs of our city but also to meet customer expectations. We are focused on enhancing the customer experience when using public transport, and this extends through to the design of the bus network.

Public consultation is undertaken for larger changes to the public transport network, as I have indicated many times in the chamber. This includes the 2018 rapid network. Significant consultation was undertaken late last year and further consultation will get underway next month. Minor changes are made to the network from time to time, and these do not usually include formal community consultation.

In late 2017 changes were made—the October network changes—in south Canberra, where the introduction of the green rapid required the redesign of local bus services to complement the new high frequency service and to provide additional connections. Data from the MyWay ticketing system showed that the stops removed from the region were consistently recording an average of only 92 passenger boardings per day, which is a very low record of patronage, and this data informed the decision to make network changes.

Figures from bus stops in Narrabundah in 2017 showed that, on average, there were only approximately 39 passengers per day from old Narrabundah who caught the bus to the Woden bus station, of a total of 32 route 5 services travelling from Narrabundah to Woden each day, which equates to one passenger per service. Transport Canberra officials have since had many direct conversations with a range of different individuals and organisations in Narrabundah, including the Narrabundah medical centre, and have also attended a meeting of the Old Narrabundah Community Council to discuss these changes. I also met with Old Narrabundah Community Council members earlier this year.

Feedback from the community to Transport Canberra service planners has included the review of connections at Goyder Street between the rapid 6 and route 4. Transport Canberra are reviewing performance data to improve connections and are looking into improved customer information to make it easier to connect.

Old Narrabundah continues to have some of the highest access to public transport services in the city. Under the proposed rapid network, the centre of the suburb, along

Kootara Crescent, will continue to be serviced by an all-day service with 30-minute frequency, providing access to Manuka, Kingston and the city. The service also provides connections to the rapid routes that surround the suburb, which, under the new rapid network proposal, provide connections to Woden, Barton and the city through the green rapid, and soon to Barton, the city and Belconnen on the new pink rapid or rapid route 2. The area also has access to a community service bus located at the old Narrabundah shops.

I am pleased to bring to the attention of members that the new route 4 and green rapid have seen patronage increase by eight per cent in comparison to the old routes 4 and 5 in the same period in 2016. On the weekend the new route 4 and 6 equivalent has seen patronage increase by 31 per cent in comparison to the old routes for the same period in 2016. Last year, when we announced the October updates as part of a network redesign, we also announced that all rapid services would be delivered in 2018. Under this plan, the reach of fast, frequent and reliable public transport would expand to be within a seven to 10-minute walk of 53 per cent of the ACT population. This is an increase from 26 per cent in 2016 and 36 per cent in 2017 with the introduction of new rapid services. That is over half of our community.

Unfortunately, the public bus system may not work for everyone, and we understand that. For some members of our community, walking as far as 50 metres to a bus stop can be difficult. There are some areas that are isolated and with low populations, and it would be very difficult and inefficient to service these suburbs with a commuter bus. That is why the ACT government also provides complementary or tailored services to meet the wide range of needs in our community.

The government runs the flexible transport office, which manages a suite of specialised transport services, including the network design and operation of special needs school transport, the community transport coordination centre, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community bus, and the flexible bus service. The special needs transport network provides transport to and from ACT public schools for 386 students with a disability and 61 introductory English class students, using 44 buses and 13 taxis to each school. The service delivers to 47 specialised and mainstream schools Canberra wide.

The government has also delivered on another election commitment to provide free off-peak travel for senior concession card MyWay users on our public transport network. The commitment for this trial is also part of the parliamentary agreement which the ACT government delivered within the first 100 days of our new term. Through the first 12 months of the trial 1.46 million trips were taken by eligible passengers and the trial has been extended whilst transport Canberra evaluates the initial 12 months.

The ACT government has also been trialling innovative solutions to what transport planners call the “first and last mile problem”. Connecting every household to the urban bus network simply does not make sense in a city as dispersed as Canberra. In 2016 and again in 2017 transport Canberra partnered with ride-share company Uber to deliver a first and last mile option for customers. Under this partnership customers were able to use a discounted trip to connect to and from rapid services to move

across our city over the holiday period. Over 2017 late-night rapids saw a 46 per cent increase in passenger boardings in comparison to the 2016 nightrider services, with a total of 4,171 boardings recorded, which included moving 3,581 passengers across the rapid lines on New Year's Eve. Over this time 250 customers took advantage of the discounted trip available through the Uber app.

The late-night rapid service, including the partnership with Uber, will be running on the Friday and Saturday nights of the National Multicultural Festival, ensuring that more Canberrans can enjoy the festival and make their way home safely using public transport.

The future of public transport services in Canberra is through connections. This includes bus to bus, light rail to bus, car to bus, walking and cycling, and tailored services to the high frequency network. To ensure that connections are as convenient as possible across the network, Transport Canberra is committed to improving journey planning tools, providing better timetable information, featuring timed connections, and increasing the availability of customer service across the network.

In addition, we will continue to work on an update to our transport for Canberra plan, which will identify the government's priorities in an integrated public transport network, as well as seizing all the opportunities we see coming through transport innovations with electronic vehicles as well as autonomous vehicles.

I move the amendment that has been circulated in my name:

Omit all words after "That this Assembly", substitute:

"(1) notes that:

- (a) the ACT Government is building an integrated public transport network for our growing city, including introducing light rail and delivering more buses more often;
- (b) Transport Canberra continually monitors patronage data, efficiency and periodically updates timetables and routes to ensure improvements for passengers across the bus network, and provide higher frequency services and better connections;
- (c) in 2016, the ACT Government undertook extensive community consultation on what Canberrans wanted from their transport system; almost 5500 people participated. Canberrans said the top three improvements they would like to see were quicker and more direct trips, more frequent and reliable services, and increased peak and off-peak services;
- (d) Transport Canberra considers the findings of these consultations, patronage data and ongoing feedback from customers to undertake minor and major network changes;
- (e) on Saturday, 7 October 2017, Transport Canberra launched updates to the weekday and weekend bus timetables as well a number of service improvements, which includes the introduction of the Green and Black Rapid services and the extension of the Blue Rapid to Lanyon Market Place;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) the ACT Government undertook public consultation in 2017 on the next major update to the bus network and will soon commence phase two of this extensive public consultation into the new network;
- (b) the introduction of the new Green Rapid required some changes to local services to ensure that public transport service coverage is balanced with high frequency rapid services that drive public transport patronage;
- (c) these changes were made in response to data which demonstrated very limited patronage;
- (d) patronage across the network has increased by 2% on each weekday and 10% on each weekend day since its implementation compared to the same period last year (as at 13 February 2018);
- (e) the ACT Government provides the free Flexible Bus Service specifically for older Canberrans and people who have mobility impairments; and
- (f) the ACT Government also provides free off-peak travel for Senior concession card holders; and

(3) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) deliver on its election commitment to build an integrated transport network, including light rail, the introduction of five new rapid routes in 2018 and expanding the network to provide a better, seven day network;
- (b) continue to consult with Canberrans on the design of the new bus network;
- (c) ensure consideration is given to meeting the needs and inclusion of older Canberrans, people with limited mobility, and other transport vulnerable people; and
- (d) ensure a mix of local bus services, rapid buses and continue the flexible transport options to provide an integrated transport network which is accessible for all.”.

I commend the amendment to the Assembly.

**MS LE COUTEUR** (Murrumbidgee) (4.49): I rise today in support of Ms Fitzharris’s amendments to Ms Lee’s motion, but I very much want to thank Ms Lee for bringing this important matter to the Assembly. I, too, had a number of concerned Canberrans contact me about last year’s minor network change, including the residents of Narrabundah in Ms Lee’s electorate of Kurrajong. This motion is evidence of the value of community awareness, activism and engagement with your local members as a way of ensuring that your issues are listened to and dealt with. So I very much thank Ms Lee for this.

As Ms Lee so rightly points out, many people use the bus because they cannot drive. They might have mobility issues, be older people or for various economic or medical reasons be unable to get around any other way. And with every change, there are going to be winners and loser and there is unfortunately almost always a trade-off. We

need to balance the sprawling coverage that lets everyone access their bus routes very closely but not very frequently with more efficient and high-capacity routes.

In designing the public transport network the ACT government needs to balance a number of different needs within a limited budget. Some routes, such as the 300 I came to work on today, are fast and frequent and connect major points of interest such as town centres and the universities. These are rapid routes, and they work really well in terms of moving Canberrans around efficiently.

There are also the suburban routes which implement the commitment that was made years ago to ensure that 90 per cent of Canberrans are within 400 metres of a bus stop, and these tend to be slow and winding. In practice, they are not frequent and not that extensively used. Minister Fitzharris talked about some of the stops on the routes that have gone to Narrabundah as having only 92 boardings a day. That is not many, but the reality is that there are some people for whom that was pretty essential, and that is why they have been writing to Ms Lee and I am sure the other Kurrajong members, and some of them to me as well.

If we want to get a lot of people out of their cars and onto public transport then we clearly need rapid routes, and that has been one of the problems for Canberra's public transport for many years. The old routes were great if you wanted a scenic tour of half of Canberra, but if you actually wanted to get somewhere they were lacking. But if we want to ensure that everybody has reasonable access to public transport, as well as the rapid routes we need the coverage routes and we need better transport infrastructure so that people can walk or ride their bikes or their scooters to the bus stop. We need special transport provision for the less able members of our community, and I am glad that Minister Fitzharris talked about those. Canberra needs both of these. As Minister Fitzharris said, what we need is connectivity between the different things.

I am also very glad that she mentioned some of the non-physical part of the infrastructure. One of the things I personally find very helpful is the new smartphone app which enables you when you get to the bus stop, instead of standing there and thinking, "Where is it? Where is it," to look it up and find out that either you have just missed the bus or it is going to be there in two minutes or whatever. Those are the sorts of things which make our public transport system a lot more accessible. Canberra needs the coverage routes and the rapid routes we need both of them. The issue behind this motion is balancing both of those needs within a limited budget.

Of course everyone here knows the Greens are big fans of public transport and the active transport that goes with it. Of course we would be happy to increase the budget for them. In fact, one item of the parliamentary agreement is an extra \$30 million for active transport. Of course if we increase the budget then these trade-offs can be done differently.

I have recently read research that social inclusion is the most important positive factor for long and healthy lives. It is absolutely vital that we make it easy for everyone to get out into their local community and the wider community. From a public health point of view it is abundantly clear that we have to make sure that all of us have an opportunity to talk to other people often. It is tragic that poor public transport options

mean that many older and disabled people become significantly socially isolated. One very positive thing of free off-peak travel for seniors is that I know a number of people for whom this has made a significant difference to what they do with their lives: they go out of the house and hop on the bus because it is free and they can now afford to do it.

Ultimately, as Ms Lee's motion points out, in trying to improve services across Canberra with a limited budget, somebody misses out. My office was also contacted by residents affected by the change in Narrabundah. While some of them have been able to make changes in their lifestyles and schedules to get to the new, now more frequent bus, some have not. One older Canberran told me that the bus changes made it very difficult for him to catch the bus. He knew about the flexibus, but he did not identify as someone who needs the service or could justify the cost of using it. He told me he thought he would be ripping off the ratepayer.

It is really disappointing that because of the scarcity of these public services people feel they are not entitled to use them. He was quite aware that the flexibus was not an abundant service. It is really disappointing to him and to us that it is not obvious to people that providing more flexibuses or the on-demand services would have to be a lot cheaper than operating a regular bus with very low patronage.

Ms Lee's motion also talked about consultation. As everyone here knows, the ACT Greens are big fans of consultation. The idea of grassroots democracy and community decision-making is so fundamental to our ideology that it is one of our four pillars as a party. So of course we are disappointed that consultation was poor on this network change. Although this was considered a minor change, it had a major impact on a number of people, and in an ideal world these people would have been better consulted.

That consultation would have included information for them about, "Okay, if this change happens which is not going to impact you positively, what are your alternatives? How can you connect to the things that you want to connect to as you used to be able to do in the past? How can you make this change work for you?" To the best of my knowledge that did not happen.

I sincerely hope that the next lot of consultation is better and that Transport Canberra goes out of their way to ensure that all those who are to be affected by the next major network change feel they have had their say in the upcoming consultation, which I believe is scheduled for early this year. While it may not make up for the experiences of these particular individuals, hopefully we have all learned from this and in the future it will be better.

I have received assurances from the minister, which have been included in her amendments, that explicit consideration will be given to meeting the needs of and promoting inclusion for older Canberrans, people with limited mobility, and other transport vulnerable people, in network changes moving forward. In this major network update I am looking forward to the government learning from our recent experiences with deliberative democracy and improvements with community consultation. I note that the government announced more changes today on

community consultation, but I admit I have not yet had the time to read and absorb them.

In terms of network planning, I am looking forward to using new and innovative ways of collecting and presenting data for that consultation. For example, with nearly all bus users using a MyWay card, we have anonymised patronage data, including journey start and end points and possibly even more importantly any transfers that go on from that in real-time. Soon we might be able to map that data and weave in data from private transport suppliers like taxis and Uber, as well as active transport data on cycle routes and pinpoints with unprecedented accuracy, high traffic areas, and upcoming transport hot spots and unmet need.

That raises some big brother issues which are beyond the scope of my conversation today. But the positive side of all this data that is being kept on us is that we should be able to do much better planning for our transport networks. That makes it all the more important to ensure that vulnerable transport users are included in our transport plan. There is an excellent chance that these users will not be part of the electronic data because they are vulnerable. They are having to stay at home because they do not have any other alternative. They may have infrequent options when a relative or close friend picks them up, but I do not think that is going to be easily found in our data.

The ACT government has made great improvements in public transport access over the past few years. I note the figures that Minister Fitzharris provided regarding the incredible increase in patronage over the weekends. It shows that it really makes a difference if you provide more buses and number them a bit more understandably. I never used to catch buses at the weekend; I now do. It really has made a difference.

We have made a lot of headway in expanding on-demand transport services, community buses and flexible buses. As part of the Labor-Greens parliamentary agreement we expanded the flexibus service to cover the whole of Canberra.

In terms of last year's update, we might ask whether the change was worth it. I cannot speak for those Canberrans who missed out and who clearly do not think it was worth it, but in some ways the numbers speak for themselves. Minister Fitzharris talked about patronage being up two per cent on weekdays and 10 per cent on weekends. In Narrabundah patronage on the new routes 4 and 6 is up eight per cent weekdays and a whopping 31 per cent on weekends over the old routes 4 and 5. That is hopefully a net positive, even though I totally acknowledge Ms Lee's point that for some it is undoubtedly not a positive and that we need to look at everybody.

In our increasingly dense, congested city and in a world choked with pollution and facing climate catastrophe it is critically important that everyone who can change their lifestyle to reduce their use of fossil fuels by using public or active transport does so and that the government does everything in its power to make that transition not just inevitable but pleasant and a substantive improvement on our collective quality of life. But in a world where many people do not speak to another person every day, it is vital that our transport options are such that people can be part of the community. All of us can be part of our community. In both these worlds more bus passengers are almost certainly a good thing.



**MISS C BURCH** (Kurrajong) (5.02): I support Ms Lee's motion and thank her for bringing this important motion here today and for all the work she has done with inner south residents on this issue. Public transport is an essential basic service of local government which should be accessible to all Canberrans. Many people in our community depend on public transport. In particular those who rely on our public transport network day after day tend to be some of the more vulnerable members of our society: young people, our elderly and those with impaired mobility.

The 2017 timetable changes to the ACTION network were largely sprung on the public with no consultation and little to no communication. The new timetable has resulted in longer, more convoluted routes and longer total travel time. People must now walk longer distances to bus stops taking multiple buses to get to where they want to go and wait for a longer time between connections. This has left many Canberrans confused, inconvenienced and frustrated.

The new timetable means elderly Canberrans are expected to walk further on a cold Canberra winter's morning, to get to their local bus stop. It means those with impaired mobility have fewer transport options and are left feeling more isolated. It means that Canberra mums and dads who utilise public transport to get to and from work now have less time to spend with their families in the evening.

Residents in the inner south and west Belconnen have been particularly adversely affected by these changes. The cancellation of route 5 means that many elderly residents in the inner south no longer have easy access to health services. Residents at St Aidan's retirement village in Narrabundah, for example, are expected to walk more than 1.6 kilometres, or more than 20 minutes, to get to and from bus stops if they wish to travel to Canberra Hospital. Other residents in old Narrabundah travelling to and from Woden now have to wait more than 30 minutes for connecting services. If they wish to travel to the city they are now faced with double the travel time and must swap buses or walk much further than under the previous timetable. I do not know about the minister, but I certainly would not expect my grandparents to walk 20 minutes to and from the bus stop on a cold Canberra morning or to wait 30 minutes in the cold for a connecting bus service.

It is not just our elderly who have been negatively affected by these changes; the Narrabundah early childhood centre, the aboriginal health service and the medical practice have all been affected as well. Residents working in Russell have also been affected as the green rapid route does not service Constitution Avenue or Russell, with passengers instead required to travel all the way into the city to change buses.

Our young people are also affected. Changes to the 455 route from Alfred Deakin high to Woden mean that buses now do not arrive until 20 minutes after school finishes and after teachers have already finished for the day. This has left the school with a difficult decision: on the one hand, if teachers leave students unsupervised it threatens student safety; on the other hand, if teachers stay this threatens school budgets.

In the north changes to the Xpresso services, which no longer travel to Barton but instead terminate in the city, mean that Belconnen residents who work in Russell or the parliamentary triangle now have to get two buses to get to work. And as if that is not enough of an inconvenience, they are expected to wait 15 minutes for a connection. This results in a 90-minute morning commute for some people. This is double the time it takes to drive from those same areas, even with morning traffic.

Meanwhile, Oaks Estate residents remain isolated despite decades of lobbying as they still do not have a direct ACTION bus route to the city or other town centres. In fact, it takes Oaks Estate residents more than 45 minutes to get to the city by public transport compared to 20 minutes in the car. This government continues to completely ignore Oaks Estate residents. Residents in Forde have also suffered: where previously a journey to the city took 45 minutes, it now takes over 70 minutes. Residents in Kaleen and Giralang also face similar issues as they have also lost access to the black rapid service.

The minister claims in the limited consultation they have conducted that Canberrans want quicker, more direct trips, and yet the replacement of previous services with the Franken-route, as Ms Lee calls it, means new routes do not allow residents to get to where they want and need to go. The minister acknowledges that Canberrans want more direct trips, and yet these changes mean that many Canberrans must catch multiple buses as their direct routes have been changed or cancelled. Even with the limited consultation the minister claims they have conducted, they are still clearly not listening to Canberrans.

The minister also says that this new timetable will drive patronage, but cancellation of local services has made it more difficult for residents to access these rapid routes. What is the point of more rapid bus routes if Canberrans are not able to get to them in the first place? The minister also claims that this an integrated public transport network. How are 30-minute wait times between connections an integrated system? The minister claims they have consulted 5,500 participants, and yet the numerous complaints we have received demonstrate that the people that these changes affect the most were not even informed, never mind consulted.

The lack of communication about the timetable and route changes has been astonishing. As mentioned by Ms Lee, many residents had not heard of the network changes until they received correspondence from her office. Is it now up to the opposition to communicate timetable changes to the people of Canberra? Is this an indication of what little regard the minister has for constituents, and for our more vulnerable constituents?

Longer travel times, convoluted routes, longer walks to bus stops and longer wait times for connections are all causing more Canberrans to get into their cars, leading to greater traffic congestion and adding to our parking woes. If the government were truly committed to reducing our reliance on cars they would be making it easier, faster and more convenient for us to catch buses. But instead of making it easier and more convenient to catch public transport, the government is making it more difficult and more time consuming. Instead of making it faster for Canberrans to get to where they

want to go, the government is preoccupied with spending \$22,000 decorating our buses with rainbows.

How is that encouraging more Canberrans to use public transport? How is that helping elderly and mobility-impaired Canberrans to get around our city? How is that reducing commuting times and traffic congestion? Public transport is a lifeline for so many people. As an essential basic service of local government, public transport should be accessible to all Canberrans. The government's changes to the ACTION network, the lack of community consultation and the lack of communication on this issue have adversely impacted many Canberrans, and this government owes them an explanation.

**MR MILLIGAN** (Yerrabi) (5.09): I thank Ms Lee for bringing forward this important motion concerning public transport, specifically the lack of adequate bus services in Canberra. In yet another display of arrogance and total disregard for the needs of the Canberra community, the ACT government has dramatically changed the bus service available to numerous areas of our community without consultation or consideration of users. Not only has Moncrief been excluded from the current network, but there is a lack of planning to accommodate current residents in Casey and Jacka. This does not bode well for future residents in Taylor and Throsby. Add to this an inadequate network in neighbouring suburbs.

I have been contacted by numerous constituents who have raised concerns about the timetable changes and the real impact this has had on people's lives and on public transport. Simply put, the Labor-Greens government has made the system much worse through its latest round of changes. Rather than working on a single direct bus service, the new network forces more transfers and has an extended travel time for many Canberra residents. It seems unlikely that these issues will be addressed by the ACT government until changes surrounding light rail become operational. Even here, I have little confidence in their ability to deliver timely and convenient services.

I believe that residents of newly developed areas and suburbs in the ACT deserve adequate services and amenities with appropriate infrastructure provided at an early stage. Given the rates and taxes Canberrans pay, is it not reasonable to expect that adequate transport and urban planning mechanisms are put in place? It is our view on this side of the chamber that Canberran residents deserve better.

Gungahlin is the fastest growing district in Canberra and the second fastest growing region in Australia. It is clear that, based on current performance, the residents of Yerrabi will continue to receive substandard transport services and planning from this government. I have spoken with numerous residents of Gungahlin who live in suburbs without adequate bus networks. These residents have explained how difficult it is to do normal, everyday things. School-age children are being forced to walk unfair distances across major roads and through overgrown reserves. But once they arrive at the few bus stops available to them, the buses are packed and can make travel very uncomfortable.

I also feel the need to point out to the government, just in case they have overlooked it, that Gungahlin residents are some of the hardest working members of our community;

66.4 per cent of residents work full time, 24.2 per cent currently work part time and in addition a further 18.9 per cent undertake voluntary work in our community. These residents deserve access to adequate public transport to partake in these activities and should have convenient and timely access to bus routes that support this endeavour.

One mother in Moncrief pointed out to me the difficulties she faces navigating the bus network to travel to work. This also is the case for her teenage son who attends school and works part time at a local pizzeria. Again, he finds the timetable and lack of adequate bus services challenging. Another resident of Forde highlighted that the new timetable had caused her commute to go from 45 minutes door to door to an hour and 10 minutes. This is an extra 50 minutes a day spent travelling because of the government's lack of consultation and poor urban planning.

How is it that the government can so blatantly disregard the needs of our community? I believe that if you want to attract people to use public transport you need to make it attractive by having direct travel routes that use one mode of transport whilst remaining cost effective. The government has already raised the cost of parking, one would think to force people on to public transport. The latest timetable has, in effect, increased the need for commuters to transfer bus services and to extend their daily commute, again, one would think, to force people on to a future system by training them now without providing any alternative.

However, if you want a successful public transport system, you need people to make that choice for themselves and of their own free will, not due to punitive measures such as raising parking costs. The new timetable does not encourage people to use public transport. Instead, it deters them. You need to deliver a truly integrated system approach to public transport that encourages commuters actually to get a better service. You should deliver adequate parking and properly planned routes and stops, as well as real community consultation and communication.

Sadly, these things the government just cannot do. It is clear that the government does not understand the needs of local families. Perhaps they should walk a mile in the shoes of everyday people who need to drop the kids off at school and then travel to work. What about the people who may want to stop at the shops on the way home or participate in community activities, such as sport and recreation? We believe it is vital that the government take on board the concerns of residents and the needs of our community when prioritising transport planning in the future.

**MRS KIKKERT** (Ginninderra) (5.15): I stand today to speak in support of the motion moved by Ms Lee. One of the most common complaints I hear from constituents in my electorate of Ginninderra is that basic services in Canberra just do not seem to work well, especially considering how small our city still is. Another complaint that ordinary Canberrans frequently share with me is that no-one seems to want to listen to them or seek their input. This motion addresses both of these issues, which all stem from a single mess.

First, the changes to the bus network that were introduced in November appear to have made it more difficult for many who wish to utilise public transport. One of my constituents who lives in west Belconnen has shared her frustrations with the new

Transport Canberra bus network. This Canberran works in the parliamentary triangle. Although she own as car, she would prefer to commute by bus in part because over the past few years the ACT government has made it so expensive for her and others like her to park near their workplaces. Before the recent changes to the bus network this constituent was able to get to work on a single bus and in what she considered a reasonable amount of time. Now she says she is required to take multiple buses that—this is the worst part—can result in commutes of over 90 minutes in some cases.

This is not how a competent government encourages workers to use public transportation. Thankfully, this Canberran still has the very expensive option of taking her private vehicle to work, but at least she has a choice. Pity our less affluent neighbours and those who are older and/or have mobility issues who are dependent on public transport to get anywhere and now find themselves facing even greater inconvenience: having to walk longer distances, use less frequent and/or slower services and take multiple buses just to complete a simple trip.

It is these residents who have become a special worry for a number of the ACT's community councils since the introduction of the bus network changes. Older Canberrans who face a choice of longer trips on two buses or a longer walk to access a new rapid route often feel like they are stuck between the proverbial rock and a hard place. Unfortunately, the outcome for many of them will be increased social isolation.

I raised the same concern in this chamber last year in relation to older residents in Latham who need to walk more than a kilometre to get to the nearest bus stop on weekends. Nothing has changed. This is not an age-friendly city when the ACT government expects the elderly to walk unrealistic distances to catch a bus.

For example, according to the Transport Canberra online trip planner, an older resident living in the eastern half of Macrossan Crescent in Latham needs to take a footpath that descends to Ginninderra Creek, go under the westbound lanes of Ginninderra Drive, cross Ginninderra Creek, go under the eastbound lanes of Ginninderra Drive, climb a footpath up into the suburb of Flynn and then, while you are almost there, just keep walking to Companion Crescent. Now you are finally ready to catch a Transport Canberra bus.

Google Maps says that this walk of more than 1,000 metres should take 15 minutes to complete. But the length is not the only challenge. Madam Deputy Speaker, can you honestly imagine that an elderly resident in Macrossan Crescent is going to be able to make such a trip with ease? Even those able bodied enough to make a one kilometre trek to a bus stop still struggle with the recent changes to Canberra's bus network.

A Canberra high school has complained that the latest changes to the bus network mean that buses are now arriving too late for their students. A high school student who prior to November was able to take a single bus to school now walks because changes to the timetable mean that the bus arrives too late in the morning for her to arrive on time. She has been left to walk a long distance to school each morning.

I have gone into some detail here because I worry that those in this chamber who make the decisions sometimes forget what it is like for those who are completely

reliant on a public transportation system that does not meet their needs and keeps changing for the worse.

That brings me to my second point: in order to have a bus network that actually meets people's needs, the ACT government needs to talk to those people. In describing the recent bus route changes, the chairman of the Public Transport Association of Canberra publicly stated the following:

Network 17 was prepared fairly quietly and community consultation was lacking.

I suggest that that is a pretty accurate, if gentle, summary of the problem. Once again, Canberrans have found themselves on the receiving end of the ACT government's dictates, having not been consulted in any meaningful way and being completely caught off guard by changes they neither asked for nor wanted. Yet they continue to pay increased rates and taxes and they certainly deserve better services.

There seems to be a pattern with this government. As I noted in yesterday's adjournment debate, changes to this year's Multicultural Festival were also handed down without proper consultation, catching many community organisations completely unaware. Feedback without knowledge of potential changes is not consultation. Damage control after the fact is not consultation either. Literally every single person or organisation that I mentioned in speaking on this topic has pointed out the lack of proper consultation before the latest bus network changes.

When individual constituents, community councils, government schools and the chairman of the public transport advocacy group all publicly comment on a lack of community consultation, then we have a problem. I therefore support Ms Lee's motion, including its request that the ACT government apologise to Canberra residents for failing to consult with them about changes to the public transportation network. This has resulted in a bus system with flaws that exclude the elderly, workers and students. The government needs to fix this mess and provide Canberrans with the transport options they need from the bus services.

**MS LEE** (Kurrajong) (5.23): I thank all my colleagues for their support on this motion. I am still at a loss as to how Ms Le Couteur is actually not supporting my motion, given that her speech was full of "Ms Lee this" and "I agree with Ms Lee on that." It baffles me that I am not receiving her support on this motion.

I know that Ms Le Couteur is an advocate for public transport. I know that she is aware of the issues facing inner south residents. Only yesterday Ms Le Couteur notified the Public Transport Association of Canberra that this motion was coming, because, presumably, she thought it was a worthwhile motion to be debating in the Assembly. So thank you for the sympathy, Ms Le Couteur, but I would much rather have your vote—just to put that on the record.

It was extremely disappointing to hear that the minister once again is not taking this issue seriously. I listened very carefully to the minister's speech. What I heard was very little on the key issues that I brought up in my motion. What I heard was the same old, same old: "Aren't we great? We got elected and we're going to do this and

that. Aren't we great because we're going to deliver this and that?" There was very little on the particular issues that I raised in my motion, and I do wonder whether she was listening to my speech at all.

When she was addressing the motion and boasting of the patronage numbers having gone up, first, she completely ignored the key fact that the Chief Minister is at great pains to spruik, which is of course that Canberra has grown in population and has increased its tourist numbers. Second, the patronage may have gone up on the particular No 4 and No 6 buses, but I do wonder whether those numbers are double-counted, given that a lot of people who were required to travel on only one bus are now required to travel on both to get to where they are, because of the poor connectivity. Further, what assurance is this? Can the minister really look Dani, Susan and Frank of Narrabundah in the eye and say, "You know what? The patronage on those buses has gone up." What reassurance is that for those people who are still missing a bus service?

The minister can quote whatever figures she likes, but it is the people who catch the bus, and it is her job as the minister for transport to provide effective public transport for all Canberrans. The fact that she has absolutely ignored the hundreds of people who have contacted my office, I am sure Miss Burch's office and I am sure the late Mr Doszpot's office—even Ms Le Couteur has confirmed that she has been contacted by a number of people—just demonstrates that, yet again, this government is using the fluffy words of access for all and social justice and equality but that, when faced with the cold, hard reality of the people who are directly impacted, numbers are above the people. She likes to talk about figures so much but she fails completely to mention the \$130 million loss that ACTION makes each year. Why? Because public transport is an essential service that serves people.

On the lack of consultation, the minister went to great lengths to say that she undertook these consultations. Is she saying that the residents of the inner south refused to engage in the consultation process or somehow missed this consultation process? Or is she saying that the entire cancellation of the No 5 bus is a "minor change" to the route that does not require a formal consultation process? It is one or the other.

Off-peak travel for seniors is all very well but if the bus does not take you where you need to go or departs from a bus stop that you cannot reasonably walk to, the concessional price is meaningless. A flexible bus service that is free for all is all very well, but if you need to attend a medical appointment urgently then it is of no use, given that you need to book 48 hours in advance. If you need to get to a shopping centre to buy groceries and the closest bus stop is nearly a kilometre away, whatever the frequency, whatever the timetable, whatever the concessional fare—or even free—it becomes pointless.

For the minister to claim that she has consulted with the community when all that happened was, at best, information-sharing after the changes were made is just not good enough.

What does the minister say to the residents of old Narrabundah who are being kicked off the bus? Preaching to them that overall figures of patronage have gone up is of little comfort to them when they still do not have an effective bus service. The minister seems to have thrown to the wind her predecessor's grand vision for the future of transport in Canberra: Minister Corbell's claim that it would be a transport system that puts people first.

If the minister is not willing to listen to the members of the opposition who are voicing the concerns of their constituents, then perhaps she was moved by a member of her own party, Ms Cheyne, who earlier this morning talked about the one kilometre of carrying groceries from the Belconnen Fresh Food Markets to the Belconnen bus stop being quite a long way. Or does the minister think that perhaps one kilometre in Belconnen is too far but 1.4 or 1.6 in old Narrabundah is quite okay?

As she is so focused on the figures and not the people, I will enlighten her with what the people have to say, in their own words. One says:

The Government encourages people to use buses instead of their own cars (for those who have one) and then makes ridiculous decisions which make it more difficult for people to get from A to B, Canberra already has a terrible transport system, so why make it worse. There does not appear to have been any consultation between the Minister and the Narrabundah community and quite frankly I am furious about it. My land rates have gone up extensively over the past couple of years and I know this is partly to fund the light rail which only benefits the residents of Gungahlin in its first stage, then to have our bus discontinued is unbelievable.

Another says:

It's like they've gone back to a 1956 route ... which was fine for Canberra 60 years ago when there wasn't much past Griffith shops. But Canberra isn't what it was like back then and buses should keep up!

Another, actually a direct response to the minister when she was spruiking the new routes, says:

You are indeed correct in saying that these changes are disruptive, asserting that disruption is justified for "an overall improvement for passengers across the bus network". However you didn't explain how this will occur, which passengers and what parts of the network? Aren't all passengers equal or are some more equal than others?

Another says:

I found the response from the minister to be disingenuous. It is clear she is cognisant of the lack of community consultation and quite ignorant of future need. More services? How do you expect a 103 year old to walk 1.5 kilometres from Karringal court to the Rapid Green stop at Griffith in order to get to Woden? My blind neighbour walks 50 meters to the bus stop for a trip to Woden. How is he supposed to get to the Green Rapid? The extra service is meaningless if not accessible.



The community is rallying and I can assure you, social equity issues are at stake here. Do you really want this matter to become a political thorn in your side? We can put a face to the vulnerable, we can tell the human story. All Minister Fitzharris can do is cite anecdotal indicators.

Old Narrabundah is not resistant to change, we want to be included in those changes.

Where is the genuine engagement, so far all that has been forthcoming is political duck-speak and a lot of ducking and weaving.

I could go on and on. However, in the interests of time, what I will say is this. I have read the minister's amendment to my motion. The Canberra Liberals will not be supporting that amendment because, once again, it is another attempt at rewriting the entire motion, absolutely ignoring the key issues that I have brought to this Assembly because they are of great concern to the people in the inner south, and it is another self-congratulatory amendment that completely hijacks the issues. It is disappointing but not surprising that the Greens are in the front row giving them a standing ovation for what they are doing.

On that basis, I commend my original motion. The Canberra Liberals will not be supporting the amendment.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 10

Noes 7

Ms J Burch	Ms Le Couteur	Miss C Burch	Ms Lee
Ms Cheyne	Ms Orr	Mr Coe	Mr Milligan
Ms Cody	Mr Pettersson	Mrs Dunne	
Ms Fitzharris	Mr Rattenbury	Mrs Kikkert	
Mr Gentleman	Mr Steel	Ms Lawder	

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## Office for mental health

**MRS DUNNE** (Ginninderra) (5.35): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the Labor/Greens Parliamentary Agreement for the 9<sup>th</sup> Assembly provides for the establishment of an Office for Mental Health;

- (b) delivery on this initiative has been delayed;
  - (c) the shortage of mental health professionals, particularly in the field of child and adolescent mental health; and
  - (d) the difficulties ACT residents experience in navigating the current system; and
- (2) calls on the Minister for Mental Health to:
- (a) explain to the people of Canberra:
    - (i) the delay in the establishment of the Office for Mental Health; and
    - (ii) what the Government is doing in practical terms to provide the services that patients need now, in advance of the establishment of the Office for Mental Health; and
  - (b) report to the Assembly by the first sitting day in March 2018 as to the:
    - (i) construct and terms of reference for the Office for Mental Health;
    - (ii) Government's strategies to simplify navigation of the mental health services system; and
    - (iii) Government's strategies to attract and retain more mental health professionals in Canberra, particularly in the field of child and adolescent mental health.

This is a very important issue for the people of the ACT and continues the work that the Canberra Liberals have been doing over a considerable time now. I acknowledge my predecessor as the shadow minister for mental health, Mrs Jones, for the work that has been done to highlight the concerns that we have in relation to issues relating to mental health.

My particular concern at the moment is the almost stasis in the health department in this area because we do not have an office for mental health. It seems that everyone is waiting for the office for mental health to be bestowed upon the people of Canberra and then everything will be fine. During annual reports hearings late last year, I asked the Minister for Mental Health on notice:

What were the unavoidable delays in progressing formal consultation on the office for mental health?

This was a matter that the minister had referred to on a number of occasions, including in ministerial statements in this place. The summary of the minister's answer is that he could not do anything until funding for the office for mental health had been appropriated, and that did not happen until 24 August 2017. The ACT Greens announced their plan for an office for mental health on 13 September 2016, and it made its way into the Labor-Greens parliamentary agreement for the Ninth Assembly. It was almost a year later that the Greens actually got the government to put the whole proposal on the streets, and this was only in the form of a conversation starter.

When I first became the shadow minister for health, and therefore for mental health, I eventually received a briefing, I think in about February last year, on the office for

mental health. I was told at that briefing that the consultation on the form of the office for mental health would begin in April 2017. I was surprised that nothing happened during April—or May, June or July. During the truncated health estimates last year—truncated because of the illness of the minister for health and the absence of the minister for mental health—an official told the committee that the consultation on the form of the office for mental health would be the minister’s first priority when he returned from leave.

Eventually, after all of that, late in the year we had this conversation starter. Even now, we are not at the starting blocks. It has taken 12 months to write a 10-page document to start a conversation. That is a one-year dance around so that we can get to the starting blocks. The minister said he took action after the Assembly passed the appropriation for the office for mental health. However, that seems to be an *ex post facto* justification. I was told in a briefing, which was attended by ministerial staff—I think, if my memory serves me correctly, that I was told by the ministerial staffer present—that the consultation on the office for mental health would begin in April 2017. There was no indication at that stage to say, “Oh, Mrs Dunne, we can’t do anything until there is appropriation.”

There was appropriation of \$2.9 million over four years to establish a new office for mental health for the ACT. The budget papers say:

The Office will enhance coordination of mental health services and work towards closing gaps in care for people with mental health conditions ...

The budget paper does not say that the money is about having a conversation.

In his answer to my question on notice, Mr Rattenbury also said that the appropriation allowed him to undertake a procurement process to engage a consultant to tell him how the office should be structured and what it should do. Although we have had a policy position since at least September 2016 from the Greens, and at least October-November 2016 from the government, by November last year we were still having a consultation and hiring a consultant to tell us what we thought should be in this office.

It is perhaps a slightly over-used term, but it sounds pretty much as though the whole policy idea was little more than a thought bubble. The appropriation in the last budget does not say that there is money to engage a consultant to tell you how to do what you should already know how to do. The appropriation is for the office for mental health to “enhance coordination of mental health services and work towards closing gaps in care for people with mental health conditions”. This appropriation assumes that all the research and the consultation had been done so that the office for mental health could hit the ground running as soon as the Assembly pressed the go button. Pressing the go button occurred through the appropriation of August last year. Mr Rattenbury has been sitting around, surfing the net and having conversations, and not very many conversations at that. And even after all of that, he still needs to pay a consultant to tell him what to do when he should already know what to do.

We have Canberrans with mental health problems unable to navigate an impossibly complex, impersonal, one-size-fits-all, bureaucratic system. Instead of having an office for mental health, we continue to suffer inadequate facilities that cannot meet demand. There are staff shortages across the board. There is a chronic lack of mental health specialists, such as psychologists, psychiatrists and mental health nurses, and we cannot meet that demand. There is a particularly chronic shortage of specialists in paediatric and adolescent mental health, an issue which my colleague Mrs Kikkert will address.

Mr Rattenbury is sitting over there; he has been sniggering and rolling his eyes, as is his wont, at everything I say. I refer the Assembly to the 2018 report on government services. Here are some of the things that the ROGS for 2018 has to say about the state of mental health services in the ACT. In 2015-16, the ACT had the highest proportion of people in Australia using specialised public mental health services. For 2015-16, the ACT was the only jurisdiction that did not publish data on the proportion of people discharged from a public hospital psychiatric inpatient unit who had a significant improvement in their clinical mental health outcomes.

So one of the first things we know from ROGS is that we do not know. We do not know, because of the failings in the health system. But some things we do know. Over the past 10 years, the number of patient days per 1,000 people for admitted acute care mental health patients has been increasing, from 48.5 to 64.9. Yet the number of beds per 100,000 people has actually fallen, from 20.7 to 18.6.

This is underpinned not by ROGS data but by answers to questions on notice provided during the annual report hearings that show that for 2016-17, the average bed occupancy rate at the adult mental health unit was 105 per cent. At the adult mental health unit, according to the answer submitted by Mr Rattenbury to question on notice No 56, the average bed occupancy was 105 per cent. And the unit was at capacity, or near or above capacity, for most of the year. This is a problem of addressing the needs of the people of the ACT. Other ROGS data showed that the full-time-equivalent direct care staff per 100,000 people had risen only marginally, from 28 per 100,000 people to 32. This was well below the national average of 50.

Members who were present during the annual report hearings last year might recall the story of Jack, not his real name, whose study I took to the annual reports hearings with the agreement of Jack's family and Jack himself. Jack descended into a state of crisis, having to go interstate to receive acute treatment and care. My colleague Mrs Kikkert, I understand, will speak on this matter as well. There was another patient recorded on ABC Online in October last year who had to travel to Victoria to receive help.

Recent media reports have assessed the minister's assurances about the office for mental health as something worth waiting for. The thing is that the people of Canberra have been waiting and waiting. And all the time they are waiting for the consultation paper, for the conversation to be concluded, they are also waiting for services to be joined up, for there to be enough practitioners here to meet their needs so that they do not have to travel interstate at a time when they are most vulnerable.

We on this side are hoping that the office for mental health will be worth waiting for. I would have thought that a budget appropriation should be based on something more than a nebulous concept taking nigh on a year to evolve into a 10-page conversation starter.

The funding for the first year of the \$2.9 million budget allocation for the office for mental health is \$507,000. I am not sure whether any of it has been spent on mental health rather than on talking about mental health. My calendar head tells me that we are more than halfway through 2017-18, and still Mr Rattenbury has not unlocked the door of the office for mental health. Only now have we just finished the conversation.

No doubt Mr Rattenbury will now spend some time sitting around waiting for his consultant to tell him what he should already know and having a bit more of a contemplate about what should happen and what and how elements of the office for mental health should be put together. We on this side will be very surprised, very pleasantly surprised, if he unlocks the doors of the office for mental health before the end of this financial year. In the meantime, not one dollar of the half a million dollars allocated in the 2017-18 budget has been spent on its purpose, which, I remind you again, Madam Speaker, is to “enhance coordination of mental health services and work towards closing gaps in care for people with mental health conditions”.

The ACT’s mental health services continue to be so uncoordinated as to be impossible for patients to navigate. They continue to create gaps—gaping chasms, some would say—through which some of the most vulnerable in our community plunge to states of despair and hopelessness.

I call on Mr Rattenbury to put aside the cogitation and explain to this community, through this Assembly, what the office for mental health will look like and how he will bring it to fruition as soon as possible. The people of Canberra with mental health conditions and their families are sick of waiting.

**MRS KIKKERT** (Ginninderra) (5.48): I stand today to speak in support of the motion brought by Mrs Dunne. I specifically wish to address clause 1(c) “the shortage of mental health professionals, particularly in the field of child and adolescent mental health”. This point should not be open to debate. It is rather an established fact. The Minister for Minister Health just last month identified a lack of adequate psychologists and psychiatrists in the territory as a pressure point in the ACT’s mental health system. He also noted that to date attempts to aggressively recruit new mental health professionals had been insufficient to fill all the service gaps.

Mr Rattenbury’s assessment of the situation is backed up by data from ACT Health. These figures show that shortages of mental health workers are affecting both the public and the private sectors, with fewer than nine psychiatrists for every 100,000 Canberra residents.

Only seven months ago, the ACT secretary of the Australian Salaried Medical Officers Federation called this shortage “crippling.” At that point nine psychiatrists had left ACT Health in the previous 12 months and the adult mental health unit at

Canberra Hospital was at times operating with a single psychiatrist on duty, raising concerns for patient safety. As noted in Mrs Dunne's motion, the shortage of mental health professionals in the territory has had real impacts on the provision of child and adolescent mental health services.

Canberra's Huxtable family bravely went public last October with the story of their experiences in order to highlight this crisis and the impact it has had on their family. When the Huxtables' daughter was diagnosed as needing mental health treatment, the GP told them frankly that there was no psychiatrist in Canberra who could treat her. Instead, the family found themselves forced to access an inpatient treatment program in faraway Melbourne with treatment and travel costs running to more than \$1,000 per week.

Last year and with permission I brought up the situation of another Canberra family in a speech that I gave in this chamber, and then Mrs Dunne shared their story with the minister in annual reports hearings. Like the Huxtables, this family has found it necessary to travel interstate to secure mental health treatment for their child as a consequence of the shortage of professionals here, this time finding the needed services in Sydney.

Shortly after I brought up this family's situation in my speech another Canberra resident contacted me to tell me that what I had said had struck a chord. You see, this man has a co-worker who has been forced to take a child interstate to seek mental health treatment as a consequence of the appalling lack of mental health professionals in the ACT, particularly in the field of child and adolescent mental health. I respectfully suggest that in a jurisdiction as prosperous as the Chief Minister continually claims the ACT is, with a Minister for Mental Health and a promised long-delayed office for mental health, this situation is inexcusable.

The union representing doctors at Canberra Hospital has claimed that the safety of patients in the adult mental health unit is at risk because there are not enough psychiatrists and psychologists. Families who wish to see their children well again are forced to travel hundreds of kilometres to seek help because it is simply not available here. Seriously, how can this be? We are the nation's capital.

Meanwhile, the number of children and young people who are in need of mental health services is increasing. As we learned just last month, Menslink has now opened its services to primary school-age boys with those aged 10 to 12 years old now making up 12 per cent of the support group's client case. I am grateful for the counselling and other services that an organisation like Menslink can provide but where do these boys go? Where will other young Canberrans go if they need professional services in this territory?

Clearly, this Assembly should note the crippling shortage of mental health professionals that is leaving some of our most vulnerable without support or hope. The residents of Canberra deserve an explanation about what this government is doing in practical terms to provide the services that patients need now.

**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) (5.53): I welcome the opportunity to address some of the mischaracterisation that has been put forward in this debate this afternoon and to discuss the very important issues of mental health in this city because the government is committed to addressing this area. It has probably been an interesting lesson this afternoon. I have been frank about some of the challenges that we face, and they have now become points of political attack. I guess it raises the challenging question of how one speaks about things in the reality without turning it into a point of political opportunity for the opposition.

I do not accept Mrs Dunne's characterisation of the ACT mental health services or the process the government has undertaken to establish the office for mental health. I move the amendment circulated in my name:

Omit all words after paragraph (1), substitute:

- “(a) the Labor/Greens Parliamentary Agreement for the 9th Legislative Assembly provides for the establishment of an Office for Mental Health;
  - (b) that work is well underway to establish the Office by July 2018, and has included significant community consultation and engagement over recent months to inform the proposed model;
  - (c) the national shortage of mental health professionals, particularly in the field of child and adolescent mental health; and
  - (d) the difficulties ACT residents can sometimes experience when navigating the current system;
- (2) further notes the Government's ongoing commitment, through an additional \$23.8 million in the 2017-18 ACT Budget, to improve access to mental health services in advance of the opening of the Office for Mental Health. The Government commitment includes:
- (a) \$5.3 million to fund a range of targeted mental health programs and services in the community, including headspace and the Detention Exit Community Outreach Program;
  - (b) \$13.8 million to deliver new rehabilitation beds at the Dhulwa Mental Health Unit;
  - (c) \$1.8 million to reduce incidences of suicide in the community by funding the Black Dog Institute's Lifespan Suicide Prevention Program;
  - (d) \$100 000 to Menslink to fund additional counsellors and expand free community counselling services to boys aged 10-12;
  - (e) expanding the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Consultation and Liaison Service at the Canberra Hospital to provide services 7 days per week;
  - (f) expanding the Perinatal Mental Health Consultation Service to provide greater access to specialist psychiatric services for new Canberra mothers; and

- (g) developing the Mental Health Specialty Service Plan within the Territory-wide Health Services Framework and the associated mental health model of care, which will improve the coordination of mental health services in a holistic and patient-centred way; and
- (3) calls on the Minister for Mental Health to provide an update to the Assembly by the first sitting day in May 2018 on:
- (a) the establishment of the Office for Mental Health, including its proposed model and functions;
  - (b) the Government's efforts to simplify navigation of the mental health services system for people in the ACT; and
  - (c) the Government's strategies to attract and retain more medical professionals, including mental health professionals in Canberra and with a focus on the field of child and adolescent mental health."

I will speak to that in detail.

In my time as minister I have been impressed with the skill and dedication of those who work in mental health services. We have a dedicated and professional workforce who are doing what can be at times a very difficult job. However, I do think it is fair to say that what I often see is a number of high quality services as opposed to a well-integrated system, and that is something that we want to try to address.

There are issues around integration between primary, secondary and tertiary mental health services, between government and non-government, public and private. I consider that the system remains largely focused on responding to acute care and crisis. It has not shifted towards promotion, prevention and early intervention enough, even though the evidence to support this is stronger than ever.

I would hasten to add that this is a challenge for all advanced healthcare systems to ensure that they work in an integrated fashion and are systems that people can move around relatively easily in, accessing the right care at the right time. It is important that we recognise, whilst there is absolutely work to do in this respect in the ACT, that this is not uniquely a Canberra problem.

What I can say, however, is that this government has taken decisive steps in seeking to improve coordination and integration for the people of the ACT, and that is why we committed to establish an office for mental health at the last election and that is why it is a key item in the parliamentary agreement and one that I am moving forward. I am focused on developing an accountable, transparent and community-focused approach to both chronic and acute mental health care that puts the people who need the service at the centre of it.

The office for mental health is a central part of our reform agenda and will have a key role in addressing some of the issues of connectivity and coordination that I am keen to address. I have said on numerous occasions that my four goals for the office are to provide comprehensive oversight and increased understanding of the mental health system and how it can be improved in the ACT, to ensure person-centred and needs-based approaches across government initiatives, to improve the coordination,



integration and targeting of services and facilities, and to drive a reduction in mental illness incidents, frequency and impacts through the development and oversight of a comprehensive mental health and wellbeing framework.

I would also like to respond to Mrs Dunne's assertion that the establishment of the office has been delayed. This has not been the case. In fact, I do not believe Mrs Dunne has any basis for this claim since I have consistently said the office would be established by 1 July 2018, and we are on track to meet that goal. It is true that we have taken a very deliberate approach to establishing the office, with significant community consultation and engagement feeding into the proposed model. The consultant engaged by ACT Health has spent the past three months speaking to people locally.

Mrs Dunne was heavily focused on this conversation starter. She completely did not address the fact that there has been a very substantial conversation with key community stakeholders over recent months to develop a model that will work for the ACT.

I was pleased to be able to participate in some of these consultation sessions and I look forward to receiving the final report by the end of this month. I will then work with ACT Health and across government to implement the proposed model and I am confident that we will meet our commitment to establish the office by 1 July this year, as we have always said.

I was very interested in the criticism of talking to the community too much. I can almost guarantee that if I had gone ahead and just established it exactly how I thought it should be we would be in here with a motion—

**Mrs Dunne:** You were going to do it in April last year.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Mrs Dunne is starting to interject. She stood here before and had a go at me for having the audacity to roll my eyes at something she said. She stood there slinging all sorts of insults at me, and she was offended. I did not even interject. As soon as I say something that contradicts one of the points she so pompously made, she starts interjecting. Let us examine our relative standards of behaviour in this place, and I will stick with mine any day of the week.

The point I was making was: if I had simply gone ahead and established an office for mental health in the vision that I saw, exactly how I wanted it, I can guarantee I would be facing a motion in this place for failing to consult. You cannot have it both ways. We are out there driving a conversation with people who matter on this issue—people with expertise, people with lived experience, people who work in the sector—and we have gone and said, "This is the vision we have in mind. We want to test this with you and make sure we get it right." It is worth taking the time to get this done properly. We will still meet the deadline we have, which is to have it up and running by 1 July this year.

I make no apology for taking the necessary time to ensure that all key stakeholders have had an opportunity to contribute to the development of the model. There is a

debate. Some people have said we should discuss it for longer. Let us bear in mind that in relation to the Mental Health Act—Mrs Dunne will remember this, I think, and she might correct me—I think there was six years development or thereabouts, five, six, something like that. People know this is a really difficult space. There are challenging stakeholder questions to work through, and I think the time frame we are working to is appropriate, trying to find the balance between allowing enough time for the conversation and getting on with the job.

*At 6 pm, in accordance with standing order 34, the debate was interrupted. The motion for the adjournment of the Assembly having been put and negatived, the debate was resumed.*

**MR RATTENBURY:** I believe the office will be most successful if it has the right relationships and buy-in from people across the mental health sector. It is a significant opportunity for us to re-evaluate how we do things in mental health services in the territory, and it is not an opportunity we can waste. It is also not an opportunity that we are prepared to rush, leading to the delivery of something not quite right, even if it could be delivered a little faster.

From the preliminary results of the consultations, it is clear that the community wants the office to provide some key things: leadership and the capacity to articulate a vision for mental health in the ACT in the 21st century. They want stewardship, the capacity to take responsibility for the process of systemic quality improvement in mental health. They want change management, based on an intimate understanding of the process of clinical service and policy decision-making in relation to mental health in the ACT. They want collaboration, the capacity to build effective teams and deliver outcomes. They want analytics, the skills to understand what is going on and what is changing. And they want reporting and feedback, the capacity to develop useful reports and feedback mechanisms for services for government and for the community.

That is a challenging list. It is a big job to work on some of those things, but we are determined to take that on. We are not shy of getting stuck into some of those challenging areas. I have been pleased to see such active engagement in the consultation process from across the mental health sector. I am grateful for the commitment of time, energy and expertise that people have contributed to the discussion. It is clear that the office will have a lot to do. I look forward to having it in place soon so that we can get down to the task at hand.

Whilst the office is a key priority for me this year, the government is not standing still when it comes to mental health. We are continuing to invest in improving mental health services on the ground. There is plenty of other work going on. I can assure members of the opposition that we are not standing still. These services will make an immediate difference to people across Canberra in the short term while allowing the office to undertake the longer-term strategic assessment of a mental health system.

As is outlined in my amendment to Mrs Dunne's motion, the 2017-18 budget included \$23.8 million to improve mental health services in the ACT. This included \$1.8 million towards suicide prevention support services; \$13.8 million to deliver new rehabilitation beds at the Dhulwa mental health unit; \$5.3 million for

community-based mental health supports for vulnerable people, including \$3 million to support children and young people's mental health; and \$2.9 million towards the development and rollout of the office for mental health.

Mrs Dunne makes an important point: there is a particular need for supports for children and young people. Mrs Kikkert has followed through in making that same point. The government is responding to that need. We know that half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14, which is why early intervention and access to mental health support services for children and young people are vital. That is why the government continues to provide support for these important services.

One example is the recent allocation of \$100,000 to Menslink. I was pleased that Mrs Kikkert is supportive of that, because I think it is a really good program. This will provide two additional counsellors, allowing them to expand their services to boys in the 10 to 12-year age group. I was very pleased that the ACT government was able to step in to provide this money to Menslink in a partnership. To be fair, they are putting money on the table as well. This is a co-funded model. They came to the government and said, "We have identified a new need. We think we have got a solution." We have been able to jump in and respond to that with an innovative new program that I think will make a real difference.

In terms of Mrs Kikkert's question of where they will go, the very purpose of the Menslink program is to intervene early to avoid escalation. That is the whole point here. Some will need escalation. There is no doubt about that. The child and adolescent mental health service is a key referral point for Menslink. That is how this has been set up. I am pleased with that model and I am pleased that Mrs Kikkert noticed. I welcome her support for that program. I think Menslink are doing a good job, because this is a challenging space. We know that parents, schools and service providers are seeing people come forward younger and younger. This is a response to that.

We have also expanded access to our child and adolescent public mental health services with the CAMS consultation and liaison service at the Canberra Hospital now providing services seven days a week. Previously it was five. That has taken effect in the past two months. The service can now provide specialist mental health assessments on weekends for young people aged five to 18 years who are already admitted to the paediatric ward or who present to the emergency department. This means that young people no longer have to be seen by the adult mental health service on the weekends.

Because we know that people need mental health services at all stages in life, we have just expanded the perinatal mental health consultation service with specialised psychiatric clinics that have been increased from one day to three days a week, as well as providing an outreach service with the West Belconnen Child and Family Centre.

The government is committed to continuing to invest in and improve our mental health system. It is also worth pointing out the extent to which mental health is a whole community issue. We know that we need to work with other parts of government. That is what we will continue to do.

These are the sorts of issues that I see the office having a key role in understanding and in bringing parties together to address from both the health and social determinant perspectives. The development of the territory-wide health services framework seeks to embed those principles as well.

On the question of the workforce, access to mental health professionals is a challenge that is being felt nationally. Here in the ACT we are not immune from this problem. One of my responses has been to raise this issue at the COAG health minister level. At the meeting in August last year I asked for work to be done on developing a national response to current mental health workforce issues. That work is currently being undertaken by the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council. ACT Health are also actively working to address this problem in both the short and longer term.

Senior medical staff shortages within the directorate are being addressed by ongoing recruitment efforts led by the Office of the Chief Psychiatrist and the establishment of the medical workforce working group in August 2017. We are working with the staff to help us think about how we can attract more people to Canberra. When there is a national shortage, we are competing. We have to sell this city. We have to sell our passion for tackling mental health to make us an employer of choice and also overcome some of the reasons people sometimes do not want to come to Canberra. For all the reputational issues, people who live here know it is a great city to live in, but not everyone outside thinks that.

The working group's remit is to develop a strategic plan which encompasses recruitment and retention strategies, projected population needs, workforce numbers, subspecialty skill mix requirements and local factors that are having an impact upon recruitment and retention of psychiatrists in the ACT public mental health system.

We also need to accept, though, that some people will need to go interstate. There are some specialties that we simply cannot provide here in the ACT. There will be times that it is appropriate for people to go interstate. That should not be the default position, but I think for some people it will be an unfortunate necessity because of the very specialised nature of their needs.

I will conclude. There is a lot more I could say. I would like to talk about this a lot more. But what I can say is that we are getting on with the job of establishing the office for mental health. We are having a great conversation with the community. There is detailed work being done at the moment.

I look forward to reporting back to the Assembly on that, as my amendment notes. But we are not standing still while we are doing that. There are service improvements going on right across the sector. There are new bits of work being funded. I am happy to report to the Assembly that we will continue to drive improvement in this sector as a way of making it better for Canberrans to tackle their mental health concerns.

**MS FITZHARRIS** (Yerrabi—Minister for Health and Wellbeing, Minister for Transport and City Services and Minister for Higher Education, Training and Research) (6.09): I am very pleased to speak to this motion today and, in particular, to

acknowledge Minister Rattenbury's amendment, which we will be supporting. We are very much looking forward to the establishment of the office for mental health.

Minister Rattenbury has outlined the extensive work underway to improve access and better coordinate mental health services. Far from standing still, Minister Rattenbury has outlined not just the process and the extensive consultation but also the increase in services, in particular, the services with Menslink, the perinatal mental health services and the extension of CAMHS to weekend services for children and adolescents. Some of these were important commitments by Labor in the lead-up to the last election. We are very pleased to have seen these implemented so quickly in this term of government.

The territory-wide health services framework that Minister Rattenbury referred to also establishes the overarching principles to guide development and redesign of all healthcare services across the territory over the next decade, and of course this includes mental health.

The framework is focused on integrating services across three areas of health care: preventive health, community-based care and care in hospitals. A number of key pieces of work in ACT Health are currently underway as a result of this framework, all of which contribute to the provision of a holistic, integrated healthcare system that is patient-centred for people in our community.

I can confirm that the establishment of the territory-wide health services group has now occurred. As I mentioned in a previous debate, I was very pleased to meet with that advisory group for the first time late last month. The advisory group includes representation of people who will bring important and powerful insights into mental health, and their expertise will inform the final framework as well as the important work being undertaken for the office for mental health.

One of the most tangible benefits of this approach to service planning will be making it easier for patients to navigate the services they need. I am also pleased to let members of the Assembly know that the development and implementation of specialty service plans is already occurring, with significant stakeholder consultation internal to ACT Health underway, and external stakeholder consultation anticipated to start later this year.

We are very proud of this framework, which also highlights the strategic priorities for ACT Health, one of which is mental health. Development of the specialty service plan for mental health, justice health and alcohol and drug services is underway. In planning for the future role and capacity of these services across the territory, there is an opportunity to develop services that support contemporary models of care, including a greater emphasis on primary, community and ambulatory services, with a multidisciplinary orientation.

The specialty service plan will highlight the provision of recovery-focused care and services that are better integrated with non-government and commonwealth-funded services for the benefit of the individual and their carers and family.

As has been mentioned, some areas of the ACT Health workforce are experiencing some challenges, and we are facing this head-on. Work on a workforce attraction strategy is well underway. This piece of work will address workforce issues with both the attraction and retention of specialists, as well as health staff more broadly, and, as Minister Rattenbury noted, including mental health professionals with a focus on the field of child and adolescent mental health.

Through this work we will seek to attract specialists and other health staff to what is one of the world's most livable cities, and to highlight the significant investments in health services and health infrastructure that are on this government's agenda, many of which are already funded, as well as the incredible health workforce we have here, and the move to a high performing, innovative and patient-centred system. It is a health system which is undergoing a process of reform and growth, with, accordingly, investments in infrastructure, services and people.

This work will also celebrate our proximity to opportunities for research and training collaboration, with strong relationships with renowned local universities. This combined work will drive the future of the healthcare workforce, attracting health professionals to make this great city their home.

I was pleased, while attending the health ministers meeting last year, that there was a special session on mental health, in which Minister Rattenbury raised the issue of the mental health workforce. All ministers across the country agreed with his recommendations that further work needed to be undertaken in this space, acknowledging the ACT's leadership in this area.

Minister Rattenbury and I look forward to continuing to work on the territory-wide health services plan, with mental health as one of our key priorities, so that we can ensure improved integration of mental health and health services for all Canberrans.

**MRS DUNNE** (Ginninderra) (6.14): I acknowledge the amendment that was circulated. Unfortunately, it was circulated after I began speaking. It was a bit of a shame—considering that this notice has been on the notice paper since Monday—that the minister would not share that with the mover of the motion until the mover was on her feet and speaking. If we are talking about the right way to do things, we all have lessons to learn.

The amendment is broadly acceptable in that paragraphs (1) and (3) are broadly in the same tone as my paragraphs (1) and (2). I should acknowledge that the minister has been candid about workforce and other issues. My principal complaint today is with the delay in the establishment of the office for mental health. When I was first briefed about this, there was not a starting date, but it was to be as soon as possible, and they wanted to do it last year. It became obvious, because there was no preparation, that it was not going to happen last year. Yes, the minister has consistently said that it will begin in July 2018, but essentially that is as a result of not doing anything very much for the first six or nine months of having the job of Minister for Mental Health.

Let us go to the chronology. Last February I was told that the discussion paper about this would be out in April. In July I asked where it was and I was told that when the

minister got back from leave that would be his highest priority. The discussion paper went out in October, I think. I stand to be corrected but it was at about that time. So the officials thought this was the minister's highest priority in July, but the minister did not get around to concluding this matter until at least October.

I have not criticised the minister for consulting. I have criticised the minister for his slowness in consulting, and the glacial pace at which this has moved. The minister himself in ministerial statements has admitted that this is a problem. We have had discussions at length about the unavoidable circumstances that led to this. I have never had a satisfactory explanation about what those unavoidable circumstances are, except that, when really pressed, the minister said, "I didn't have appropriation for it." We had policy agreement. There was broad policy agreement, it was part of the Labor-Greens agreement and this minister could not get his act together. After the event he then used the excuse that there was no appropriation. It is a poor excuse.

As I said, paragraphs (1) and (3) of Mr Rattenbury's amendment, which was produced quite late, are broadly acceptable. I would like a reporting date that is earlier than the one proposed by Mr Rattenbury. It is quite clear that Mr Rattenbury does not know what he is going to be reporting on, which is why he has kicked it back. We need to put on the record that this is a minister who does not yet have a fully formed idea about what the office for mental health will look like.

I do take the point that it should not be about what Shane Rattenbury thinks the office for mental health should look like. It is about what is best for the community. The Shane Rattenbury model may be the one that is best for the community but that needs to be tested. It should have been tested in the first half of last year, not in the last half and in the early part of this year, as has been the case, and we should have progressed on this much more than we have.

Paragraph (2) further notes some issues which are important but which do not reflect directly on the office for mental health, and this motion is essentially about the office for mental health. If I were to quibble, I could move that they be deleted because they do not relate to the motion in its original form, but I do not think, at this stage of the day, at 20 past 6, that we want to go down that path.

I am pleased that this motion today has produced some activity from the Minister for Mental Health, and I am pleased that we will get a report, albeit a little later than we first envisaged and that we first hoped for. But there will be a report. This report is about what the office for mental health will look like; it will come down in May and the minister proposes that it will be available and ready to go on 1 July. I hope he is right. As they say in the classics, I would really like to see that.

I thank members for their contributions to the debate today. Although I have quibbles about some of the content of the amendment and the late notice with which it was provided, the Canberra Liberals will generally accept the amendment, noting that in doing so we are pushing back the reporting date by which the Minister for Mental Health will have to report to the Assembly. With that I thank members for their contributions to the debate.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **Adjournment**

Motion (by **Mr Gentleman**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

## **Tuggeranong—government services**

**MS J BURCH** (Brindabella) (6.21): I want to talk briefly today, in the first sitting week in the year of 2018, about the government delivering on initiatives for Tuggeranong Valley. Tuggeranong is going through a period of expansion, and that is why we are planning and delivering the services that our local community needs.

Canberra is recognised as the most liveable city in the world in which to live, and I have said here before and will say at any opportunity that in Tuggeranong the sun shines brighter and the grass is greener. My co-member for Brindabella, Mr Gentleman, recognises that as well.

Speaking of the grass growing greener, it was a great pleasure to join Mr Gentleman a number of weeks ago to see the rollout of green bins. This is a very popular initiative, a welcome initiative. From Gordon and Banks in the south to Wanniasa in the north, in excess of 8,000 people from the Brindabella electorate have chosen to opt in to this system. We know why: because down south we have large gardens, magnificent gardens. I see that when we are out and about walking in the community. Opting in to the green bin services recognises that that will make the time and certainly the cost of maintaining gardens easier. It is not too late. Even though the green bins are popping up through the suburbs of Tuggeranong, it is not too late for community members who have not put their names down to get this service to register.

We are also delivering on infrastructure. I will talk about the duplication of Ashley Drive, which is very close to being completed. Ashley Drive is a very major street. It carries over 20,000 cars each and every day through our suburbs. It is a busy street indeed, so the duplication will be welcomed by many. There are underpasses and improved cycle lanes attached to that duplication. It will reduce travel time. In particular the areas of the intersections around Statton Street and Clift Crescent are well known to have a bit of a traffic jam. Certainly the duplication and the improvements for that area will improve our travel times. All of us on our way home want to get home quickly, want to get home to our families and enjoy our family time and, often, forget about the time at work that day.

In the town centre, I know that those who have visited Tuggeranong recently will see the improvement on Anketell Street, where we have invested \$3 million in stage 1 of the Anketell Street redevelopment. I look forward to phase 2. While Minister Fitzharris has left the room, she can be assured that I will keep on asking about when



those improvements will come on board, because stage 1 has certainly opened that area up, made a great improvement, and stage 2 will as well.

Another great investment down south has been at Caroline Chisholm School. This year, from term 1, the students of Caroline Chisholm and the students from the broader Tuggeranong network will have access to our science, technology, engineering and maths centre, the STEM centre. That was a \$5.9 million investment. I was there in April of last year turning the sod, and it is great to see that the construction fences are down and that the STEM centre is open for the students. It is great to see that investment in Tuggeranong schools, making sure that our students get access to great training that sets them up for the future and the jobs of the future.

There are other commitments that will come on line. I have talked about Ashley Drive. The next conversation is focusing on the duplication of Tharwa Drive. There is also the commitment to the Lake Tuggeranong Rowing Club, and of course we are all looking to see the further planning and development phase of the ice sport centre. We who live in Canberra may not appreciate the interest of a broad community from Canberra and the region in ice sports in the area. As we are coming almost to the end of summer, we will very soon be watching our ice hockey teams and how they go through the years to come.

It is good to see these developments go on in Tuggeranong as I am out and about. I have already started the year with my regular monthly mobile offices. Many folk come up with little matters; it does not matter how large a concern is for our community members. As local members we are there to do what we can to provide an ear to listen and to work with them and work with members across the government to make sure that we continue to have the best city in the world to live in.

### **Women's march**

**MS CHEYNE** (Ginninderra) (6.26): “Women’s rights are human rights.” “Fight like a girl.” “Girls just want to have fun-damental rights.” “Stand up, fight back.” These were the words floating through the city on Sunday, 4 February at the women’s march, held high by women who were determined, proud and strong. Their message was clear: we are here and we are not going away.

The Canberra event was part of a coordinated worldwide women’s march which happened throughout January and February. I was honoured to be one of the millions of women—and men—around the world who took to the streets in 96 cities to demand respect and equality for women. The international message was “Look back, march forward”, marking the one-year anniversary of both President Trump’s inauguration and last year’s international women’s march, the US’s largest protest in history.

We have a lot to look back on, not only to our foremothers who fought so hard for basic recognition and rights, not only to the efforts of more recent decades when the internet revolutionised efforts to spread information and women en masse fought their way up corporate ladders for the first time, but also just to the last year.

Last year, 2017, was marked by women standing up on a global scale, brandishing the new power that social media gives us to unite our voices and quieten the doubters. There truly is power in numbers. The #metoo campaign swept across the world, giving women the confidence to say, “I have been sexually assaulted too. It wasn’t okay, but I was too shocked or scared to speak up. This is my story.” I cannot do justice in this speech to the power of those stories, and there are too many to repeat; it would take us years. But for the women who have had to deal with their traumas and also for the public who have been forced to look at how we respond to the stories of sexual assault and men’s abuse of power, there is power in those stories.

The year 2017 was also the year when international politics shocked us into realising that the road towards equality really is not that straightforward. While equality may seem irrefutably fair and reasonable, we will no doubt face blockades established by those who benefit the most from our subjugation. There will be some steps backwards but we will not be deterred. We will look backwards but we will march forwards.

The theme of the Canberra march was “Unbroken” and looked at local and global issues affecting women. We made a human chain, standing together against the continued harassment and violence women face as we strive for a more inclusive future. The atmosphere surrounding the show of solidarity was electric. It was an empowering moment to be part of. Speakers on the day represented strong Canberra women from a wide range of backgrounds. Stories were shared that reflect the experience of young, gender diverse, disabled, Indigenous and ethnically diverse women in our community. Their words shed light on some of the specific challenges these groups face. I will quickly share some of them with you today.

Nip and Gayana of GG’s Flowers, which I have spoken about many times, spoke about the experiences of women with disabilities. They highlighted how important it is to include young women with disabilities in formal work opportunities. They spoke from firsthand experience, having founded GG’s Flowers when they realised that Gayana had limited employment opportunities. Despite being eager to work and boasting a very friendly personality, Gayana was overlooked for work because of her Down syndrome. So they took matters into their own hands and established GG’s Flowers. I understand they have had a very successful day today.

Jenni Atkinson, a renowned advocate for gender diverse and trans people, also shared her insights on the day. Jenny is the founder of TranzAustralia and is an active member of Canberra’s LGBTIQ-focused organisations, including Quire and SpringOUT Pride Festival. Jenny transitioned 27 years ago and has since dedicated a lot of her resources to educating people about gender diversity and helping the LGBTIQ community. She let us know how critical it is to include the community in the movement for gender equality.

It was incredible to hear these and other women speak. In the words of Diana Abdel-Rahman, who represented Canberra’s multicultural community at the march:

We are not interested in a feminism which disregards the voices and experiences and struggles of the unrepresented minority.

As we look forward to 2018 and beyond, it is not going to be an easy road. We and our sisters around the world have a long way to go before true equality is reached but, luckily, we are not going anywhere.

### **Women's sport**

**MS CODY** (Murrumbidgee) (6.31): Well, it is that time of the year again. The women's AFL season has begun. With the season's opening matches, fans continue to be impressed by the skills of women who play professional AFL. What a spectacle. The crowds have not thinned. The enthusiasm has not waned. The hope has not faded. I congratulate all the players who are giving hope to a new generation of young fans and building on the success of last year's season. There were some very fiery matches and a real contest of wills on display. The women's AFL continues to set the benchmark for professional sport in Australia. The players continue to fill their young fans with the hope that one day they can play professionally and be the next Daisy Pearce or Erin Phillips.

Of course, there is just no satisfying everyone, and haters are going to continue to hate. Keyboard warriors are taking to social media to complain about the crowds or the perceived shortcomings. Well, they are living in denial. Women's sport is here to stay. It must hurt these types, but to them I say: bring it on. We are strong, we are proud, and we will continue to fight. Get in on the ride and enjoy the winter of sport that lies ahead.

Let us not forget that prior to the women's AFL we witnessed some superb games of cricket in the women's Ashes and the WBBL series. It was a ground-breaking season for Ellyse Perry, scoring a double century during the first ashes day-night test at North Sydney Oval in November last year. She finished off the season by winning her second Belinda Clarke award. Congratulations, Ellyse. Canberrans set the record in getting out to women's cricket, with Manuka Oval recording the highest crowd numbers for the women's ashes series. That is why I am excited to see Manuka Oval host five games in the women's T20 world cup in 2020.

While the women's AFL season has started, the W-League season is hitting the final rounds. Sadly, we will not be seeing another Canberra United premiership this year. But the players put on some brilliant performances, and have earned praise from supporters, peers and coaching staff. So keep an eye out for opportunities to support women's sport.

I look forward to the raucous atmosphere at Manuka Oval on 10 March when the GWS Giants women's team take on the Western Bulldogs women's team. I will be there in my full regalia as a foundation member of the GWS Giants women's team, and I hope to see many other people in Canberra get their tickets soon. It was a sellout last year, and I can guarantee it will be a sellout this year.

Good luck to all the women playing sport this weekend. Continue to believe. Young girls have opportunities these days. With the ACT government investing more and more money, there are opportunities for young girls and women to play the sport they love for as long as they can play.

**National Trust heritage walks—Mt Stromlo**

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee) (6.35): On 21 January I had the great privilege of attending the Mount Stromlo heritage walk. The heritage walks are a new initiative by the ACT National Trust. The walks are held on the fourth Sunday of each month and attract many attendees. The National Trust is a leading organisation for conservation in Australia and raises awareness for the conservation of built and natural sites across Australia.

This particular walk was around Mount Stromlo Observatory, one of Canberra's most significant cultural and scientific institutions. It also happens to reside in my electorate of Murrumbidgee. Mount Stromlo Observatory has a fascinating and varied history, ranging from being the site of a World War II munitions factory to being the current workplace of the Nobel laureate Brian Schmidt. Mount Stromlo also boasts spectacular views of Canberra, the Murrumbidgee and the Brindabellas. The Mount Stromlo Observatory dome, which housed the Oddie telescope, was the first commonwealth building in the ACT and represented a massive piece of national infrastructure for the Commonwealth of Australia as well as being an important part of Canberra's history.

The heritage walk was led by Dr Bradley Tucker, an astrophysicist and cosmologist who is a research fellow at the Research School of Astronomy & Astrophysics at the Australian National University. Dr Tucker led a group of around 30 of us through the Mount Stromlo heritage trail. We stopped at sites of historical significance as he explained the rich and varied history of Mount Stromlo, as well as future innovations and research happening right now at the Mount Stromlo Observatory and other institutions.

The walk included a tour of the historic Mount Stromlo director's residence, which was ravaged by the Canberra bushfires 15 years ago. Since then, the property's facade has been restored and the residence is now open for public visitors. But perhaps the most notable attraction of the heritage walk was the burnt shell of the Mount Stromlo Observatory telescope. The telescope remains melted in place at the site, a reminder of the fires that ravaged the area.

Soon after the fires, the ANU released plans to rebuild Mount Stromlo Observatory in stages. It has since been announced that the final stages of rebuilding are over, and we are now looking forward to the future. In 2016 Mount Stromlo's visitor centre was opened, signalling the completion of the restoration at Mount Stromlo, featuring a new cafe and interactive exhibits. The ANU facility there is now much more diverse and features Wombat XL, the only space simulation facility in the Southern Hemisphere. The facility is also the only Australian facility that has the capability to engage in pre-launch satellite testing from initial design to launch. Mount Stromlo is also now the home of MSATT, a teaching telescope which is used by our local high schools and our famous local high school teacher, Geoff McNamara from Melrose High School.

If those in the chamber and the community have a spare weekend, I highly recommend the National Trust heritage walks as a way to engage with our ACT heritage. Other heritage walks include those around Oaks Estate and Yarramundi shores. Future events coming up include the Acton Peninsula in April and the Callum Brae nature reserve later this month.

I would like to acknowledge the ANU Research School of Astronomy & Astrophysics for the fantastic work they are doing in this space. I would like to thank National Trust ACT heritage walks for organising the event, in particular the event organisers, Mary Johnston and Trevor Lipscombe.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**The Assembly adjourned at 6.39 pm.**