



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
AND COMMUNITY INCLUSION**

(Reference: [Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2022–2023](#))

Members:

**MR M PETTERSSON (Chair)
MS N LAWDER (Deputy Chair)**

PROOF TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

WEDNESDAY, 15 NOVEMBER 2023

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**Secretary to the committee:
Ms K Langham (Ph: 620 75498)**

By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

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

APPEARANCES

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 9.11 am.

Berry, Ms Yvette, Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Early Childhood Development, Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women

Community Services Directorate

Rule, Ms Catherine, Director General

Wood, Ms Jo, Deputy Director General

Perkins, Ms Anita, Executive Group Manager, Communities

Evans, Ms Jacinta, Executive Group Manager, Strategic Policy

Akhter, Ms Sanzida, Executive Branch Manager, Women, Youth and Multicultural Affairs, Communities

THE CHAIR: Good morning, and welcome to this public hearing of the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion for its inquiry into annual and financial reports 2022-23. The committee will today examine the annual report of the Community Services Directorate.

The committee wishes to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on, the Ngunnawal people. The committee wishes to acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region. We would also like to welcome and acknowledge other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be attending today's event.

The proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if witnesses used these words: "I will take that question on notice." This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice from the transcript.

We now welcome Ms Yvette Berry MLA, Minister for Women, and relevant officials. Could you please acknowledge the privilege statement.

Ms Perkins: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement.

Ms Akhter: I have read and understood the privilege statement.

Ms Rule: I have read and understood the privilege statement.

Ms Berry: I have read and acknowledge the statement.

Ms Wood: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement.

Ms Evans: I have also read and understand the privilege statement.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. We will jump into questions. Minister, I note that the government has been doing a lot of work to get women into male-dominated

industries. Would you be able to talk to us about that work, particularly around women in construction?

Ms Berry: Thank you, Chair, and thank you for that question. It has been a real success, this program to encourage more women and girls to try a trade and get the chance to try working in the building and construction industry. What is really great about this program is that it has been specifically designed in the ACT. It has had teachers developing a curriculum specific for the program, targeted at careers-focused learning in schools, and giving young women and girls those kinds of opportunities that they would never have had previously.

It is the first of its kind in the ACT and in Australia. We are encouraging other states and territories to have a look at this program and see how it could fit within their states and territories. We are merely an island in a sea of male-dominated industries, in the ACT, and we want to make sure that this work continues to evolve and grow across the country as well.

There is probably some really great data on it, because it has been such a great success. From just talking with young people who have been involved with the program you can see how much they have enjoyed it, how much they have learned and the opportunities that they have had. I might ask Sanzida to elaborate.

Ms Akhter: Thanks, Minister. As the minister said, it is a first in Australia that we have landed this program. It started between March and December 2022 as a pilot in four ACT government schools, including Alfred Deakin High School, Calwell High School, Harrison Public School and Mount Stromlo High School. Over 1,000 pilot school students across all genders in years 7 and 8 participated in an introduction to the building and construction industry. One hundred and eleven female and non-binary school students in years 9 and 10 participated in a Women in Construction elective, which provides certification and safety gear for an onsite work experience placement week. Seventy of those students participated in the one-week work experience placement.

This program went to tender, seeking a supplier to support the work experience placement component. The preferred supplier was the Australian Training Company, which then worked closely with us and the Education Directorate to deliver the work experience placement. Participants needed to also complete both asbestos awareness training and white card training before being allowed onsite. From 1 October 2023, all participants will also have to complete silica awareness training. What we see here is a big success for the pilot, and we would like to continue to roll out this program where possible.

Ms Berry: When the program started, we got to meet some of the students who were engaged in the program and they were all in their PPE. They had their hard hats, their hi-vis, their steel caps on and everything. It was this amazing group of enthusiastic people who really want to work in this sector. It was really a positive experience, and it has been successful, so I expect we will be able to convince people of the success of the program and, hopefully, have it funded and continued.

THE CHAIR: That is wonderful. The Women's Plan Third Action Plan also

mentions a number of other actions that would contribute towards women participating in traditionally male-dominated industries. A lot of those actions are to be led by other directorates, not CSD. How does that work in terms of ensuring that those other directorates deliver on their commitment?

Ms Rule: There has been discussion with cabinet about the actions that are in the Third Action Plan. That is a whole-of-government strategy. I am sure the committee will appreciate that this is not just an issue about women; it is about all of the programs that are delivered across government. It is about making sure that they address some of the gaps. Ensuring that the right services are provided for women, where there are deficiencies is a really important part of that action plan, so it goes well beyond the remit of CSD. As I said, it has been to cabinet. It is the subject of discussion at the human services subcommittee strategic board and the strategic board of the ACT public service to make sure that directorates across the ACTPS are delivering on their commitments under the action plan.

MS LAWDER: The construction industry plan sounds quite positive. Is there an intention to translate that to other currently male-dominated industries, to roll it out further, and where might that be?

Ms Berry: This has been a pilot, really, and we have developed it ourselves. After properly reviewing the pilot, how it has worked and its success, it is possible that it could be rolled out to other male-dominated industries. It has been so successful that I think we would like to see it rolled out to other schools, as we have had only four schools in the initial pilot part of the program. It has been so successful. Sanzida, did you want to add more to that, or that is kind of where it sits?

Ms Akhter: That is pretty much it, Minister, yes. We would like to be able to extend the successful template of this particular program to a different male-dominated industry sector. We would like to be able to roll out this program further and also learn from the evaluation of this program and then utilise that knowledge and lessons learned.

MS LAWDER: When will you consider the completion of the pilot? Is that at the end of the financial year? What is the time frame?

Ms Akhter: It is. As the minister mentioned, we would like to convince the decision-makers so that we get the funding to be able to roll it out.

Ms Berry: I am convinced!

MS LAWDER: You have to convince yourself. Okay. Last year in annual reports hearings we talked about a tenderer for a grant or contract, which went to the CFMEU, to encourage more women to enter the construction industry. You said last year, in answer to a question, that the resources resulting from the research and the industry engagement would be made publicly available on completion of the project. Have they been made publicly available and where might I find them?

Ms Akhter: We have received that report and we are considering it. The minister has not seen it yet. We are still looking at it and looking at how we can deliver on all the

recommendations provided.

MS LAWDER: So when was the technical completion of the project? Was that the end of the financial year just finished or—

Ms Akhter: I will have to double-check that.

MS LAWDER: And do you know when the report will be publicly available?

Ms Akhter: When we are able to provide that to the minister, and then a decision will be made.

Ms Berry: If I have it before annual reports hearings are completed, I will provide it to the committee.

MS LAWDER: Thanks. Also in answer to a question from last year's annual reports hearings, you talked about procurement and gender equity strategies and you said that a survey indicated that "a very high proportion of these suppliers have policies and strategies in place to promote gender equity in their businesses". But, as I understand it, it is not a reporting obligation to identify whether a procurement has included a gender equality strategy. Is that still the case or will you move to make sure that a gender equality strategy is included in the procurement?

Ms Berry: It is definitely something that the government has been seriously considering. Also, as part of the procurement for the Strathnairn primary school, the government has required that it be project managed by a team of women. I guess that is our trial run with regard to working with the sector on having a program in place that supports gender equality.

I recall that when I announced that program there was still quite a bit of blowback from people in the community about why, or where would we find the women, for starters, and how would they have the experience to be able to do this work and why were women getting special treatment in this space.

Whilst we are chipping away at the inequality, and particularly in these male-dominated areas, there is still a lot of work to do within our community to bring them on this journey with us. Taking this "see what you can be" approach, giving young women the chance to see people in these jobs, is all part of our plan. It is about building the experiences of young women and girls, and other women, but also acknowledging that the sector is not quite prepared yet and we need to support it to be prepared. But we have got a pipeline ready to go of young women and girls who want to work in the sector.

Ms Rule: I would also note that in the action plan Procurement ACT has committed to a women in construction procurement policy. That is one of the commitments government has made in that action plan. They may be able to answer questions for you, Ms Lawder, about the progress of that work.

MS LAWDER: In answer to that question from last year's annual reports hearings, Ms Berry said:

In late 2018, Procurement ACT incorporated a survey into the Whole of Government Professional Services panel to better understand the proportion of these suppliers that have established Gender Equity Strategies. The survey indicated that a very high proportion of these suppliers have policies and strategies in place ...

What is a very high proportion?

Ms Rule: That work was done by CMTEDD, through Procurement ACT, so I do not have the details of that in front of me.

MS LAWDER: But you have used it in your answer, so you must have had an idea of what the answer was.

Ms Rule: As I said, I do not have those details in front of me. We can take that on notice or we could direct that question towards Procurement ACT.

MS LAWDER: Sorry; are you going to take it on notice?

Ms Rule: We can take it on notice.

MS LAWDER: Okay; thank you. I would like to know what is a very high proportion. Is it 80 per cent or is it 60 per cent? Given that it was late 2018 when this survey took place, are there any plans to have a follow-up survey to see whether there has been an improvement in the five years or so? Do you know? Have you been asking for such a survey or—

Ms Berry: As I said, we obviously need to work with the sector to prepare them for this pipeline of young women and girls who want to work and pick up a trade in these industries. Minister Steel has been working on that process, getting an understanding of what the sector needs and how we could support it to move towards employing more women in the trades and also having a gender equality plan. I have not had an update more recently about where that is up to, so it might be better that you talk to Minister Steel about where that program is up to. It might not be completed yet, but it was definitely something that we announced earlier this year, before the start of the Woden CIT build.

I know that the sector knows that it needs a pipeline, given that the infrastructure build, not just here in the ACT but across the country, is significant. From my perspective, we are doing our part in developing that pipeline of young women and girls who are ready to work in the trades. We just need to make sure that the sector is ready. We do not want to throw these enthusiastic young people into a trade that is not ready.

MS LAWDER: Okay. Thanks. Page 52 of the annual report—this year's annual report, you will be pleased to know, not last year's—talks about the proportion of women who feel safe walking by themselves at night. It looks like it has slightly decreased over the past five years. What are we doing to reverse the trend and improve that perception of safety for women and girls?

Ms Akhter: In terms of improving women's safety, we have a number of programs in place, including supporting women through the grants program. We have a dedicated Women's Safety Grants program where different organisations come to us with proposals for how they can provide that support to women, providing them with awareness training or any other services to improve their feeling of safety.

The indicator that you were looking at in the annual report in particular can be influenced by many other external factors because it also comes from a national level survey, not just within the ACT. It can vary year on year, noting that the variation is not beyond expectation—that expected five per cent limit. So my response would be that the variation that we are seeing is because of external variables. Does that answer your question, Ms Lawder?

Ms Berry: This is that national survey that the police developed. We do not really have any say in what questions are asked. We have talked about this at nearly every annual reports hearings. We measure it in our own statement because that is the only measure that we have. Since before COVID, and then when COVID came, it has kind of interrupted the work that I have been hoping to do with Women's Health Matters on the Canberra Safety Map—that is, how we can work with them to understand how people really feel in the ACT, from the ACT perspective, and so that the questions that are asked are suitable for our community. That does not mean we ignore the national survey results. We obviously want to make sure that Canberra is as safe as possible. It is one of the things that Minister Steel, through TCCS, works on to make sure that there is improved lighting in places where people feel unsafe, which is just one way that women can feel safer.

MS LAWDER: So in the national survey there is no disaggregation down to the ACT level?

Ms Akhter: There is, but I can also talk a little bit more about what we do in the ACT with the women's safety audits.

MS LAWDER: Just so that I understand: are the graphs on page 52 the national figures?

Ms Berry: They are ACT.

MS LAWDER: They are the ACT figures.

Ms Berry: As part of the national survey.

MS LAWDER: So there has been a slight decline over five years. In the Women's Action Plan, what are you doing to reverse that slight downward trend and improve the perceptions of safety for women and girls in our community?

Ms Akhter: As I mentioned before, we have a number of grants that we provide. In the last financial year we provided \$90,816, allocated to seven projects in the safety category. That included Apayi Charitable Organisation Incorporated, which is working with the community, having conversations and information sessions on family violence issues within the South Sudanese equatorial community. We have

Beryl Women Incorporated, who are looking after the women's wellbeing program. We have the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre, providing sexual assault prevention education.

MS LAWDER: Sure. A lot of those though are responding after the fact. They are not what we are doing to make women and girls feel safer when they are walking around, perhaps back from the bus stop.

Ms Rule: Again, I point to the Women's Action Plan, where one of the themes is safety and inclusion. Some of the actions in that safety and inclusion theme go to shifting attitudes to women and ensuring that women are adequately represented in various parts of our community. It is also to ensure that we have clarity around actions to prevent domestic, family and sexual violence. We are looking at a risk assessment and management framework in some of our specialist and mainstream services. We are looking at how we pilot the implementation of government gender-sensitive urban design guidelines, which go to some of those safety things. There is a whole theme in the action plan around safety and inclusion and a number of the actions within that go to really preventing, rather than responding after the fact.

Ms Akhter: I will just add to that. As we speak, we are working, as the minister mentioned, with Women's Health Matters, who are assisting us to pilot women's safety initiatives in the Canberra CBD. In addition to that, we are always engaging with Events ACT on implementing women's safety audits for any major events. A women's safety audit involves walking through a physical environment and completing a checklist of methodically evaluated safety from a woman's perspective. We involve the members of the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women, who participate in that safety audit program.

Ms Berry: This will be the last action plan of our women's plan, and we will be working on a new women's plan. This can be something that the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women can consider, as part of the development of a new plan.

MS LAWDER: According to the chart on page 52 of the annual report, we failed to meet our original target. Is that a nationally set target or is that the ACT government's target? What are we doing to make sure that we meet the target next year, other than perhaps reducing the target?

Ms Wood: This is an ACT target, so that is the target that we set. I think Ms Rule and Ms Akhter have spoken about the range of things we are doing to increase that feeling of safety. The point about this national survey, which is related to social and policing services, is that we do not get to shape the questions. We do not get to go more granular, to understand what other factors are driving that feeling of lack of safety. That is where the other work with Women's Health Matters could give us, in the ACT, much insight into what are the things that make people feel unsafe and what are the best ways that we can actually tackle it.

MS CLAY: Is there a space, do you think, for a full ACT lighting strategy, given these perceptions of safety issues?

Ms Rule: I think that might be beyond the remit of CSD. We do have diverse

responsibilities, but lighting is not one of them.

MS CLAY: Perfectly reasonable answer. Thank you. I will take it up in another session.

Ms Rule: Thanks, Ms Clay.

MS CLAY: On the Third Action Plan, we are interested in our office in how you have come to decide where different issues are covered. We have got barriers for women entering predominantly male industries in the employment section. It makes perfect sense, and we have spoken a lot about that already. We probably do not need further information about that.

In the health section we have got employment issues for women in women-dominated industries. We keep looking at that and asking, “Is that not also an employment issue?” Women in predominantly women’s industries and women in predominantly male industries are all employment issues. We are also looking at that health section and feeling like it is a bit light on. Can you run me through how you put together that health section so that I can better understand the thinking that went into it.

Ms Berry: Just before I pass to the officials, the plan is developed with the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women. It is not a decision that I make on my own. Certainly, we had conversations with that broad and diverse group of women to develop the plan. They set their priorities and what they hear from their stakeholders, to work towards the plan, with advice from the government of course. That is how it is considered through the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women. For example, on the issue of lighting or feeling safe, those are matters that the ministerial advisory council could include in a future plan. It is something that I will certainly raise with them. But it will be that group that formulates the plan and the priorities that come out of it, through their conversations with their stakeholder groups.

MS CLAY: Yes. I get that these are the issues that they have decided are key. That makes perfect sense. It could be that this has been covered in other areas or it could be that this will be something that comes up in future consultations. We have only a few issues highlighted in that health section and one of them is on information about health. The other ones are not really on general health. Much of our health system is traditionally and primarily based on male health conditions. I would have expected to see more content there. Is that an issue that gets discussed when these plans are put together?

Ms Rule: How we would typically put these types of plans together is to get that feedback from the stakeholders, like the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women, and then reach out across government to say, “These are the things that the stakeholders are telling us are important in the next plan. Tell us the things that you should do in your portfolios that are relevant to achieving these outcomes that our stakeholders have told us.” Those are the things that have been identified by the Health Directorate, agreed by government, as the things that go into that action plan. I cannot speculate on whether they are the right things. Those are things that the Health Directorate and Canberra Health Services have put forward and that have been agreed by government.

PROOF

MS CLAY: Thank you.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister and officials for their attendance today. If you have taken any questions on notice, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*. The committee will now suspend proceedings and reconvene this afternoon. Thank you.

Hearing suspended from 9.39 am to 3.01 pm.

Appearances:

Stephen-Smith, Ms Rachel, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs,
Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health

Community Services Directorate

Rule, Ms Catherine, Director-General

Wood, Ms Jo, Deputy Director-General

Sabellico, Ms Anne Maree, Executive Group Manager, Children, Youth and
Families

Evans, Ms Jacinta, Executive Group Manager, Strategic Policy

Simpson, Mr Chris, Executive Branch Manager, Aboriginal Service Development,
Children, Youth and Families

Moyle, Mr Brendan, Executive Branch Manager, Office for Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander Affairs, Strategic Policy

THE CHAIR: Welcome back to the public hearings for the committee's inquiry into annual and financial reports 2022-23. The proceedings today are being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and webstreamed live. When taking a question on notice, it would be useful if witnesses used these words: "I will take that question on notice." This will help the committee and witnesses to confirm questions taken on notice from the transcript.

We now welcome Minister Stephen-Smith, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, and officials. Could you please acknowledge the privilege statement. We will start with Ms Evans.

Ms Evans: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement.

Ms Wood: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement.

Ms Stephen-Smith: I have read and acknowledge and the privilege statement.

Ms Rule: I have read the privilege statement.

Ms Sabellico: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement.

Mr Simpson: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement.

Mr Moyle: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement.

THE CHAIR: Wonderful. We have got no opening statements today, so I will lead off with questions.

Minister, ahead of the 2020 election, ACT Labor committed to delivering a purpose-built new facility for Gugan Gulwan. How is the government progressing in its commitment to deliver a new purpose-built facility for Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Thank you, Mr Pettersson. Things are cracking along. We now

have a contractor in place, and I will hand over to Mr Moyle to provide an update.

Mr Moyle: Thank you, Minister. The design work has happened. The site has been cleared. Rork Projects have been engaged to deliver the contract as an Indigenous service provider, so CSD has been working through Major Projects Canberra to manage the process. Construction is due to start shortly. I know that new fencing has gone up, and we are liaising with Rork projects, the ACT government and Gugan Gulwan as well to support the community engagement throughout the construction process.

THE CHAIR: That is great. I am hoping you can speak to the committee on how this facility will help to better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

Mr Moyle: Minister, are you happy for me to answer?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Yes.

Mr Moyle: The ACT community has grown significantly over the decades. Gugan Gulwan was established about 30 years ago. About 25 years ago, I think it was, they relocated to the current site, where the new building will actually be, in Erindale, in Wanniasa.

The largest growth in the population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is around Tuggeranong. The new facility itself will allow for expanded services, which will increase the number of children and families that can come and participate in it. In short, the old premises, unfortunately, while fit for purpose 25 years ago, is no longer fit for purpose for today's population and future population projections.

THE CHAIR: Wonderful. What work is the government doing in the meantime to ensure there are no interruptions to services while the project is underway?

Mr Moyle: Gugan Gulwan has been relocated to the Erindale Business Park, which is, I think, about 200 metres away, as the crow flies. OATSIA have been working with colleagues across the ACT government, and we are actually incurring all the costs for the rental and everything else, so Gugan Gulwan themselves are not out of pocket with that. They have the option to remain there for the duration of the actual construction build until the new building is open.

THE CHAIR: Wonderful.

MS LAWDER: Can you just remind me of the expected completion date?

Mr Moyle: It is approximately 12 months. We are hoping that by about October or November next year it should actually be completed. Again, there are always some challenges, but everything is on track with the progress.

MRS KIKKERT: How many jobs will it create after its completion?

Mr Moyle: After its completion?

MRS KIKKERT: Yes

Mr Moyle: That would be a question I would have to take on notice. I would need to liaise with Gugan Gulwan in terms of the services that will be able to be expanded.

MRS KIKKERT: Okay. Will there be—

Ms Stephen-Smith: Sorry—can I just add to that. It will be a separate decision in relation to ACT government funding for Gugan Gulwan for expanded service delivery, so it provides the opportunity to consider additional business cases or transfer of activity to the community-controlled sector, which is obviously something we are committed to under Closing the Gap. This will enable some of that transfer of funding from mainstream to community-controlled services.

I am not sure that Mr Moyle will be able, even with taking the question on notice, to actually give an answer of what that is going to look like, because it will depend; for example, under Next Steps for Our Kids, there will be a gradual transition of services to community-controlled organisations, and whether and how Gugan Gulwan wants to participate in that will be a matter for them.

In addition, they do also access some commonwealth funding, so that also provides them the opportunity to provide expanded services if they are successful in getting commonwealth funding, some of which is also flowing through the Closing the Gap funding pool. I do not think we are going to be able to provide a specific answer on what that looks like. What we can say is that the expanded facility will give them the opportunity to expand services as funding is available.

MRS KIKKERT: With its expanding services, are you aware of any additional new services that the new expansion of the building will provide?

Ms Stephen-Smith: That really is a matter for Gugan Gulwan—

MRS KIKKERT: Has it been discussed yet?

Ms Stephen-Smith: There are some conversations around, for example, whether and how they will engage in the youth justice or youth justice diversion space in response to the raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility, as we work through that, and whether they will engage, as I said before, in the services in child and youth protection, particularly in the early support for families space. Mr Simpson might want to talk about any conversations he has had with them about the areas they are interested in expanding with through the Aboriginal Service Development Branch.

Mr Simpson: Thank you, Minister. I will expand on that. We are currently in conversations with the leadership there as well as their board around opportunities and to leverage off the opportunities there. Through some funding that was available we are delivering, in partnership with them, an intensive family support program, which is in a try-test-learn process as part of the Next Steps, and that is a \$700,000 funding opportunity with them.

When we embed building the community-controlled sector and changing the way government works with our community, the key performance indicators are actually led by the community organisations' program logic, so they have self-determination leading that particular progress. And there are some really great opportunities that are happening down there in regard to the intensive family support program, which is an early diversionary program with our young families.

MRS KIKKERT: Okay. How much do they get from the federal government for their funding? You mentioned that, Minister.

Ms Rule: That is a question for them, Mrs Kikkert. We do not have visibility of all their lines of funding. You would have to ask that of them.

MRS KIKKERT: So you do not have it on record so that you can match from the ACT government whatever funding that they get? You are not aware of how much funding that they have received in previous years?

Ms Stephen-Smith: It would probably be in their annual report—where their funding sources come from.

MRS KIKKERT: Right.

Ms Stephen-Smith: But we do not match the commonwealth funding and the commonwealth does not match our funding in any automatic way—

MRS KIKKERT: That is just an example; I am not saying that they offer it. Great, thank you.

MS LAWDER: I have a question about the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement annual reporting dashboard, which appears to have information from 2019-2021 but not more recent data. Is it supposed to be being updated annually as the name implies?

Mr Moyle: Minister, would you like me to take this one?

Ms Stephen-Smith: I hear you, Ms Lawder. I have in fact raised this issue in relation to how often the dashboard is updated. Some of the data—before I hand to Mr Moyle—is not available on an annual basis, but I have asked that we have a process to make sure that it is updated when data becomes available.

Mr Moyle: We are currently going through a process, and we now have got a data map. The challenge for us, as the minister was saying, is that some data is available quite regularly and some data, against some of the indicators, is not available. We find this with Closing the Gap as well, where I think four of the actual key targets have not been able to be reported on at a national level because there is just no data actually available.

What we are doing through our data process is to identify where we can update regularly and start to identify where there are data gaps as well, and what we might be able to do to actually collect that data. Part of the conversation we also have to have is

with the Aboriginal community-controlled sector itself, particularly under Closing the Gap priority reform 4, about how we actually work together to build data metrics to not just give us what we need but to help support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector to make informed decisions as well.

MS LAWDER: In April 2022 the 2021 impact statement was released. Is the information on the online dashboard the same as the information in that 2021 impact statement?

Mr Moyle: Generally with the dashboard, it has been getting updated to a certain point in time. It depends on when the thresholds and milestones were, but I have those approved. In terms of the annual reports—like the impact statement of the Closing the Gap annual report—they do contain more up-to-date information. This is something that we have actually just gone through.

I know we are working through the processes in terms of new reports, but I think the Closing the Gap annual report was tabled and has been released in September, and we are finding there is a disconnect between what the Productivity Commission is publishing at any point in time, because it is based, again, on when their data collection points are, as opposed to when we are providing our reports, which is quite often more recent information.

MS LAWDER: The one you said was released in September—will the dashboard be updated to reflect that?

Mr Moyle: That is correct, yes.

MS LAWDER: When might that be?

Mr Moyle: I will need to take that on notice, but we are going through that process to do that now.

THE CHAIR: A new line of questioning. Mrs Kikkert?

MRS KIKKERT: Thank you, Chair. On page 413 of the annual report it states that the 2023 impact statement is expected to be released in early 2023-24. We are now in the middle of the year. Has its delay been caused in any way by issues that were raised by the Auditor-General's report tabled in August? If so, what is being changed to address the Auditor-General's concerns, and when can we expect it?

Ms Rule: I think the time frame referred to in the annual report is the 2023-24 financial year, so we are still in the early part of the financial year 2023-24. As Mr Moyle just pointed out, we are just working through updating all of those data fields at the moment, so we would still expect that we will release something during this financial year.

MRS KIKKERT: The Auditor-General's report noted that the two governance committees that oversight the implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agreement had not had stable or consistent attendance and that meetings were not held according to established time frames. What has been done over the past three

months to help remedy this issue and the companion issue of poor recording regarding action items?

Ms Rule: I will kick off and throw to Mr Moyle for any further detail. The two governance bodies referred to include the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs subcommittee of the strategic board, which I chair. We had a discussion at the strategic board with the head of service and directors-general about renewing commitment to that committee, particularly given all the activity underway in the Indigenous affairs portfolio at the moment. Since the release of the audit report, all directors-general who are members of that committee have been in attendance. We have seen a renewed commitment.

The second governance body is the interdepartmental committee. Again, directors-general have reaffirmed their commitment to ensuring that senior staff continue to engage in that committee and that there is more consistency. Obviously, as people move positions and move jobs, that can sometimes be harder to achieve, but we have seen a more stable attendance in those governance bodies. I think that, across the ACTPS, there is a commitment to meeting that audit recommendation.

MS LAWDER: Is the membership of either of those committees based on the position or is it personal?

Ms Rule: It is based on the position. For the subcommittee of the strategic board, it is directors-general. It is agnostic of the person who occupies that position when it is directors-general from relevant portfolios, as an example.

Mr Moyle: I can add to that. The strategic board has actually approved the changes to the terms of reference of the IDC, the inter-directorate committee. That has been workshopped through the IDC process with all directorates, but also with the elected body in terms of co-chairing arrangements. We already had things in the pipeline as the draft audit report was coming in to tighten those requirements and make sure that, as Catherine was saying, we have an appropriate level of people who are actually attending and participating, and have subject matter expertise, but also have delegation authority to make decisions and be able to support that.

In terms of the meeting structures, we are generally having at least four meetings a year in each of the groups, which will then escalate up so critical issues can be brought up. In terms of the rest of the question, we have also built a register in terms of actions and commitments, which is consistent with what some of the recommendations were in the audit report. That register will be coming back through the IDC and back through the strategic board. That allows for greater tracking of compliance with the actions we have committed to deliver against within the IDC agreement.

MRS KIKKERT: Thank you. Will the government consult with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body about the resourcing it needs, in accordance with the Auditor-General's recommendations?

Ms Rule: Yes. Those discussions with the elected body are underway. We have canvassed a range of views from the elected body about what the level of resourcing

is. We have already taken some immediate steps to shore up the secretariat services for the elected body. One of the things they told us was that they wanted more secretariat resources and for those secretariat resources to be independent of government. We have contracted an Aboriginal business to provide those secretariat services and many are looking at the additional resources they might require.

MRS KIKKERT: That is good news. Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

THE CHAIR: I think it is back to me. Minister, how is the Community Services Directorate progressing in its commitment to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff?

Ms Stephen-Smith: The Community Services Directorate has made really great strides on this. There are a range of strategies to not only recruit but retain and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. I will hand over to Ms Rule to talk about how that is going.

Ms Rule: Thank you. This is a great question and one that I am really pleased to talk about. We have seen an ongoing increase in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff that we have in the directorate. Around six per cent of the directorate's employees are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, which is significantly above the target that exists across the ACT public service. I think it is really important for CSD in reflecting the diversity of the population that we serve.

We have made some very specific decisions around improving ourselves, if you like, as an employer of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. We now have some highly capable and senior leaders in both Mr Moyle and Mr Simpson and a number of senior-officer-level staff who have been able to take on leadership positions within the directorate. We have increased the cultural capability of the whole directorate in a range of training activities, depending on which part of the organisation people sit in.

We have done a number of things around increasing support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. For example, we have been highly conscious of the load that people have been carrying as a result of the Voice and some of the debate and the things that have happened since the referendum. On Friday, we provided a day on country for Aboriginal staff, where people were able to engage in a range of activities on country with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers to really give people a chance to regroup, decompress from some of the things that have been happening and share some of their experiences of what has gone on in the months before.

The feedback from staff about that has been exceptionally positive. The nature of the work we do means that cultural load will always be significant for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, so making sure that we provide opportunities for people to share some of the load, relieve some of the burden and talk to their colleagues about it is really important. We will continue to engage in a range of activities like that. As I said, I am exceptionally proud of the work that has happened across the directorate to get us up to six per cent, and the challenge now is to keep it there by providing a culturally safe and meaningful workplace for our staff.

THE CHAIR: Amazing. Are there any supplementaries? Ms Lawder.

MS LAWDER: Thank you. In January this year, as I understand it, CSD established the Aboriginal Service Development Branch to facilitate the development and establishment of current, emerging and new Aboriginal community-controlled organisations across the ACT. Since January, has the ASD helped any new ACCOs to become established?

Mr Simpson: Thank you for that question, Ms Lawder. We are currently working with our current and established community-controlled organisations. As Brendan mentioned, we have Winnunga and Gugan Gulwan, which have been in the ACT for over three decades, but we are also working with our new and emerging community-controlled organisations. Some of those are in their very early infancy, such as Mental Health for Mob. We are working with them around opportunities around registrations and the regulation frameworks. We are partnering them with the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations around a board and governance—those types of opportunities that are there—which will also assist to deliver our next steps framework and the new way of working with that.

We are also working with our newly emerging community-controlled organisations like Yerrabi Yurwang around nurse registration. It will be a community housing provider. There are some really good opportunities with those particular organisations. The other organisations that we are working with that are in their very early infancy include Clybucca. Clybucca is an Aboriginal enterprise that works with women facing a crisis with domestic and sexual family violence. We are working with them very closely around registering. They have put forward their intent to register as a community-controlled organisation, so we are working with them, side by side, on the transition to that and what governance looks like. We are seeking funding opportunities and investments as well as we go through those particular processes.

We are finding that, with our relationships with our commonwealth colleagues, there are some really great expedited processes as well, particularly for our new organisations to do those regulatory registrations, such as the Secure Local Jobs process. We also work with them to be able to apply through those particular processes and have their certificate at the end of it.

Those are examples of a few of the things that we are doing with some of our established and also our new and emerging community-controlled organisations.

MS LAWDER: Just to clarify: Winnunga and Gugan Gulwan are already well-established, and you mentioned at least three emerging organisations, but have any new ones been established from January to now, or are you working through the three that you mentioned?

Mr Simpson: Yes; we are working through the three that I mentioned. Some of them are on the trajectory and the pathway. As they are made aware of the Aboriginal Service Development Branch that is in the Community Services Directorate, we are finding more people, organisations or small groups of like-minded people want to start to deliver these particular programs.

MS LAWDER: But none have been established in the 10 or so months?

Ms Stephen-Smith: Ms Lawder, I think the context for this needs to be seen as this: over the last probably three years, a number of organisations have emerged. They were already emerging prior to the beginning of January this year, but, for things like Sisters in Spirit, Yerrabi Yurwang, and even Yeddung Mura, which was established but is still very small, and Tjillari, which is still quite small, what the Community Services Directorate identified in establishing the Aboriginal Service Development Branch was that we need to support these emerging organisations when people have put up their hand and said, “There’s a gap here. There’s an opportunity for Aboriginal community-control here,” and help them to grow.

The first priority has been to take the green shoots and help them to actually sprout and grow before we start planting more seeds, to use an analogy. Of course, if there are more green shoots, we will help them to grow. Housing, which is not my portfolio, is probably a space that we are trying to move into. Is that a fair analogy?

Mr Simpson: That would be very fair. Using self-determination, some of those small groups have come together and they have gone through that process themselves through registration. One of those would be Every Mob, which has gone through that particular process. Once they were established, they got in touch with us and said, “What assistance can you provide us?” Others are an Aboriginal enterprise and they want our assistance to transition. It is a mixed approach on the levels of participation and understanding around what we are able to provide and assist with.

Ms Sabellico: I can give an example as well. Chris’s unit works with a range of other units in order to support the delivery of different programs. Under the next steps framework, we have gone through a tender process, and we are now at the point where evaluation has been undertaken. The Aboriginal community-controlled organisations have applied through that process. Then Chris and his team support them through the next stages as we go through it, with the expectation that we will have the new funding and the new services out from 1 July next year. He works to support other areas about the processes we are undertaking to actually achieve the development of the Aboriginal community-controlled sector as part of the delivery of broader strategies as well.

THE CHAIR: With that, we are out of time. On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister and officials for their attendance today. If you have taken any questions on notice, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof of the *Hansard*. If a member wishes to ask questions on notice, please upload them to the parliament portal as soon as practicable and no later than five business days after the hearing.

The committee adjourned at 3.28 pm.