



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL POLICY

(Reference: [Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2024-25](#))

Members:

**MR T EMERSON (Chair)
MS C BARRY (Deputy Chair)
MISS L NUTTALL
MS C TOUGH**

TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE

CANBERRA

WEDNESDAY, 12 NOVEMBER 2025

**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.

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Amended 20 May 2013

The committee met at 1.15 pm

Appearances:

Pettersson, Mr Michael, Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations

Health and Community Services Directorate

Sabellico, Ms Anne Maree, Acting Deputy Director General

West, Ms Kate, Acting Executive Branch Manager, Support Services for Children, Inclusion Division

Bogiatzis, Ms Vasiliki, Acting Executive Group Manager, Inclusion Division

Saballa, Ms Melanie, Executive Branch Manager, Next Steps, Children, Youth and Families Division

Therapeutic Support Panel

Barker, Dr Justin, Chair

THE CHAIR: Good afternoon and welcome to the public hearings of the Standing Committee on Social Policy for its inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2024-25. The committee will today hear from the Minister for Children, Youth and Families, the Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs.

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

Please note the following housekeeping matters. All mobile phones and laptops are to be switched off or switched to “silent”, and witnesses are to speak one at a time and will need to speak directly to the microphone or computer if you are online for Hansard to be able to hear and transcribe you accurately.

This hearing is a legal proceeding of the Assembly and has the same standing as proceedings of the Assembly itself. Therefore, today’s evidence attracts parliamentary privilege. Giving false or misleading evidence is a serious matter and may be regarded as contempt of the Assembly. The hearing is being recorded and transcribed by Hansard and will be published. The proceedings are also being broadcast and web-streamed live.

When taking a question on notice it will be useful if witnesses use 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 welcome Mr Michael Pettersson, MLA, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, and officials.

For multiple witnesses for the session when you first speak, please state your name and the capacity in which you appear. Please note that as witnesses you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. As such you must tell the truth.

Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly.

We are not inviting opening statements, so we will now proceed to questions.

I have some questions about the Therapeutic Support Panel. I have heard that the referral pathways to the Therapeutic Support Panel changed at some point recently. Can someone please explain to me these changes, when that happened, and why it happened?

Mr Pettersson: Why don't we go to Justin first, to talk through the processes we have got in place, and then we can get into the details of the question.

Dr Barker: My name is Dr Justin Barker. I am the chair of the Therapeutic Support Panel. I have read and acknowledged the privilege statement.

I have no oversight over other people's referral processes to me. Over the last 12 months the league of referrers has been from ACT Policing and the community sector. Eighty-five per cent of all referrals have come from the police; community—which includes parents and other people in the community, and carers; and education—different schools. So, at the moment we receive referrals from anyone who has concerns from the community. I have no oversight of the internal processes of anyone else who refers to me.

THE CHAIR: How many children have been referred, say, in the last three months to the Therapeutic Support Panel by Children, Youth and Families?

Dr Barker: We have not had a referral from Child, Youth and Families in the last three months.

THE CHAIR: When was the last referral from Child, Youth and Families?

Dr Barker: In the last 12 months. From September to September, there were three referrals. The last one was in February 2025.

THE CHAIR: Was there any change in the referral process in February or January?

Ms Sabellico: Anne Maree Sabellico, Acting Deputy Director-General for the Health and Community Services Directorate. There has not been any change in the referral pathway from CYF to the Therapeutic Support Panel.

There is a system in place that needs to be there to consider all of the referrals that have been put forward to the panel. As part of the legislation, there is a requirement on us to make sure that we do everything within our power in order to be able to support children and young people, and usually the care order—and everything that that provides—gives us a level of ability to be able to manage for most.

Then referrals are made when we need to have other services compelled to support for the delivery of support and assistance for young people. That is what the process is about, in terms of: an initial discussion with the branch manager or the chief

practitioner; if, then, we are absolutely assured of ourselves—that we have undertaken all the work we can within the parameters of the orders, and working with other agencies—that continues under our accountability; and then we refer to the panel for others.

We also take responsibility for any of the matters that then have ITO provision. So, that then comes back to Children, Youth and Families, and we have oversight and management of those. We actively participate and consult with the chair, the therapeutic support team and the panel, as part of those arrangements. Most of the young people that are also referred from other areas tend to also be active in our system. So, we also account for whether there is a need to look at double referral.

THE CHAIR: You said you try to refer only when you really need support and have done everything within your power to provide a level of support. How do you make that judgement as to whether that threshold has been met for someone requiring support?

Ms Sabellico: That is why we ask that the practitioners consult with their executive branch manager or the chief practitioner who is responsible for oversighting clinical decisions. Through that process, we are able to test whether or not we have in fact done everything that we can within the authorities of the orders that we have, in order to look at an appropriate referral.

THE CHAIR: Dr Barker, you are a statutory office holder with expertise in this area. What kind of support would be required, if those are the kinds of determinations that the panel has been established to make? You indicated the last referral was in February. How many times since then has your advice been sought in relation to whether or not someone who is under the care of the directorate should be referred to the Therapeutic Support Panel?

Dr Barker: That is a difficult question to answer. We still get referrals for kids who are on care orders—about 25 per cent of all the referrals for kids who are still on care orders, irrespective of whether the referral comes from CYF. We still then provide advice on those referrals.

So, for every kid that is referred to the panel, they go before the panel to provide some advice even if we do not accept them as clients because they do not meet the threshold, or we can see how the supports are providing for them. About 30 per cent of the clients are on care orders.

So, we are providing advice and support for that 30 per cent of 45, whatever that is. We have 45 active clients at the moment, and those are the ones we are currently working with, that we provide advice and support and assistance on.

THE CHAIR: Is CYF seeking your advice directly in making the determinations which Ms Sabellico just indicated are made as a kind of a last resort?

Dr Barker: We provide advice whether they seek it or not.

THE CHAIR: Are they seeking the advice?

Dr Barker: Yes, I would say that they are. Through the referral process, they do seek our advice. Like I said, it is a tricky question to answer because we provide the advice whether someone asks for it or not.

THE CHAIR: Maybe it is a question on notice. I am curious about this halt in February of this year. We have got this fantastic mechanism here, and I think most committee members are really supportive of the existence of the panel. I am curious about whether your advice has been sought at any point since February about any specific cases and whether or not someone should be referred to the panel.

Dr Barker: Yes, absolutely. I can take the question on notice.

THE CHAIR: Not whether the advice was provided, but whether it was sought. Thank you.

Would you describe it as being used as a last resort, the Therapeutic Support Panel?

Ms Sabellico: All I can say is the legislation requires us to make sure that we are doing everything within our remit to support for access to the services that the young person needs. When we have issues in terms of not being able to access services, I do in fact consult with Dr Barker on nearly every occasion, and we try to work out what, then, is the way in which we can consider the systemic issues to access—but also on a case-by-case basis whether there is something that we can do in terms of looking at, “How do we solve this problem, now?”

So, that might suggest that we are able to do things jointly without having to take it to the panel to be able to sort that particular issue, given that there is a very clear threshold that we need to meet in order to be able to make the referrals for panel consideration.

The therapeutic support team sits under Dr Barker, and Dr Barker sits on the floor with Children, Youth and Families, and there is ongoing conversation and consultation about many matters. In fact, I see Dr Barker and his staff going and talking to our staff all the time on the floor. It is absolutely free access to whoever wants to have a conversation. We do not interfere with any of that. The process around formal referral to the panel is what we have a process around to ensure that we are meeting our legislative obligations as stated.

THE CHAIR: The minister arranged a briefing for me, to help me understand how the panel works, and my understanding was that the panel does not need to take on every referral as a client but instead can on-refer—and has special expertise in on-referring. So, what I am trying to understand is why that expertise would not be accessed as part of acquitting your obligations for the directorate to do everything within its power to support those children.

Ms Sabellico: The matters that we have referred are still ongoing with the panel. You have to go and re-present the case on a regular basis. The numbers are small, but the only young people with ITOs have been referred from CYF for the purposes of support of the panel, and the therapeutic support team and the chair—as well as a number of other young people who still are ongoing in terms of the work of the chair and the panel.

THE CHAIR: Dr Barker, you indicated that 30 per cent of your clients are on care orders and that you have received referrals recently from elsewhere for clients who are under care orders. Where have those referrals come from?

Dr Barker: As I mentioned before, most of the referrals come from ACT Policing at the moment—about 50 per cent of those referrals. And I would say that about 30 per cent of those will be kids who are known to the care and protection system and on care orders. Sometimes it will be other service providers in the community, too, who reach out because they are concerned about a child who is on care orders—or education. Sometimes they are repeat referrals; we may already know about that child, or we might have several different people reach out because something has happened in the community.

Primarily, many of those referrals come from the police, which is fantastic. If they have heard about any concerning or harmful behaviour, they very readily reach out to us to say, “Do you know this kid, and are you able to provide them with support?”

THE CHAIR: So, referrals are coming from the police, which means that there is a contact point with the criminal justice system, and that is where a referral is made. I am trying to understand why we would wait until we reach that threshold of having engaged with policing to make a referral, rather than having made it sooner. Is there a risk that the obligation that you described earlier, Ms Sabellico, of having to do everything possible to support these kids before referring, means that they are engaging in concerning behaviour that draws the attention of the police before they get referred. That seems too late.

Ms Sabellico: Again, it will also depend on what they are coming to the attention of police for. I am sure Dr Barker can talk a bit more about the types of referrals that he is receiving, and whether or not they do in fact need more intensive support, or whether it is more about the coordination of the supports to be able to support for the child. We have practitioners who do that—and Dr Barker is the chair with his panel, and the therapeutic support team also have practitioners that can do that.

So, again, we do not want to look to duplicate systems across the board. The intent in terms of implementing for the minimum age of criminal responsibility was to really have a look at that absolute diversionary end as well. And I believe that more referrals are coming in for younger people who are not necessarily also part of the care system. As this system is maturing, that is where the focus needs to be in order to divert from the system.

We can continue to have a look at what our practitioners do. And as I said, we consult with the team, with the chair, with our chief practitioner and other clinicians about those other young people. We have also got a set of expertise built into our structures, and we look for where we can do joint work as well. There is a lot of collaborative work that we do; not just keeping them separate. And I think there is success in that sort of model as well.

We will go back and have a look at our current cohort and see if there are any others that can be referred. But we are quite diligent around looking at who is appropriate to

refer. There is only a set amount of resources, as well, within the team. Regarding that access to the panel, we can also, through the chair, ask to have a conversation rather than a referral requirement to the panel.

THE CHAIR: Is it your sense that any of these referrals are coming later than they should?

Dr Barker: We have been encouraging the police to reach out to us in that early intervention space, and the police have been really good at it. If a kid comes to their attention—and, as Ms Sabellico said, some of them are under the age of 10—and this is a kid that previously we did not have a response for, they can be referred to us. So, it is really heartening to get those “if in doubt, refer us” referrals from the police. With the police taking carriage and making it a criminal matter, we can look at, “Okay, what supports are available for them? And where do we need to support them?”

As time has gone on, we have been getting more of those early intervention referrals from the police, which has been really encouraging. They seem to be really on board with this approach.

THE CHAIR: Resourcing-wise, can the Therapeutic Support Panel manage additional referrals? Would the panel welcome additional referrals? And what is the panel’s—and perhaps also the minister’s—policy perspective on exercising an abundance of caution and “referring away”, as opposed to using it as a last resort?

Dr Barker: I am a really big fan of people, if in doubt, referring to us. It allows us to then keep an eye on—which is one of my roles—what the gaps are in the system and the community in providing supports. So even if we do not take them on and work with them, it allows us to get that snapshot of what the needs are, and the gaps in the community sector, and the community more broadly. I do encourage that. Currently, our resources to do that screening and initial assessment process are fine. If it continues to increase the way it is—

THE CHAIR: You are the only area of government who has said that! It is a good thing. It is great.

Dr Barker: Well, look, I am very cautious. The advocacy from the community sector does not wear off quickly. I need to be careful about what I ask for money for, because it might be better needed somewhere else. At the moment, we are doing fine. If we continue to see an increase in demand, I might need to think about what it means for us to have more resources. But if in doubt, I like a referral—even if it is a repeat referral. We will just get more information about what this kid needs. Clearly, we did not do what we needed if they are coming back to our attention.

MS BARRY: I have just a few supplementaries, if that is all right. Dr Barker, you just mentioned that part of your role is identifying what gaps exist in community. What are some of the gaps you are currently seeing in community?

Dr Barker: This year’s report has been released, and I identified four key gaps in that report. One was regarding a dedicated approach to dealing with harmful sexualised behaviours. At our population level, we probably need to think about having a dedicated

service that can have referrals for children with harmful sexualised behaviours. We made a recommendation of what that might look like.

Building the capability and the capacity of the sector to deal with foetal alcohol spectrum disorder too. That is not unique to the ACT. That is an Australia-wide problem; to think about how we screen, diagnose and then treat people with that. We should expect a large number of children and young people in the justice system to be affected by that, based on previous research. More “flex ed”. “Flex ed” is a fantastic option for kids who are not fitting into mainstream education—particularly on site. The outreach stuff is great, but for them to have prosocial interactions with other kids is absolutely invaluable. It is limited as to how many kids we can do. We possibly need two sites but that is not up to me to make that specific recommendation.

Finally, I think that we need to look at what it means to have a fit-for-purpose, purpose-built intensive therapy place or two: a place that can be a home-like environment that allows us to do intensive therapy orders; that has been built for that purpose; that keeps the child safe, and the workers safe to be able to make sure that we can meet the therapeutic need. Again, based on the size of Canberra. Most other jurisdictions have one of these now, and I think it is time for Canberra to think about what that looks like.

MS BARRY: Thank you. The second supplementary question I have is around referring out to community sector organisations. What materials are available for your staff to be able to know what service to refer out to? What I have heard from conversations is that sometimes the panel is calling around, frantically looking out for a community service to take a child because they do not know what to do with this complex child. So, I just wanted to understand from your perspective what that looks like for your staff. What is the process?

Dr Barker: We have a range of services and providers that we go to; some of them private, some of them in the public domain that we regularly go to. We have not really had any difficulty finding the services we need. There are some services that do not exist, for example, for our client group. In health, for example, we do not have mental health facilities or drug and alcohol facilities under a certain age, which allow us to do certain types of mental health and drug rehabilitation.

So, we have those gaps. There is nowhere for us to refer them. They are two of the main gaps that we have in terms of services that we need. Also, an outreach-based psychiatric service or paediatric service would be really helpful. I think in other states, they have been located within, for example, in DCJ I believe there is one—

Ms Sabellico: They are in-posted health teams sitting in with the secure care or intensive support service in New South Wales.

Dr Barker: I think that that is one of the gaps we have too. These kids need some psychiatric or paediatric attention but they are not able to get to those appointments. We need someone who can go to the kids and meet them in their conditions. We need to make sure that these really vulnerable kids are not the ones that are missing out on the services, but that we are finding a flexible way to do that. So, I think that is one of the gaps. Otherwise regarding psychologists, functional and capacity assessments, drug and alcohol services that are not quite so pointy-end, we are finding referrals out are

going quite well.

MS BARRY: Thank you. For some of these gaps you identify, what is the process to address those? What have you been doing?

Dr Barker: Every year, make a report where I identify what systemic gaps are. In between those yearly reports, I make sure I reach out to the key stakeholders to see if they can flexibly adapt the existing programs to work with this cohort. Sometimes that is successful. Sometimes it is not. So, I have to take note of that.

I will often discuss it with the panel members about what kind of advocacy we need to do between reports, to advocate for these services in these gaps. At a service level, we piece together a response even if there is not one. So, if there is not, we will try and find someone in the private sector. We will find out what it means for us to address this gap if no one else is able to do it. And that is kind of an interim step while we think about, “Is this a systemic issue? Does it need to be a change on a bigger scale or not?”

MS BARRY: On a more systemic level, what resources do you need to ensure that some of these gaps that you have identified—which are significant—are addressed?

Dr Barker: I think more funding for those services that include responses for our cohort is what is needed. I think more adequate funding for flexible education. I do not think I need more brokerage money or anything like that. I think we need to be able to more meaningfully draw on the external supports from other health providers and mental health providers, ideally in the public sector.

MS TOUGH: Just in relation to Ms Barry’s first supp: who currently has the policy responsibility for children who are displaying or engaging in harmful sexual behaviours to other children?

Ms Sabellico: The Health Directorate and Canberra Health Services have that responsibility, which emanated from the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Sexual Assault.

MISS NUTTALL: Is the Office for Domestic Family and Sexual Violence ever engaged in questions about harmful sexual behaviours? Has anyone here engaged them?

Dr Barker: I have been in conversations along with Strategic Policy to think about who it is we need to engage in these conversations; to think about how to remobilise existing services; or advocate for other ones who we have been referred to and have helped us identify some of the people to talk to as well.

Ms Sabellico: And CYF is in ongoing conversations with the Office of Family and Domestic and Sexual Violence around a range of matters, including service system responses.

Ms Bogiatzis: That is right. My name is Vasiliki Bogiatzis, and I am the Acting Executive Group Manager for Inclusion, and I have acknowledged and read the privilege statement. So, in the Domestic Family and Sexual Violence Office we have

been engaged in conversations with the community sector, the Children and Young People's Commissioner, Dr Barker and Canberra Health Services around the Royal Commission recommendation, and implementation against that recommendation.

I understand that the Canberra Health Service have an FTE dedicated to responding to harmful sexualised behaviours, and that the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre—who I spoke to earlier this morning—talked about how they also provide support to children who are impacted by harmful sexualised behaviours.

THE CHAIR: Just quickly before we move on, is the rollout of the therapeutic support panel, especially alongside the changes, is that being independently evaluated? Is there any plan for that to look at things like effectiveness, the gaps you have described, the referral pathways, which you have spoken about, and transparency around decision making? It might actually be a question for the minister; I am not sure.

Mr Pettersson: No. There is a review process that is going to be procured soon. I will look to Anne Maree on that one. Short answer: yes.

Ms Sabellico: In terms of the panel specifically, you were asking?

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Dr Barker: I think there is money in the budget that comes at the end of a four-year period—I cannot quite remember—that is been allocated towards evaluation. We just need to make sure we find ways to make sure the evaluation plan and the indicators for success are selected early enough, so that we can make sure we can collect that data over a period of time. In March we will be two years into it. We have got a preliminary evaluation framework to think about what that looks like, but we really need someone external to be able to do that robust evaluation of what we are doing.

And as a recovering evaluator, I think it is really important that we do make sure someone external helps us choose those indicators for success and analyses that data, because that is how we have our ongoing learning and improvement. So, I do not want to wait to the end. I think we need to make sure we collect that data and iteratively look at it, to see how well it is going so we can continue to adapt. What we call a developmental evaluation.

THE CHAIR: So, you support bringing someone in sooner rather than later.

Dr Barker: The sooner the better, yes.

MS BARRY: I will go to substantive if that is all right. Minister I just wanted to talk about your community development education program. That program, by my calculations, has been cut by 26 per cent. Exactly what was cut?

Ms Sabellico: Sorry, Ms Barry, what program was it?

MS BARRY: The community development/education program. It is output 2.1 Child and family centres. Then there is a strategic indicator too.

Ms West: Hello. Kate West. I am the Executive Branch Manager of Support Services for Children. I have read and acknowledged the privilege statement. The programs have not been cut. The child and family centres run a range of different programs. Some of those are community development engagement, and some of those are parenting assistance. The sway between the two is dependent upon community need. And you will see that last year, the indicator for community development was down by 24 per cent but the indicator for parenting assistance was up by 26 per cent. So, there has been a sway between those programs—so, a different need within the community that the centres have been addressing.

MS BARRY: What need has changed the numbers?

Ms West: It is different across all of our centres. There has certainly been a shift towards more parenting programs and more ongoing complex case management, rather than those individual community development and education sessions.

Ms Bogiatzis: I am just going to clarify the record. I think Ms West got the percentages incorrect. For the community development education programs, we have seen a 26 per cent decrease, and for the parenting assistant sessions we have seen a 24 per cent increase. Sorry, she has got those around the wrong way.

MS BARRY: Thank you. Is it likely that these underlying causes will continue to require higher levels of parenting assistance? You have talked about a shift in both. What sort of level of assistance are you expecting will keep driving that increase?

Ms West: I mean, it changes every term. The programs offered at the centre will shift every term based on what is coming through in the community need. So, it is hard to say what the need will be next year. We have seen a trend towards more parenting assistance programs and so we will continue to offer for those. But if there is an increased need for community development engagement programs we will offer more of those. It is really dependent on what comes through our door.

MS BARRY: What is driving the need for the parenting assistance program? Are parents coming to you and saying, “We need this”? What is driving that need?

Ms West: Lots of things in the community would be driving that need.

MS BARRY: For example?

Ms West: I would not want to pinpoint anything in particular. Parenting is what people come to the child and family centres for, so it could be children dealing with anxiety, or wanting to do social connection with other people. There is a whole range of different things.

MS BARRY: What training are you offering? I know you said that it could shift and change, but this is currently the need you are seeing that is increasing. What training are you offering to staff to address that?

Ms West: All of our staff are trained in the parenting programs that are on offer at the centre, which are all evaluated programs. Our staff are trained to deliver all of them;

then we shift and put people in, based on whatever their training is.

MS BARRY: Do you have enough staff to do that, to switch and change?

Ms West: Yes, we do.

MS BARRY: I have a question around, again, 2.1, where you record the number of parenting sessions as 1,399. In strategic indicator 2, you describe the number of occasions of service as 9,149. Can you explain the discrepancy between those two numbers?

Ms West: It is a small variation of four per cent seen last year. Is that what you are talking about?

MS BARRY: In 2.1, you record the number of parenting sessions. I want to understand what the numbers are, because I understand that the figure for occasions of service is 9,169, but for the parenting sessions it is 1,399. More parents are visiting; I am guessing that one parent is visiting multiple times. I want to understand what the numbers indicate.

Ms West: The occasions of service is the number of interactions that we have. Yes, a parent would come multiple times.

MS BARRY: Can you explain why they are—

Ms West: It might be to attend a playgroup. They would come every week to go to a playgroup. It might be to attend a parenting program which runs over six weeks, and they would come every week to attend that program.

MS BARRY: In figure 11 on page 76, the historical results show a steady decline in the number of occasions of service over the last three years, from over 12,000 to just over 9,000. Can you explain the reason?

Ms West: It is that shift in community that I was talking about earlier. We are seeing people coming to us for longer sessions and with more complexity, rather than the one-off and shorter education sessions.

MS BARRY: What is driving these complexities?

Ms West: Again, I would not want to pinpoint it. We can only talk to the people that come through our door. We have people that are coming in who are seeking a range of different parenting support. It could be supporting children with anxiety, the development of their child or a range of other things to do with parenting.

Ms Bogiatzis: In relation to the occasions of service, that is not just the parenting programs and the programs delivered by the child and family centres. The child and family centres welcome anyone who walks through the door who has a question around accessing a service or an issue they are experiencing in their family. The child and family centres are very well placed to support the people who walk through the door. They will sit down with them and have a chat; they will understand their needs and they

will, if appropriate, refer them into one of the programs delivered by the centres or, if it is more appropriate, refer them to other specialist support.

MS BARRY: Neighbours, grandparents—anyone can just walk in?

Ms Bogiatzis: Yes.

MS TOUGH: I want to ask about the Next Steps for Our Kids program, and whether there need to be any changes.

Mr Pettersson: We are always happy to provide an update.

MS TOUGH: Now that many of the providers have been engaged for nearly 12 months, what work is underway to transition and support the services to the Next Steps preferred provider panel?

Ms Saballa: I have read and acknowledge the privilege statement. Thank you very much for the question. It relates to the new Children, Young People and Families panel that we have been setting up over the last 12 months. There is lots of interest in the panel. It is new for the ACT.

We are currently working with 11 providers to deliver a mix of services across seven different service packages. Those service packages range from earlier support for families, right through to aftercare support for young people. The panel is helping to build a stronger and more diverse system with more providers, and that greater focus on earlier support for families.

It is a new way of delivering services and support. It is in direct response to what we heard from community, who were asking for this type of option. It is also a key component of the ACT government's reform of child and family services.

Transitions to the new panel are well underway. Seven providers are currently delivering services under the panel, and they are delivering a range of things. That goes from sustaining families to foster care and kinship care support, supportive contact and transport, functional family therapy, youth justice, and extended care support. In the period to early 2026, we will be introducing a new aftercare assistance model with three providers and support for a further five providers, to commence Sustaining Families.

That highlights that it is being done in stages, to make sure that care continues smoothly for children, young people, families and carers that are already in the system. For new families and children, as they may come into the system and need earlier support, they will receive quality support right from the start.

It is quite a big question that you have asked. In thinking about and working through establishing the panel, there are new governance arrangements that we have put in place, and there is all the work that we have done to support the providers under the panel as well. I could talk briefly to the governance arrangements.

MS TOUGH: Can I ask about the Sustaining Families initiative? There are more providers coming in. What are these services for and what are you hoping that the

outcomes will be?

Ms Saballa: With the Sustaining Families services package, under that services package, providers deliver a range of contemporary, evidence-informed, integrated services for children, from birth to 17 years of age, at risk of entry into out-of-home care. They use practice elements that are known to be effective in intensive family support, in preservation—that is, keeping children and young people safely at home—and restoration.

That package provides a combination of support pathways, from early assistance to support children and families with emerging needs and vulnerabilities, through to targeted and specialist supports, so that children can remain safely in the family home, or they could be returned safely home. The key thing is that it is safe to do so. As you would be aware, Next Steps for Our Kids outlines that commitment to family preservation and restoration. I can share more detail about the providers and the next steps that are coming up.

MS TOUGH: That is all right. I have one further question around how Next Steps is addressing over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

Ms Sabella: I will hand over to Ms Sabellico for that.

Ms Sabellico: To start with, I will look at how we are addressing over-representation within Children, Youth and Families, given that is substantially where we are seeing the level of over-representation. A lot of that has been guided by the Next Steps, as well as Our Booris, Our Way, the Closing the Gap reforms and those sorts of things.

We have spent a fair bit of time looking at the way in which Children, Youth and Families is structured and what the practice models are. We have looked to move away from what you would consider an interventionist child protection model to one that we call our family services model. It arose out of establishing our First Nations team, as part of the recommendations from Our Booris, Our Way. We asked the Aboriginal leads, once they were appointed, to look at what this needs to look like in order to divert Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families from the system. They designed and built what we now call our family response and engagement services. We have then looked to replicate that across the board for all families. We are really building on the new principle that has been embedded into the act around early support and trying to give life to the delivery of the child placement principles as well.

The other thing we have done is to look at how we also grow our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staffing complement, as well as how many of those are at senior levels, and creating opportunities for senior Aboriginal staff. They then provide the guidance and lead the way in terms of what we need to do internally.

They have worked with us to establish what we call our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander care pathways, which means that we have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff looking at, consulting on and guiding the decision-making around every single matter to do with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children across our system.

We have the introduction of the Chief Practitioner. The Clinical Services and Practice Assurance Branch also means that we have a greater focus on what we are doing, from a systems point of view, to respond. So far, with the success we have seen in 18 months, since moving to the new approaches across CYF, we have seen a 33 per cent decrease in substantiations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. That means, instead of following a process-driven child protection response of doing an appraisal and then looking at what we need to do, we are getting in early and working with families in order to support them to stay out of the system.

MS TOUGH: That is wonderful.

Ms Sabellico: We have also seen a 53 per cent decrease in the number of appraisals that we have commenced, because we are looking to work to support preservation. Where we need to look at bringing a child into care, it is absolutely for a very short period. We do not go for orders to 18 as one of the first interventions. We now look only at very short-term support services, for the purposes of restoration.

We have also seen a decrease in our admission rates into the child protection system for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. It has gone from an admission rate of 14 in 2023 to 11.7 in 2024. Our entry rates into out-of-home care have declined from 13.9 to 5.5.

MS TOUGH: Wonderful.

Ms Sabellico: We are looking at how we make that change to be able to address over-representation. It does not impact the number of children and young people that are currently sitting in the out-of-home care placements, but there is other work occurring that we are developing with Our Booris, Our Way and our Aboriginal staff.

MS TOUGH: Thank you for that.

THE CHAIR: With that entry rate that you just mentioned, do you have the corresponding rate for non-Indigenous children?

Ms Sabellico: I do. I do not have it with me, but I can provide that.

THE CHAIR: On notice; is that okay?

Ms Sabellico: Yes.

MISS NUTTALL: Going back to the preferred provider panel, stakeholders have informed us that there are young people in out-of-home care who are being referred to organisations that are not on this panel. My question is: how many young people are being referred to non-panel organisations and why is this happening?

Ms Sabellico: Can you ask the second part of that question again?

MISS NUTTALL: Yes, absolutely. How many young people are being referred to non-panel orgs and why is this happening?

Ms Sabellico: We do not just refer to our panel organisations; we do look at the whole of the service system and refer appropriately regarding what the needs are of the families that we are working with. We would refer to our child and family centres, if what they need is some parenting support. We would refer to other agencies where we might be able to look at getting some in-home support as well.

There might be a need to look at some youth mentoring for older children in the family, or we might refer to places that look at how to address, for some of that family, friction and stuff like that, in terms of looking at how to get in there and work with the family about what the issues are. We use the whole of the service system; we are not just confined to our panel arrangements.

In fact, the panel can be built out, however we need, as we start to bring on different arrangements through different program areas. It is just a construct in terms of how we identify who has met the threshold to be able to provide services, particularly given that referral from Children, Youth and Families usually means that they need to be accredited under the care and protection organisation regulations.

MISS NUTTALL: That is the case for all organisations that you refer out to, irrespective of what the domain is?

Ms Sabellico: If we are referring a matter that meets our threshold for risk of significant harm, they need to have CAPOs. If we receive reports that do not meet that threshold, they are the ones we would refer out to those that also deliver services, but they do not necessarily require CAPO registration.

MISS NUTTALL: Do you actively maintain your contact list with organisations? Do you build a strong relationship with all of them, irrespective of whether they are on the panel or not?

Ms Sabellico: Yes. All of our practitioners do. They would have relationships with quite a lot of services. In our structure, because we understand that it is difficult for 200 practitioners to keep across all the changing aspects of the service system, we have created what we call our information resource and referral unit. It is a group of practitioners who specialise in knowing all the services, knowing what their entry criteria are, and it is able to understand whether there are vacancies and things like that, and what the service models are. Our practitioners can consult with them about the best referrals to achieve for the case plan direction or the issues that sit with the family.

MISS NUTTALL: Do you have those numbers for how many have been referred through?

Ms Sabellico: We can, for those that we keep track of, yes.

MISS NUTTALL: I would be grateful to understand that; thank you.

THE CHAIR: Going back to the Our Booris, Our Way recommendations, I have a couple of questions. How is progress on those recommendations being tracked? Maybe it is in one of the annual reports or you may be able to provide an update. I think it may have shifted from completed or not completed to some other method of tracking

progress.

Ms Sabellico: In our partnership with the Our Booris, Our Way Implementation Oversight Committee, we now look at supporting the tracking, monitoring and development of initiatives in terms of those that the committee have identified as requiring more work or being able to complete some work in order to put them into the monitoring cycle.

There are three subgroups of the committee that meets every month. We go through and look at particular recommendations that have been allocated to those groups. We then report every month back to the chair and committee about each of those subgroups and how they are tracking.

We then meet once a quarter with the whole of the committee to present all of the work that has been done, to get sign-off from the committee as a whole about anything that is deemed to be completed, or nearing completion, as well as guiding any of the new work that may emanate from those recommendations. At the moment, we feel that it is a very positive approach. We certainly get to have a good amount of time to be able to negotiate where we are at, what the committee is needing, what that might look like, and come back in a rather interactive way with the subgroups, to be able to achieve that.

MISS NUTTALL: My question is about the out-of-home care transition plans. A lot of young people in out-of-home care are expressing a concern that their transition plans are out of date and are not actively updated to be useful to them. What is the current policy on how frequently transition plans are updated? What measures are you putting in place to ensure that those transition plans are being followed?

Ms Sabellico: By transition plans, Miss Nuttall, do you mean the transition from care plans?

MISS NUTTALL: Yes.

Ms Sabellico: I will get Melanie to talk a bit more about the aftercare assistance program that she mentioned previously. Our expectation, with the new panel providers for those who are providing foster care and kinship care, is that leaving care planning should always start with the young person at about the age of 15, in order to be able to support them with what they need while they are still in care. There is a lot of focus around building independent living skills and looking at family reconnection. If they do not have great family connection, what do we do in order to be able to support that, going forward, and accessing specialist services that help with those sorts of arrangements? It is about looking at what their housing need might be, if they cannot return to live with their family.

We would work with our housing colleagues to look at what the appropriate housing options might be for young people, in terms of pre-preparing for headleasing arrangements and those sorts of things. It is so that we are able to let the young people know what is happening going forward.

Given the new aftercare assistance funding, there is even more intensive work done towards the later stages of being in care, to be able to develop those.

Ms Saballa: Thank you very much for that question. As Ms Sabellico was outlining, funding was allocated for the aftercare assistance initiative. It is about improving the support available to young people in the early transition planning, as they transition to adults and independence. As young adults, it is about having supports available that meet not only their needs but also their aspirations and wishes, as they step into being adults.

Certainly, it is a commitment in Next Steps for Our Kids. We have a set of things that are coming into place for that aftercare assistance initiative. First of all, there are amendments to the Children and Young People Act, so there is a legislative base. It creates an obligation to provide appropriate care and support to care leavers, up to the age of 21. It gives discretion to the Health and Community Services Director-General to continue to provide support. The directorate also has discretion to provide financial support, if it is considered appropriate, and that could include access to the current carer subsidy. There is that legislative change.

In pre-empting this, we did work with the Australian Catholic University's Institute of Child Protection Studies. They undertook a piece of local research work. They talked to young people with lived and living experience about what was important to them, as they transitioned to being adults. They looked at other jurisdictions—models, what was contemporary and what was working well for young people and young adults. They also did literature research.

They brought that information together into a model, and that is the model that we are taking forward. We are calling it aftercare assistance. We have been doing a lot of work in developing the guidelines. There is a set of financial guidelines. There is a set of guidelines for the providers on the panel. There will be three providers that will support young people and young adults.

MISS NUTTALL: I am interested in understanding how this integrates with transition plans, particularly, and what our policy is around keeping those up-to-date and relevant to young people through this process.

Ms Sabellico: A plan will need to be reviewed every 12 months and updated according to where that young person is at. We will also look at establishing a panel with the providers and ourselves in order to make sure that we are across and on top of what is happening—changing circumstances for young people, as well as the initial approvals, and tracking and monitoring of all those as we go forward. That will help to drive the work that needs to be done with the young people.

MISS NUTTALL: The panel is supported through the aftercare assistance funding and, as part of that panel, you track the plans fairly closely and make sure that they are—

Ms Sabellico: Yes. We will have a collective group of panel providers and CYF to be able to manage for all of those, as they go through.

MISS NUTTALL: Is it the panel that reviews this alongside the young person? How does that work and how are they involved?

Ms Sabellico: Yes, that would be with their practitioner, because you do not want executive involvement in the day-to-day aspects. Their practitioner will need to provide reports, in terms of the compliance around certain aspects of the work.

MS BARRY: How many transition plans are currently active?

Ms Sabellico: I will need to take that on notice because they will be at different stages, depending on where the young people are at. We can certainly get the information for you, in terms of how many plans are in place with the current providers as well.

MS BARRY: Thank you; and when they were last updated as well.

Ms Sabellico: The last update, yes.

MS BARRY: Minister, are you aware of the news article around children who have transitioned out who cannot get rentals because they have no rental history?

Mr Pettersson: I did see that *Canberra Times* article, yes.

MS BARRY: What have you done since the article was published?

Mr Pettersson: I am currently seeking advice following the publication of that article, and the government did provide a response to help inform it.

MS BARRY: How does that marry with the fact that the evidence before us is that transition plans are updated regularly?

Mr Pettersson: I think you are drawing a connection between a transition plan and some of the services that are available. The crux of that article was that some of the services that are available do not necessarily have the full flight of resources that they might require to be able to provide the fulsome support that these young people deserve, which is separate to having a plan.

MS BARRY: My understanding is that the article talked about children not being able to get accommodation because they do not have rental histories. If transition plans have been updated when they should be, that would not be an issue that the young person would face.

Ms Sabellico: I do not know the circumstances of the matter that was reported, but we do a lot of work with our colleagues in housing assistance. Where a young person requires access to a house through housing assistance, we work with them to secure a headlease arrangement with a community housing provider, usually before they leave. That is the current practice. I do not know whether the matter reported in the paper was for a matter in the last 12 months, or what the circumstances are. It is hard to be able to talk about those things without knowing what the details of the case are.

MS BARRY: I think the minister said that he has provided advice, or you have provided—

Mr Pettersson: I have asked for advice.

THE CHAIR: In the comments it was indicated that, “Child, Youth and Families must provide assistance where it considers appropriate to care leavers who are younger than 21 years old and may provide assistance where it considers appropriate to care leavers who are over 21 but under 25 years old to find housing.” I do not know if that is a quote from a website or a comment but, in any case, there are quote marks around it.” This might be a question to take on notice, but I am curious about how many young people aged under 21 years were provided with assistance to successfully find housing in the last financial year by CYF; how many young people aged 21 to 25 were successfully provided with assistance; and, for both of those cohorts, how many sought assistance but were not provided with it and/or a breakdown of how many were assisted but were not successful in finding housing.

Ms Sabellico: Of those that required housing?

THE CHAIR: Of those that required housing, yes. There is obviously some discretion, according to that comment, in what level assistance may be provided.

Ms Sabellico: They might still be staying in placement for a number of years, which we have the authority to approve. If they are with kin, they will stay with family. Some return to family. It will be the cohort whereby they are looking for more independent living. We can certainly have a look at how many of those sit within what we call our CAP program and how many of them then graduated to their own housing. The 21 to 25 could be more difficult if we are not the case manager at that time. But we can pull together what it is that we do have available, if that is okay, Mr Emerson.

THE CHAIR: That would be great. The numbers on who sought assistance, who received it and whether they were successful in finding housing as a consequence of that assistance, would be great.

MS BARRY: I again want to go back to that news article. Minister, did you say that you had sought advice or given advice?

Mr Pettersson: I read the *Canberra Times* article, and I have asked for advice on the circumstances underlying it.

MS BARRY: While seeking that advice, what have you done, if anything, to reach out to this young person?

Mr Pettersson: I have not reached out to the young person. I am still awaiting advice on the circumstances behind that article.

MS BARRY: Minister, it has been two days, though. It is a concerning incident. Seeking advice, I think, is not acceptable if your government has been in power for 24 years. Seeking advice is just not acceptable, Minister.

Mr Pettersson: I will take that as a comment, because I am not sure there is a question behind it.

THE CHAIR: Do you think you have something that you could very quickly ask

about?

MS BARRY: No, I do not; I will put them on notice, yes.

THE CHAIR: We will wrap up the session there and go to the next one. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance today. For any questions taken on notice, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*.

Short suspension.

Appearances:

Pettersson, Mr Michael, Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations

Health and Community Services Directorate

Sabellico, Ms Anne-Maree, Acting Deputy Director-General

Bogiatzis, Vasiliki, Acting Executive Group Manager, Inclusion Division

Connor, Tina, Acting Executive Branch Manager, Women, Youth & Multicultural Affairs, Inclusion Division

THE CHAIR: We welcome Mr Michael Pettersson MLA, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, and also officials. I believe you were all here before. As witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly. I am going to pass immediately to Ms Barry.

MS BARRY: Thank you, Chair. Welcome, again. I have a few questions around the Multicultural Festival, specifically around the festival grants program. Can you provide some data on the number of requests for festival grants? How many applications were there, how many were approved and how many were declined? Can you also provide details of the amounts requested and the amounts granted in the approved and declined categories? I am happy for it to be taken on notice.

Mr Pettersson: I suspect they have come prepared and have those answers.

MS BARRY: Excellent.

Ms Bogiatzis: Thank you, Ms Barry. For the 2025 festival a total of \$220,000 was available in grant funding across two funding streams—Cultural Showcase and Community Group. In 2025 we saw that funding distributed to 145 recipients. The Community Showcase grant is capped at \$8,000. Under the Community Group grants, there are a number of subcategories. For Community Performance grants, which is one of the subcategories, there is \$700 available for each grant; for the Cooking Demonstration grants, there is \$250 available for each grant; for the Community Workshop grants, there is \$800 available; for the Parade Participation grants there is \$500; for the Interstate Overseas Travel grants, there is \$1,200 each; and for public liability insurance, there is \$100 available to support grant applicants through that stream.

The grants were open for the Cultural Showcase grants from 5 June to 1 July 2024 and for Community Performance from 10 July until 12 August the same year. We had 108 applicants for the Community Groups and we had 75 successful applicants and for the Cultural Showcase grants we had 28 applicants and we had 22 successful applicants and 11 of 22 Cultural Showcase applicants received—sorry, I will stop there. Thank you.

MS BARRY: How many were declined? For the community ones, we could do the maths. I mean, 25 and then—

Ms Bogiatzis: Yes.

MS BARRY: All right. For the second, the performance grants, are they individual grants? I think you had two categories. One was—

Ms Bogiatzis: We do. The Cultural Showcase grant is one grant thing and then the second stream of the grants program is broken down into several elements. That is the Community Group grant program, where there were 75 successful applicants.

MS BARRY: Thank you. Of those 75 successful applicants for the Community Group grant, how do you ensure equitability across the distribution of the funding?

Ms Bogiatzis: I will ask Ms Connor to answer that question.

Ms Connor: The National Multicultural Festival Team develops guidelines for the grants. It is not necessarily a competitive grants process. When all of the applicants come in they will look at them collectively to have a look at the distribution to ensure that there is cultural representation from as many cultures as possible. That is part of how they form the programming for the festival. It is based on the applications but also the spread of groups that are applying. Does that make sense?

MS BARRY: Yes, it makes sense. So you are using a guideline?

Ms Connor: Yes.

MS BARRY: Do you have documentation or some of the things that are in the guidelines?

Ms Bogiatzis: The guideline is released every year. That is publicly available for quite a decent amount of time to allow community organisations to digest the information. We also run sessions and offer opportunities for people to ask questions and for us to communicate the guidelines and what is in and what is out and how they can apply. The guidelines foster and promote broad participation and, as Ms Connor said, seek to engage a really broad representation of community participation in the program.

MS BARRY: So there is no consideration of whether, say, five community groups come from one community?

Ms Bogiatzis: That is exactly the sort of thing that is considered. If we have five different groups wanting to do a cooking demonstration for the same kind of food, we may consider the quality of the application against others to ensure diversity.

MS BARRY: Excellent. Who is the decision-maker for the grants?

Ms Bogiatzis: We convene a panel in the directorate, and that panel makes recommendations to a delegate, who approves the grant applications.

MS BARRY: Is the delegate the minister or someone else?

Ms Bogiatzis: It is me.

MS BARRY: Okay.

Mr Pettersson: Believe it or not, it is not me picking winners.

MS BARRY: Do you advise the minister then of—

Ms Bogiatzis: Yes. I would brief the minister before the grant program opens. I would talk to the minister around what was in the guidelines and what our recommendations are around that. We do not talk very much to the minister while the process is out and while we receive applications. During panel deliberations, there is absolutely no engagement with the minister. Then, once I have signed off as delegate, I would then bring the minister on the outcome.

MS TOUGH: Just tagging on, for next year's 2026 festival, can we expect any changes to the footprint given what is going on in the city at the moment?

Mr Pettersson: Yes, indeed. We expand further into Glebe Park.

MS TOUGH: Wonderful.

THE CHAIR: Do you want more detail on that?

MS TOUGH: That is all right; if it is just Glebe Park, that makes sense to me.

Ms Bogiatzis: There is a bit more information we can provide in relation to that.

MS TOUGH: Okay; perfect.

Ms Bogiatzis: As the minister indicated, we will be expanding into Glebe Park, but we will also be retaining the festival in its home site, which is in the centre of the city. Due to a number of construction projects and developments underway, the 2026 festival will have a slightly reduced footprint in the city centre and we will see potentially a slightly smaller footprint. But the expansion into Glebe Park will really help us maintain diversity of the footprint and availability for stalls.

MS TOUGH: Wonderful. Is there any work being done to support Civic businesses to participate in the festival?

Ms Bogiatzis: Yes, there is. We do have that information. We are working closely with the City Renewal Authority, local businesses and development sites, and Ms Connor can speak more to that.

Ms Connor: Each year we work closely with both city businesses and residents in terms of the disruption of both the festival as well as the construction that is happening. To support businesses during the festival weekend the Multicultural Festival is declared as a special event under the Liquor Act 2010. That means on the Friday and Saturday of the festival, Canberra venues that hold a liquor licence are automatically able to extend their licensing hours and remain open until 2 am.

As Ms Bogiatzis said, we also work with the City Renewal Authority to engage with businesses and involve them in the festival. The City Renewal Authority delivers a promotional campaign for city businesses as part of the festival, promoting the offerings. Part of what we discuss with them is how we can best support them. Some of the feedback we have heard this year is that they would prefer, for instance, to not have a stall but that we can kind of try and direct traffic to their specific areas. They are some of the ways that we help them.

MS TOUGH: That makes sense.

Ms Bogiatzis: Acknowledging the impact on city businesses—which is mostly positive as a result of the festival, because there is a lot more foot traffic in the city and so it does attract greater levels of business—to further support businesses this year we are offering a micro-grant program, which will be rolled out for the 2026 festival. That will support local businesses with any City Centre marketing and to promote engagement with the foot traffic into their businesses. That grant process is not yet finalised, but we are looking to see businesses come up with some really interesting ideas that seek greater foot traffic into their businesses.

MS TOUGH: Wonderful. Are there any other initiatives that you are trialling to boost community engagement with the festival for 2026, to continue the high attendance rates we have been seeing.

Ms Bogiatzis: We do a number of things to maintain strong community engagement from community organisations, commercial vendors and the community more broadly. In the lead-up to the festival, there is a fairly significant communications engagement strategy that that we use to promote the festival across multiple platforms. We also use other providers to help us with that promotional work. We have seen strong attendance at the National Multicultural Festival, and I anticipate that attendance to stay strong for the next festival.

MS TOUGH: Wonderful; thank you.

MS BARRY: I have a few more questions on the Multicultural Festival. I want to understand how you compile the attendees' feedback for the festival. For example, how many individual responses did you gather?

Ms Bogiatzis: For the 2025 National Multicultural Festival we had a total attendance of 329,626, which was made up of 243,557 unique individuals. So some people were repeat attending the festival. We do conduct a survey which supports us to understand people's participation with the festival. These statistics always sound a bit funny, but the average person visited 1.59 times; so meaning that people were—

MS BARRY: Two days.

Ms Bogiatzis: Yes, they were coming back, which was really great. Of those people that attended, we know that over 54 per cent spent two to four hours at the festival and 27 per cent spent longer than four hours. There was some severe weather during the festival, and that always impacts attendance. I think on the Friday night it rained quite

badly, and so the turnout perhaps was not as much as we had anticipated.

MS BARRY: Are you saying that the number of people who provided feedback was 246,000?

Ms Bogiatzis: That was the estimated number of people who attended the festival.

MS BARRY: Are they the ones who also provided feedback?

Ms Bogiatzis: I do not have that number—unless Ms Connor has the number of people who engaged in the survey.

Ms Connor: There are two surveys that we conduct. They are both done by external consultants. I am just trying to find the info about how they make the calculation for attendance.

MS BARRY: Okay.

Ms Bogiatzis: We could maybe come back to that, if that is okay.

MS BARRY: Thank you. As part of that, I would also like to know what questions you asked other than the areas recorded in the annual reports—if there were additional questions you asked and how that is reflected in the annual reports as well.

Ms Bogiatzis: We can circle back to that.

MS BARRY: Thank you.

MS TOUGH: I am interested in what humanitarian support is provided to refugees and humanitarian visa holders that are new to the ACT?

Mr Pettersson: What a wonderful question. It was great to continue the supports in the most recent budget.

Ms Bogiatzis: Yes; thank you, Ms Tough, for the question. The ACT government provides a range of humanitarian support. One of the programs that we provide is the Humanitarian Funding Program, which is \$150,000. That funding goes to Canberra Refugee Support, Companion House and St Vincent de Paul, who administer the funding on behalf of the ACT government. That program is really to support community organisations who are working with refugees and asylum seekers, particularly those who are ineligible for other forms of support because of their visa status in Australia.

In 2024-25, the Humanitarian Funding Program provided support to 44 households, which included 18 children and 12 people who have no working rights in Australia. The types of support that that includes is accommodation and rental payments, food, clothing, basic needs, pharmacy, medical costs and transport assistance. It is really that basic living assistance that is required by refugees and asylum seekers in Australia.

MS TOUGH: Was that the Family Settlement Assistance Grant Program?

Ms Bogiatzis: No; that is a separate program. The Family Settlement Assistance Grant Program is a \$200,000 program, and it provides one off grants of \$5,000 to newly-arrived refugee families or individuals to help secure long-term accommodation and meet their immediate living expenses. The Australian Red Cross administers that program on behalf of the ACT government. In 2024-25, it supported 40 individuals, couples or families, benefiting a total of 175 clients. The clients supported through this funding were seeking asylum or were refugees from Afghanistan, Myanmar, Syria or the occupied Palestinian territories.

MS TOUGH: Are there any people who miss out on either of those programs for any reason?

Ms Bogiatzis: Funding is limited, and the community organisations do their best to provide support that they can, including working with other organisations to support their clients. For the Family Settlement Assistance Program, there is currently a waitlist of 45 people, and that is due to the capacity constraints.

MS TOUGH: How do we make sure these vulnerable people do not fall through the cracks, particularly those ones that are on the waiting list?

Mr Pettersson: Good question. I guess the starting point for it is that a lot of the issues that we see in this space are the result of commonwealth policy decisions. These are gaps that exist due to decisions made in another parliament. As Canberrans, I do not think we want to sit idly by as vulnerable people in our community experience need, which is why we have these programs in place. This is the ACT government's role in trying to respond to that need that exists, not just within our community but also in other places in the country.

We, as a community, rely on non-government organisations to also support these people. In my time as minister, I have been with advocacy groups that are keen to address these issues. This is an ongoing campaigning effort across the country to see improvements in supports to vulnerable people in our community. So, yes, there is work to be done and there are organisations that help alongside us.

MS TOUGH: Thank you.

MS BARRY: I have a really quick supp—I think, just for my benefit, because I think I got it wrong. You said that the grants administered by the Red Cross are \$200,000 and that it is a \$5,000 grant.

Ms Bogiatzis: That is right.

MS BARRY: And participants so far number 175?

Ms Bogiatzis: They have administered 40 grants. Some of those were households, with children and other—

MS BARRY: I see what you mean.

Ms Bogiatzis: The Red Cross has reported to us that a total of 175 clients have benefited

from the grants, but there have been a total of 40 grants administered.

MS BARRY: Okay. So the 40 are the ones who have benefited, but the total of 175, including parents, families—

Ms Bogiatzis: Correct.

MS BARRY: Thanks.

MISS NUTTALL: My question is about the availability of family and domestic violence services for culturally and linguistically diverse women and children. At the end of this financial year, obviously funding for the Multicultural Hub's domestic and family violence service is due to expire—and I know we discussed this a little bit yesterday. We know that culturally and linguistically diverse women face additional barriers when seeking support for domestic and family violence and that the Multicultural Hub provides essential services to some of our most vulnerable community members. Could you please outline the government's plan to ensure that culturally and linguistically diverse women and children do not slip through the cracks if or when this service ceases to exist due to funding running out?

Ms Bogiatzis: I am familiar with the program that mHub administer. I would refer to the minister's statement yesterday, which said that the continuation of that program is subject to future budget consideration.

MISS NUTTALL: I appreciate the discussion we had yesterday, part of which was that, if it wraps up before future funding considerations, we may have lost a program that is supporting culturally and linguistically diverse women who are experiencing family and domestic violence. Can you identify any other services that specifically provide support to culturally and linguistically diverse women and children experiencing family and domestic violence?

Ms Bogiatzis: What I can say is that all domestic, family and sexual violence services do not discriminate based on race. If a member of any community is seeking support due to safety concerns, they are strongly encouraged to contact the services. Services will do their utmost to provide culturally safe and responsive service programs, intervention and whatever is required to meet the needs of those clients. I appreciate that mHub deliver perhaps a more culturally responsive service offering in relation to domestic and family violence. So they are well placed to do that.

There are also a number of other programs, which perhaps relates to the previous hearing session, delivered by child and family centres, for example, who deliver a range of groups, whether that is a supported playgroup for mothers from a particular community. In those forums, we have heard of various things being disclosed and various support needs required for those women. The service system is very good at connecting clients to the support that they need.

MISS NUTTALL: I am interested from your perspective and from the perspective of the Office of Multicultural Affairs, how much input you provide and what kind of monitoring you do to make sure that there are enough services—not just culturally safe services but also services that are culturally responsive to women from various

culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Ms Bogiatzis: The Multicultural ACT team delivers a range of programs and services and also perform functions where they are engaging with community to understand the needs of the community. As an example of that, they co-convene the Humanitarian Coordination Committee, which is co-chaired between us, the ACT government, and the Australian Red Cross. That is a forum where we engage with a network of over 40 stakeholders who are subject matter experts in humanitarian responses and service provision. The coordination committee convenes quarterly to share insights, coordinate efforts and strengthen sector-wide collaboration. That is a great forum for talking about what providers are seeing and services that they are offering. It is certainly a forum that we can tap into if there are capacity limitations in the system, to make sure that we understand where there are opportunities and also so that those providers can talk to each other around connecting as a system.

Further to that, we have the Ministerial Advisory Council on Multiculturalism. That council is a great opportunity for us to engage with members of the multicultural community to understand the needs of the community and what is being shared. They also run consultation forums, which is again an opportunity to hear from the community to understand the broad needs.

MISS NUTTALL: Thank you.

MR BRADDOCK: I have a question about Multiculturalism Act reporting. I refer, for example, to the community services directorate annual report. I found there about half a page which is basically a list of actions undertaken by the Office for Multicultural Affairs. What else is the community services directorate doing to meet its obligations under the Multiculturalism Act, and reporting against that?

Ms Bogiatzis: Under the Multiculturalism Act, there is a charter for multiculturalism, which is a positive duty and right to make a face-value statement for the Canberra community that we want to live in, and which promotes inclusion. All ACT government directorates are required to report annually on how they are promoting multiculturalism, applying the principles of the charter, and looking at their policies and programs to consider how they promote multiculturalism.

There is a review of the act that occurs. That happens every five years. I would say that the act is new, and that there is public reporting. Do you have anything further to add to that, Ms Connor?

Ms Connor: The other thing I would add is that Multicultural ACT is also supporting the implementation of the positive duty under the Discrimination Act, which is primarily led by the Justice and Community Safety Directorate. We are supporting that in the rollout beyond the public service, and to support multicultural organisations to understand their obligations and rights under the positive duty legislation. It is part of that cross-portfolio work that we do.

MR BRADDOCK: Can I assume that the community services directorate, by the lack of its reporting, has done nothing beyond the Office for Multicultural Affairs, in terms of meeting that positive duty? There is nothing reported in the rest of the community

services directorate beyond what your office does.

Mr Pettersson: Positive duty applies across the service. I am not sure whether it is the duty of the Office for Multicultural Affairs to ensure that the entire service is complying—that that responsibility rests with them.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, under the act, the director-general of the administrative unit must report against their obligations. That is why I am asking the question, in terms of the actions of the office, but we have nothing from the administrative unit here.

Ms Bogiatzis: I am happy to take on notice how we understand other directorates are delivering on their obligations under the act.

MR BRADDOCK: This is not just other directorates; this is your directorate as a whole, beyond just your office. Can I ask some clarifying questions as well?

THE CHAIR: Do you want that taken on notice, Mr Braddock?

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you, Chair. Yes, I would.

THE CHAIR: Across all directorates?

MR BRADDOCK: I will focus on the community services directorate.

Ms Bogiatzis: I am happy to take that on notice. Just to clarify, it is how the Health and Community Services Directorate is meeting its obligations under the Multiculturalism Act.

MR BRADDOCK: Yes. In terms of the now Health and Community Services Directorate, do they have recruitment policies and guidance that promote multiculturalism?

Ms Bogiatzis: Within the Health and Community Services Directorate, when we do recruitment, we include language in all of our advertisements which promotes and encourages applications from people from different cultural groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Also, often, active efforts are made to promote the recruitment through EthicalJobs or other platforms where we know people are looking to work in the Health and Community Services Directorate.

MR BRADDOCK: Do the Health and Community Services Directorate procurement policies and guidelines promote multiculturalism?

Ms Sabellico: As part of the agreed ACT legislation and requirements around procurement considerations, there are areas where you absolutely need to consider the diversity and inclusion aspects of any procurement.

MR BRADDOCK: Are there any diversity action plans that promote multiculturalism in the directorate?

Ms Sabellico: There is a diversity inclusion policy that sits in our corporate area to

guide the work around recruitment, training, support—those sorts of areas.

THE CHAIR: I have a question on interpreting services. Last Friday, there was a story on ABC's *Stateline* raising impacts of the lack of adequate interpreting services—how some government service accessibility is affected for people who have limited English proficiency. The limited number of in-person interpreters seems to be an issue across the country. What work is the government doing to ensure that people with limited English language skills can access government services?

Mr Pettersson: A good question.

Ms Bogiatzis: The Multicultural ACT team delivers programs and services that we are directed to by government. Part of our remit is also to gather the views of the community. We are aware of community concerns regarding access to qualified translators. This has been raised in some of the forums. The community has shared with us the need for people seeking translation and interpreting services to feel safe, for those to be accessible, and for translation services to be staffed by quality and qualified professionals. The translation and interpreting service is delivered by the Australian government, not the ACT government. We use the opportunities to gather the information we get from the ACT government to feed into the Australian government to improve its service delivery.

THE CHAIR: Does the ACT government, separate to that, directly employ any interpreters or translators?

Ms Bogiatzis: Not that I am—

Ms Sabellico: We would have to take that on notice.

THE CHAIR: Employees or contractors.

Ms Sabellico: Yes.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. Is there a piece of work underway to increase the availability of interpreters and translators?

Ms Bogiatzis: No.

THE CHAIR: Federal government responsibility?

Ms Connor: We do work with the federal government, through the Department of Home Affairs. There is a meeting that I sit on regularly with senior officials, which also talks about the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters and the issues with that. We have been talking with them about reviewing that and trying to improve the service to make more translators available.

THE CHAIR: In the story last week, the Australian Race Discrimination Commissioner chimed in specifically about the ACT and was warning that the system is failing multicultural patients. I have also seen recent reporting on avoidable errors leading to the death of a deaf man in New South Wales, because the hospital had not

obtained an Auslan interpreter. First of all, does the government have a response to that specific concern from the Race Discrimination Commissioner about the ACT? Is the government aware of that concern?

Ms Bogiatzis: I am aware of the article. As Ms Connor said, we work with the commonwealth to improve service responses. If it is a matter for Canberra Health Services and how they work with the interpreting service, I cannot speak to how that operationally works.

THE CHAIR: Has any work been done to ensure access to Auslan interpreters across different settings in the ACT?

Ms Bogiatzis: I understand that there is an Auslan interpreter being recruited for the Health and Community Services Directorate, which is really exciting. I do know that, historically, there has been a shortage of qualified Auslan interpreters in the ACT, so we really welcome the recruitment of an Auslan interpreter.

THE CHAIR: Looking at an investigation in the UK that found that interpreting issues were a contributing factor in the death of at least 80 babies over a period of four years, and other research indicating that the COVID-19 mortality rate amongst culturally and linguistically diverse populations was estimated at two times higher than that of the general population, I am curious about whether interpreter use is tracked across directorates and government services in the ACT.

Ms Bogiatzis: Not that I am aware of.

THE CHAIR: Is any consideration being given to more closely monitor gaps?

Mr Pettersson: I am not aware of it in this portfolio space. I am happy to take it on notice. We do not provide the interpreting services utilised by an entity like Canberra Health Services. Canberra Health Services procures that service themselves. I understand there is a range of services that they might utilise. We will take it on notice. I am not sure that we are in a position to speak for the entire government, but we will do our best to answer it for you.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Are you aware of any areas of the ACT government using artificial intelligence for interpreting or translating?

Ms Bogiatzis: No, I am not.

THE CHAIR: That might be one that could also be taken on notice, in order to check, and confirm whether or not that is the case.

Mr Pettersson: We are happy to take that on notice.

MS BARRY: I have a few questions around the ministerial advisory council. Has the council produced an annual report for 2024-25?

Ms Connor: An annual report, Ms Barry?

MS BARRY: Yes.

Ms Connor: The Ministerial Advisory Council for Multiculturalism generally provide an update on their community engagements as part of the annual report and the minister's statement that he makes in the Legislative Assembly. They also publish a work plan, which is available on the ACT government website. That should be available online.

MS BARRY: My understanding is that, under section 14 of the Multiculturalism Act, they are required to produce an annual report. Is that your understanding as well?

Ms Bogiatzis: Yes. I am just getting the information, to see whether that report has been finalised.

MS BARRY: Thank you. The next question I have, while I wait for the response on that one, is: how did the council decide who to invite to its inaugural community consultation forum?

Ms Bogiatzis: The ministerial council on multiculturalism encourages engagement with community, so anyone can contact the council via their publicly available email address, which is ma@act.gov.au. They host and promote the forum to ensure that there is broad representation. I have information on their engagement. They independently liaise and engage regularly with community service providers, community organisations, peak bodies and businesses. This can be done through routine meetings with community organisations.

MS BARRY: The specific question was about the inaugural community consultation forum. I understand that they have the email address, so that people can reach out to them, but how do they go about inviting people to that forum? If the answer is that they do not, that is okay.

Ms Bogiatzis: I am not sure. I would need to take that on notice.

MS BARRY: Thank you.

Ms Bogiatzis: In relation to the annual report, that is input that is provided that contributes to the minister's ministerial statement.

Ms Connor: I can probably answer that question, around the most recent community consultation on 2 August.

MS BARRY: The inaugural one, yes.

Ms Connor: That was promoted widely. It would have been promoted via the MACM, as well as Multicultural ACT and the other communication channels that we use across the directorate. That includes other diversity officers as well, and our general comms channels. For that forum, there were 43 participants from diverse cultural backgrounds. I am not sure whether your question was about particular targeting or—

MS BARRY: If they were having an inaugural meeting, I would anticipate that they would have an attendees list; then they would reach out to those organisations or

individuals to say, “We’re having this; come along,” and promote the event through the other channels. Are you saying that there was no list?

Ms Bogiatzis: We will take on notice, if there was an invitation list, how that was settled; or if it was an open forum and people could just turn up and participate.

MS BARRY: Okay, thank you. Going back to annual report, what did you—

Ms Bogiatzis: The council is required to provide input into the Health and Community Services Directorate annual report, and the minister makes an annual statement.

MS BARRY: I will need to check what the act says. My understanding is that it is actually an annual report, but I will check the wording of the act. How do you and MACM, Minister, ensure equity in the selection of organisations to attend community consultations?

Mr Pettersson: We want as many people to come as possible. I would not, even for a second, entertain the idea that we are trying to have an exclusive invitation list. It is actively promoted. We want as many people to come along as possible.

MS BARRY: How do you ensure that there is the distribution of representation across—

Mr Pettersson: It is not like there is a clear cap on the number of people that can come along to these things. Anyone that wants to attend can do so. They are open events.

MS BARRY: I understand that. I am asking: how do you ensure that you have the appropriate representation in the room? That is my question. I know it is open to everybody.

Mr Pettersson: Picking up on your previous questions, I am not sure that there is work done specifically to make sure that certain people attend. I am not sure that occurs. I understand that it has been taken on notice; if it is different, we will come back to you. It is widely promoted. With the forum I went to, I thought there was quite broad representation. I hope that next time there are even more diverse and larger numbers.

MS BARRY: What are you doing to ensure there are more diverse and larger numbers?

Ms Bogiatzis: We do a range of promotion of the events. If we need to improve that promotion, we will do so for the next one.

Mr Pettersson: I suspect you have heard somewhere in the community some sort of frustration that they either were not invited or were not aware of it. I appreciate that you may not want to identify them to us, but could you pass on future communications, to make sure they are aware of it, and so that in future they can be incorporated into those email lists? We want as many people as possible signed up to those email lists to get this information, and so that, hopefully, this frustration that you have received in the community does not occur again.

MS BARRY: The difficulty is that it is only those who reach out to me that I know

about. If they do not reach out to me, we are missing a whole cohort of people who are not participating. It is difficult to understand whether you are getting the views of the broader community. Are members compensated or otherwise recognised for their contribution, their lived experience and expertise to your office?

Ms Bogiatzis: Yes, members are remunerated for their participation on the council, and that determination is made by the Remuneration Tribunal. Those payments are made for attendance at council meetings.

MS BARRY: What mechanisms are in place to ensure that community voices raised through the advisory group lead to tangible policy outcomes? How do you synthesise the comments you get from this group?

Ms Bogiatzis: We do hear a range of views from a range of different forums. The council is just one of those groups and forums. We look to synthesise the information we receive from community groups. We share that information across directorates, where appropriate. I talked about the committee that we co-convene. That is a forum where we share information that we are hearing from the community to ensure that it is feeding into program delivery and anything else that is appropriate.

MS TOUGH: I am interested in what the ACT government does to support Canberrans with overseas qualifications who are living here and want to work here.

Mr Pettersson: A great question.

Ms Bogiatzis: The ACT government offers an overseas qualification and assessment service. That service is administered by the Multicultural ACT team, and it provides free assistance for assessments of overseas higher education qualifications for ACT residents. The assessment broadly compares an overseas qualification to an Australian qualification, using a framework that is set by the Australian government, which is called the Australian Qualifications Framework. This program enables people who have received qualifications in other countries—new migrants and others—to better access further study, to have their qualifications recognised in Australia and to enhance their participation in employment and society more broadly.

MS TOUGH: Wonderful; is that open to all ACT residents?

Ms Bogiatzis: Yes.

MR BRADDOCK: I have a question in terms of the number of multicultural services here in the ACT that are facing funding cuts. The Multicultural Hub and the Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services are significantly affected by this and have limited alternative sources of funding available. What is the government's plan to ensure that these vital services continue to be financially viable and are able to provide support to the community?

Mr Pettersson: Every non-government organisation that relies upon funding from ACT government is subject, ultimately, to the budget process of ACT government and the funding arrangements that are in place for them. I cannot speak to the specifics of either of the organisations you have mentioned. I appreciate the uncertainty about

contracts nearing their close that can be caused for organisations, the challenges that presents to staff and the uncertainty that surrounds that. I acknowledge the frustration. I am not sure that I can speak to the specifics.

MR BRADDOCK: The multicultural office provides advice on the representation of people from multicultural communities to directorates seeking to consult on proposed board and committee appointments. This is from the CSD annual report. What changes have been made as a result of that consultation? Can you demonstrate that you are actually improving the multicultural representation on committees and board appointments as a result of your advice?

Ms Bogiatzis: Thank you for the question, Mr Braddock. When there is a vacancy on a board or a committee that the ACT government convenes, the Multicultural ACT team is sent all the applicants, and there is typically a panel that is convened to shortlist applicants. Sometimes the recruitment processes are more extensive than others. Typically, there would be a panel that is convened. The recommendations of the panel are sent to the Multicultural ACT team, who then consider the diversity of the panel and the broad representation of the community on that board, committee or council—whatever the forum is.

MR BRADDOCK: In how many instances in the last financial year was the advice of your office sought?

Ms Bogiatzis: I would need to take that on notice.

MR BRADDOCK: Were there any instances where a decision was changed as a result of the advice provided by your office?

Ms Bogiatzis: Appointments are decisions of cabinet. We just provide advice. We do not actually compare the advice we provide with the outcome. Certainly, typically, if it is a statutory body, cabinet take those things into consideration. Where it is not a statutory body, that is a decision of the delegate. Typically, our advice is helpful, to make sure that councils, committees or boards are representative of the community.

MR BRADDOCK: Are you monitoring the make-up of boards and committee appointments to see whether they reflect the diversity of the community?

Ms Bogiatzis: No, I do not monitor those.

THE CHAIR: I want to go back to translating and interpretation services. I understand that the ACT government, along with the commonwealth and other state and territory governments, has an ownership stake in NAATI, the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters. Is that your understanding as well?

Ms Bogiatzis: Not to my knowledge, but I would have to find out about that. It is not a contract that we manage in Multicultural ACT.

THE CHAIR: I understand that it is not a contract arrangement so much as a company that is owned by all governments cooperatively, as is sometimes the case with different authorities.

Mr Pettersson: What is the name of it?

THE CHAIR: NAATI.

MS BARRY: NAATI interpreting services.

THE CHAIR: The National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters.

Mr Pettersson: We will have to take this line of questioning on notice.

THE CHAIR: Okay. Their website indicates:

Translating and interpreting services in Australia are governed by the multicultural, settlement, language and/or citizenship affairs ministry in each of the commonwealth, state and territory governments.

I am trying to square this statement with earlier remarks indicating that translating and interpreting services are not an ACT government responsibility.

Ms Bogiatzis: We need to find out a bit more.

Ms Sabellico: We can include other aspects in any response that you need about it. We can find out whether or not ACT government has any relationship; and if that statement is, in fact, true for the ACT.

THE CHAIR: Okay; perhaps some information on the extent of the ACT government's responsibilities.

Ms Bogiatzis: Yes, I am happy to take that on notice.

THE CHAIR: Compared to the commonwealth responsibilities—what the division is. I do not imagine this would sit somewhere else, if it is not within the Multicultural Affairs portfolio.

Ms Bogiatzis: I do not have that information, so I do not want to say anything that is incorrect.

THE CHAIR: I understand. I am just wondering whether I should be asking anyone else. This is the right place to ask for it; you just need to get the information.

Ms Bogiatzis: Yes, it definitely sits with the team.

THE CHAIR: Here we go: it is “a public, not-for-profit company that is jointly owned by the commonwealth, state and territory governments”.

MS CARRICK: I know you have talked about the Multicultural Festival. It attracts record crowds, and it has a significant economic impact, whereas the multicultural inclusion grants total around \$103,000 for 32 grantees. What proportion of the Multicultural Affairs budget is spent on the festival compared to local community

programs?

Ms Bogiatzis: For the National Multicultural Festival, in 2025-26 the ACT government invested \$4.627 million in the festival.

MS CARRICK: How does the government justify prioritising a one-weekend city festival over year-round support for multicultural communities, given that they are not getting anywhere near that amount?

Mr Pettersson: I would not agree with your characterisation of the National Multicultural Festival as a local celebration. It is comprised of local organisations, and it is highly valued by those local organisations, primarily because it is a large fundraising event for them, which they then use to support their activity through the rest of the year.

MS CARRICK: Outside the Multicultural Festival, I cannot see any accountability indicators; can you outline what outcomes have been achieved through the ACT government's multicultural grant programs?

Mr Pettersson: We can do that.

Ms Bogiatzis: Yes. For the multicultural inclusion grants, in 2024-25, a total of \$197,000 was available. The team hosted three information sessions to support applications, including face-to-face and online sessions. We received 62 applications, and those applications were all assessed by the panel. A total of 47 applications were deemed eligible and recommended for funding. That was the grant outcome there.

MS CARRICK: I mean outcomes for the multicultural community. Never mind; we are out of time. I will put the rest of mine on notice.

MS BARRY: On the annual report for the multicultural council, section 14—and please correct me if I have misinterpreted it—states that the council must prepare a report. The minister can issue a direction about the report, based on the Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act. Sections 7 and 8 indicate that the minister must present a notifiable instrument. My question is: what is the status of the report? Has the minister issued a direction? If not, why?

Ms Bogiatzis: I will have to take that on notice. I do not have the information.

MS BARRY: Okay; thank you.

THE CHAIR: On behalf of the committee, I thank you all for your attendance today. If any questions were taken 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 the proceedings for a short break and reconvene at 3.30 pm.

Hearing suspended from 3.16 to 3.31 pm.

Appearances:

Orr, Ms Suzanne, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans

Health and Community Services Directorate

Arthy, Ms Kareena, Acting Director General

Sabellico, Ms Anne-Maree, Acting Deputy Director General

THE CHAIR: We welcome Ms Suzanne Orr MLA, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, and officials. Please note that, as witnesses, you are protected by parliamentary privilege and bound by its obligations. You must tell the truth. Giving false or misleading evidence will be treated as a serious matter and may be considered contempt of the Assembly.

As we are not inviting opening statements, we will proceed directly to questions. My first question is about the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. I am wondering why we do not have Mr Brendan Moyle here, the head of the office.

Ms Arthy: When we talked to Mr Moyle about whether he wanted to be here, given that he has resigned, it was a decision of all parties that he would not attend today. He is online and is still part of the preparation team, but we thought, given the transition and the situation, that he would not be here.

THE CHAIR: Was that his decision or was that—

Ms Arthy: That was a joint decision, it is fairly safe to say. It was definitely discussed with him. I do not know whether, Ms Sabellico, you have anything to add. There was nothing nefarious about it. Given the situation, and that it will be his last day very shortly, he chose not to come, after discussion with us, with the leadership team.

THE CHAIR: He did not request not to come; he was approached and then—

Ms Sabellico: I had the conversations with Brendan Moyle. Given his resignation, and the priorities and work that he needed to do, and his wellbeing and what he would like to do, he also said that his preference would be not to attend.

THE CHAIR: Understood. Committee members will recall that, at a recent inquiry into a bill, Mr Moyle indicated that his workplace was the least culturally safe that he had experienced. Is that part of why he has resigned?

Ms Arthy: I think so. I do not particularly want to get into discussions about the reasons for an individual staff member resigning, in a public forum like this, and particularly without Mr Moyle's permission. I will come back, and we can definitely talk to you about the issues that he raised in terms of cultural safety and what has happened since then. I can certainly talk about that. I do feel quite uncomfortable talking about his reasons without his permission, and because it is about a person's private information.

THE CHAIR: Yes, that is reasonable. I assume he has voluntarily resigned and not

been—

Ms Arthy: He has resigned, yes.

THE CHAIR: There has not been any pressure or—

Ms Arthy: No, there has definitely not been any pressure from management for any form of resignation. It is a decision that has been made.

THE CHAIR: That is a loss. Is there a recruitment process underway?

Ms Arthy: We are just looking through what that is. It is a really critical position for government. I believe the resignation was fairly recent. We are working through with Brendan, with relevant people, what is our recruitment process. We know that Mr Moyle's shoes are going to be very big to fill. He has made a great contribution, and we need to make sure that we get it right, because it is such a critical position.

THE CHAIR: I want to ask about the Reconciliation Council. Page 179 of the annual report outlines that a key future direction is continuing to work with the Reconciliation Council to progress reconciliation across the ACT. Is the council remunerated for this work?

Ms Orr: I can take that, in the first instance; someone else can jump in, if I miss anything. Mr Emerson, that council is not remunerated, but, since coming into the role, they have discussed with me the options for that. Part of that includes writing to the Remuneration Tribunal, because any payment to a council is done through a determination of the tribunal. There have been briefs that have come to me around the process for that, and consideration of that, and we have been progressing and working through that process.

THE CHAIR: Is it your understanding that reconciliation councils in other jurisdictions are remunerated?

Ms Orr: I cannot say that I have ever received advice on whether they are or are not, in other jurisdictions. The conversations I have been having have been focused on our council and the work they do.

THE CHAIR: It does seem concerning, when we have loads of other advisory bodies, like our victim remuneration tribunals. There are determinations; there are long lists there. But the Reconciliation Council is not on there. Do you share that concern?

Ms Orr: Mr Emerson, I have already said that we have been progressing and seeking consideration through the processes. It is fair to say that I am not resting on my laurels. Yes, I am very open to having that discussion.

THE CHAIR: I also understand that, per diem, advisory council members across government—of course, excepting the Reconciliation Council—are paid more than members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body. Is that your understanding?

Ms Orr: I must admit that I have not done a comparison across all the different councils—what pay rates there are and the determinations they have. In going to what I believe is the core of your question, though, which is the remuneration of the Elected Body, again, this is an ongoing discussion. As part of the review that is being finalised into the Elected Body, I anticipate that the resourcing, the number of hours and the remuneration of members of the Elected Body will be key parts of that discussion. We will go through that, and the Elected Body has been providing quite a bit of feedback through that process and, to date, anecdotally to me, as to how we address some of those issues.

THE CHAIR: How is the funding for the Elected Body secretariat function determined? Have you or officials received any feedback regarding the sufficiency of that funding?

Ms Orr: I might need officials to jump in, because this pre-dates my time in the portfolio. My understanding is that secretariat services used to be coordinated out of the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. Probably two years ago, there was a shift from having it within the office to having it provided externally and independently, to help enliven the Elected Body and give them a bit more independence. That arrangement was put in place, and I believe it was to align with the review that was undertaken of the Elected Body.

However, that review is still being worked through. My understanding is that we are looking at what we can do, because broadly everyone has been quite happy with the arrangement that is there. We are looking at how we can continue that, while we take the initial learnings from the first couple of years and the other considerations around that, and bring it all together.

Ms Sabellico: A key piece of the review is to have a look at the ongoing secretariat support needs.

THE CHAIR: The annual report also references a listening report having been provided in May this year to improve the functionality of the Elected Body, and thereby the outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT. Is this report available anywhere publicly?

Ms Orr: The report came to government. It also went to the Elected Body. The directorate, the Elected Body and I have been working through the report and considerations of it. I will be taking it forward, once we have all of that input, to cabinet for consideration. We will then look to publicly release the report.

THE CHAIR: What is the timeline for that work, given it was received in May?

Ms Orr: I will look to the directorate as to when the final is coming up. It is imminent, to go to the cabinet process. I do not remember the date.

Ms Sabellico: It is imminent. We are waiting on those final discussions with the Elected Body and their satisfaction with the consultation—

Ms Orr: Yes. Mr Emerson, to put it into context for you—it probably sounds a bit

shifty, because we are not being too clear—the report was quite detailed, and a lot of interviews with a range of people were undertaken. A lot of the information that came through, while very informative, could potentially identify people in a way that invades their privacy. One of the issues we have been working through is how we can best present the information in the report without necessarily impinging on anyone’s right to privacy or causing any harm through some of the commentary, in case some of the commentary causes offence in any way.

That is one of the things that we have been working through. Certainly, I very much appreciated the Elected Body’s input into that, and in shaping up how we make sure that we still get all the key messages out there, while respecting people. That has been the bit that we have been working through, since first receiving the report. As I said, we are looking to take it to cabinet pretty soon. We just had those final revisions based on those considerations and the best way to take it forward, before we can put it to cabinet for that final agreement.

THE CHAIR: Does taking it to cabinet involve a proposed government response or is that the next step after that? I assume this report makes recommendations. How does the cabinet process know which recommendations are agreed, or the actions?

Ms Orr: The short answer is that it depends on the process that we decide to go through. We might do a response straight off. It could be that we agree to release the paper, in the first instance, so that people have the benefit of it. We will have to sit down and fully look at that.

THE CHAIR: That decision is—

Ms Orr: The brief has not come to me yet, to sign off on it.

THE CHAIR: You are not sure whether it will come just with the report, de-identified as required, to address those privacy concerns, or with a proposed response. Officials might be able to provide some clarity.

Ms Orr: Mr Emerson, is what you are trying to get at when would we see the government response to the report? Is that the—

THE CHAIR: Yes. Are we going to see the report on its own, after it goes to cabinet, because the cabinet says, “We’re happy to publish this report,” or will it go to cabinet with a proposed government response that cabinet can clear? Otherwise, there might be a two-step process where there is six months in between.

Ms Orr: There might be a process. As part of working through the responses to it, I would envision that we would work with the Elected Body on those, too—allowing the time for those discussions and those responses to be had. I can give an assurance that there will be a government response to it.

THE CHAIR: It sounds like it will go to cabinet and there will be a decision made in that initial cabinet meeting as to whether the report is published prior to a government response being prepared. In any case, a government response is yet to be prepared, given the Elected Body has not been consulted on the preparation of such a response.

Ms Orr: I would have to seek advice from the directorate as to where they are up to, with progressing a response.

THE CHAIR: We are getting nods from officials.

Ms Orr: Definitely, we can look to take it to cabinet for agreement to release. That is usually what we do. That is usually the process. With respect to informing our response, we would be working with the Elected Body, and we would come back with reports to—

Ms Sabellico: Absolutely, we have to work with the Elected Body.

THE CHAIR: Is the timing of the Elected Body's reports out of this year's hearings related to that piece of work or separate?

Ms Sabellico: I do not believe they are related.

MS BARRY: I have a question around housing. It is very exciting to see Yerrabi Yurwang, the 20 homes pilot. I want to find out a bit more about that program, including who is on it and how they were selected. I will then have a few more questions. This is the Yerrabi Yurwang housing program addressing homelessness.

Ms Sabellico: Absolutely, there is a program with Yerrabi Yurwang, but the details of that would sit with our housing assistance colleagues, who have responsibility for the program. Our Aboriginal Service Development Unit and the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs provide advice, support and leadership around what this needs to look like, having regard to implementation of the priority reforms under Closing the Gap, to ensure that we are in fact looking at how we build and strengthen this for Aboriginal community-controlled organisations. The detail around that program, in terms of the delivery, would sit with our housing assistance colleagues.

Ms Arthy: We can take any questions on notice and put it to that team. I believe that team has already appeared. We can certainly follow it up.

MS BARRY: Who was on it? How were they selected? How are you ensuring diversity of views is represented across relevant stakeholders that were included? How is the advice provided to government? What advice are they providing to you? Can the advice be provided to the Assembly? Did you get any report on the outcomes of the program that could impact or influence your policy area?

Ms Sabellico: The Aboriginal Service Development is very connected with program owners, with housing assistance, with the Office of the Coordinator-General for Housing, as well as Infrastructure Canberra, given that now all three areas are working in the housing space. They are supporting all the conversations about what this needs to look like, going forward.

Part of their responsibility, along with the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, is to understand, for any potential business case going forward, what is the wellbeing impact assessment specifically related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander service delivery, and how it aligns with the Closing the Gap reform.

MS BARRY: That work is something that feeds up to you as well?

Ms Sabellico: Yes.

MS BARRY: On housing, have you sought feedback, either from the Elected Body or from housing residents, on the impact of cultural awareness training on the quality of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experience of dealing with Housing ACT?

Ms Orr: That is one that should go to Housing ACT. As to the question around the Elected Body and what role they might have in providing feedback or accountability, they would obviously—

MS BARRY: Minister, I said you or your department. Have you sought feedback, either from the Elected Body or from housing residents, to test—

Ms Orr: Yes, this is the point: the Elected Body will provide feedback through a number of forums to officials and me. They have various reports that they will look at, and there will be a member who is focused on housing, in particular. They will meet regularly with the directorate to provide feedback. They will also have oversight and scrutiny through the hearing process. I meet with the chair and the deputy chair, and they provide feedback to me.

MS BARRY: What feedback have you been provided on the cultural awareness training and on the quality of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experience in dealing with Housing ACT?

Ms Orr: I must say that it has not been raised in meetings I have had, as a matter that people wish to discuss with me.

Ms Arthy: We will have to take that on notice, because the people who are at the table here are not necessarily the people who would be working with the Elected Body on this issue. We will go and talk to that area and come back with advice.

MS BARRY: This is, again, for my own understanding. When you say “culturally appropriate housing”, can you describe what that is?

Ms Orr: Ms Arthy is welcome to answer the question. Again, I would just stress that this is probably one for Housing ACT. Ms Arthy, do you want to say anything?

Ms Arthy: That is exactly what I was going to say. Again, the question is probably best asked of Housing ACT. There is no-one here from that area. We can take that on notice and come back a with specific definition.

MS BARRY: Thank you. I do not mean to be difficult. The minister does not know what “culturally appropriate housing” means?

Ms Orr: I think that is putting words in my mouth and embellishing, when it is not quite fair. It is more that I do not necessarily want to speak for an area that does not

report to me, which is appropriate, and what I am meant to do.

Ms Arthy: Ms Barry, as you know, it is day 3 in the chair now. I want to check with Housing ACT whether there is a specific definition for “culturally appropriate”. That is why I do not want us to mislead the committee by talking off the top of our heads, without making sure whether or not there is a specific definition.

THE CHAIR: We can speak about whether we need Housing ACT to come back for an additional session.

Ms Arthy: I can also ask the team now, and they might be able to come back by the end of the session, if there is something—

Ms Orr: Yes, they might have something.

THE CHAIR: With the definition, I am quite interested in that as well—if there is an operating definition for cultural competency.

Ms Arthy: I will see what I can find out before the end of this session; otherwise I can come back.

THE CHAIR: The annual report indicates that 72 per cent of Housing ACT staff have undertaken cultural competency training. Do you have percentage figures for how many staff across the rest of the directorate have done so, as at 30 June?

Ms Arthy: I will check whether Mr Riley has those figures with us. If not, we can definitely come back, on notice.

THE CHAIR: I think it was described as cultural competency training.

Ms Arthy: We will have to take that on notice.

MS TOUGH: I am interested in how the ACCO Establishment and Expansion Fund was co-designed with community.

Ms Sabellico: The Aboriginal Establishment and Expansion Fund sits in our Aboriginal Service Development area. They spent time consulting with stakeholders, as well as having discussions with new and emerging ACCOs, in terms of what would be beneficial, as part of the development of the program. They ran a series of consultations, inviting people along to talk through what the elements would be and what would be the best way to structure the program. I will have to check this; I am sure they discussed it with the Elected Body, as part of that, but I will need to confirm that. The grants opened earlier, in 2024-25 The agreement is to look at how we also build and improve on this, as we consider the different applications and what people are seeking it for.

MS TOUGH: How does this fund differ from other ongoing funding and grant approaches that the directorate has?

Ms Sabellico: Because it sits with the Aboriginal Service Development Branch, they are also responsible for looking at how they are supporting new and emerging ACCOs.

The money would pay for some aspects of their growth and development. The unit also looks at how they support them with tapping into other commonwealth initiatives. They look at what other governance training might be able to be accessed. There is also support for any applications that might be needed, in order to supplement the funding from the fund.

It is not a one-off. You can continue to apply, as you grow and develop as an ACCO. It is available for the new and emerging, and the established, so that people can continue to grow.

MS TOUGH: What has its take-up been like?

Ms Sabellico: I know I have that detail. I think they are up to maybe their third assessment panel of applications that have come forward.

Ms Orr: While Ms Sabellico finds her notes, if I have this correct, it is done by financial year. In the last financial year, I believe, all funding was allocated. We had a full uptake. Given that it is a rolling grant, it does track. With the new financial year starting—this is what Ms Sabellico was referring to—as it is a rolling grant, they have more panel considerations coming in that continue to be assessed.

It is certainly providing support in a way that adapts to the needs of a range of groups and organisations. We are seeing interest continue to grow and organisations are looking at the various avenues within the fund through which they can progress their consideration. I do not know whether Ms Sabellico has been able to find the notes she was looking for.

Ms Sabellico: I have. So far, for 2025-26, applications that have been received have been funded—some to the level requested and some to part of that. In terms of how many, I will have to add it up. Two have currently been fully approved, and the others are still in assessment. That is, if my maths serves me correctly, 10.

THE CHAIR: Through the fund, what framework is in place to ensure that it aligns with the socio-economic outcome areas in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap?

Ms Sabellico: At this stage, given that it is in its early days, it is very much focused on the self-determination of agencies to consider what it is that they need. As we go forward, there will be—

THE CHAIR: Agencies being the community service organisations?

Ms Sabellico: The ACCOs. It is based on their self-determination of need. The panel do not necessarily make a judgement around that. If it is a need, it is a need. The work that ASD does with them is about how that gets built into their service delivery, in order to achieve some of those other areas of reform that we need.

Ms Orr: Mr Emerson, you asked about the socio-economic aspect. This particular fund sits very much under priority reform 2, which is building the community-controlled sector. It is very clearly within the Closing the Gap commitments. In going to what Ms Sabellico said, it is taking an agile approach to how we can support the ACCO sector,

for the reasons that Ms Sabellico outlined, in allowing that space for self-determination and for the direction to come from the sector itself.

THE CHAIR: To be clear, I think it is great that it exists. I am curious as to whether there is any framework or anything to that effect to ensure that it aligns with the government's specific commitments. The answer might be known and developed at a later date.

Ms Sabellico: As I said, there is a continuous improvement approach. I will take it on notice and speak to ASD around that.

Ms Orr: Mr Emerson, if you look at the range of ACCOs that we have in Canberra, and the work that they are doing, it is very easy to draw the lines to the Closing the Gap work and focus areas. You raised a very valid point, in the sense that we want to be aligning with that and progressing that work. In going to your point as to whether there is a particular guideline or policy that goes to that, it is probably fair to say that everyone is focused on those, so it has happened, without necessarily needing a strict rule to be in place for it. Having said that, I would note that we do have guidelines around this work.

Ms Sabellico: There are guidelines. It will just be about whether they cover off that issue.

THE CHAIR: To be candid, there can be a public perception, which I do not agree with whatsoever, of, "We're just throwing money out the door at these Closing the Gap initiatives." Without some clear evaluation and targeting, and without a clear framework to ensure that the funding is used well—

Ms Sabellico: It is a useful point to take back and have a look at; thank you.

THE CHAIR: Yes. I am worried about the public perception.

Ms Orr: Yes. There are guidelines that the fund operates against. Ms Sabellico could run through a little bit about how some of the applications are assessed. It is quite a considered and rigorous process.

THE CHAIR: I do not want to use up the time for other members to ask questions. I am happy for that question to be taken on notice.

Ms Orr: Yes.

Ms Sabellico: Okay.

MISS NUTTALL: On page 142, of the EPSDD annual report, it says that the government will not progress co-management with traditional custodians for Namadgi until traditional custodians are confirmed through a native title process. Where is the native title process up to, and what are the next steps on that?

Ms Orr: Miss Nuttall, in answering the question, the native title process is being progressed by the claimants. It is not one that the government is running. We have

provided, and will provide, support to people or groupings that wish to put in a native title claim. However, that is essentially our role. It is not necessarily about going through the process.

Ms Sabellico: That is going through the courts at the moment.

Ms Orr: Yes.

Ms Sabellico: Native title is a process managed through the commonwealth, broadly. Again, it is—

Ms Orr: Miss Nuttall, can you help me with the question? I know you made reference to the EPSDD report and the Namadgi agreement.

MISS NUTTALL: Yes.

Ms Orr: That is probably best dealt with on Monday—anything specifically to do with the Namadgi agreement. I think your question was actually going to the native title process, which does sit within this. If we take away the confusion about the preamble, we can maybe focus on the substantive question, which was around the native title claim. Again, with any claim that may be in progress at the moment, the government are not a party to the process, and we do not necessarily have the most up-to-date information. It is one that would go to the community and the people progressing the claim.

Ms Arthy: The advice that I have coming through is that it is under commonwealth legislation. The ACT government has no legal administrative role in the process. That is why we do not have any up-to-date information.

MR RATTENBURY: I presume the ACT government is monitoring the case, though. Perhaps you could give us the insights you have.

Ms Orr: When we say “monitoring”, I do not want to give the illusion that we are—

MR RATTENBURY: I will reframe the question. I assume the ACT government is aware and has an interest in the matter. Can you share any insights with us?

Ms Orr: Yes. Most of the feedback that I get from the community is anecdotal. I would preface this with: what has been passed back is anecdotal. My understanding is that the claim is progressing and—

Ms Arthy: Going through the court.

Ms Orr: going through the court. I have not heard anyone complaining that it is not progressing. That is probably all I could say, because I do not know a lot more than that.

MISS NUTTALL: Noting that it will eventually come back to the ACT government, do you have any kind of timeframe? I appreciate that you may not, since it is a court process, but do you have any insight on how long it might take? Not at this stage?

Ms Orr: No.

MISS NUTTALL: I note that EPSDD priority actions include granting access to land and resources for cultural use. The last update is that the Conservator has requested legal advice on this. Do you have any oversight of that process?

Ms Orr: That is probably a question for Monday.

MISS NUTTALL: I suspect the other question I have will be as well.

Ms Orr: If you want to ask it, Miss Nuttall, we can tell you if it is for Monday or now. That way we will not miss the opportunity if it is not for Monday.

MISS NUTTALL: It may even be for a different day. EPSDD also had a priority action to co-design and develop a new heritage database. That would be—

Ms Orr: That would be with the planning minister. I believe that is also for Monday.

MISS NUTTALL: Fantastic. Cultural data would probably be recognised in that?

Ms Orr: On Monday.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, I am interested in understanding the areas of responsibility you have in the government response to the final report from the Jumbunna Institute—the independent review into overrepresentation. With the portfolio responsibilities you have, what role are you playing in the government response?

Ms Orr: The Attorney-General is the minister leading the response for the government. I have been working quite closely with the Attorney-General. I think it is fair to say that the Attorney-General has been embracing the opportunity to work together on this. It has been quite constructive in providing input and advice, particularly with regard to the recommendations and the work that I have oversight of regarding the Closing the Gap agreement and the other agreements that we have made—looking for alignment and symmetry and working through it so that it is a joined-up response, not necessarily the Attorney-General doing her thing and me doing my thing, with the two of us never talking. It is fair to say that my role has probably been more consultative—for lack of a better word—than that of the Attorney-General, who is the minister responsible for the response. I say “consultative” with a grain of salt, because the input we have is being taken very seriously in shaping the response as we work through a very long and interrelated set of recommendations.

MR RATTENBURY: That is a good point to finish on. I am interested in why the Attorney-General has the lead on it. I am not opposed to the fact that she does, but the recommendations cover a broad range of whole-of-government areas and quite a few portfolio ministers, so why was the decision taken to have the Attorney-General lead it?

Ms Orr: Mr Rattenbury, I will preface the answer by saying that, if the Attorney-

General is listening and wants to correct anything, she is more than welcome to. My understanding is that the Jumbunna report was initiated by JACS, very much within the legal partnership framework and considerations within the legal partnership framework that sits under Closing the Gap, which the Attorney-General has the lead on. It has continued in that area. This goes to the point you make: it covers a range of areas. To paraphrase the Attorney-General, the reasons people end up in the justice system are not necessarily contained within the justice system. There are a lot of considerations. In looking at where this work could go, you could argue that it sits with pretty much everyone. While the Attorney-General and the JACS Directorate are leading the government response, I do not want to give the impression that the Attorney-General, and everyone else, is not paying attention, because we are all paying attention. It is being taken very seriously. It is something that we are working through across a range of considerations and work areas.

MR RATTENBURY: In terms of the recommendations that fall within your areas of responsibility, what work is being done to prepare the response to those areas?

Ms Orr: We have provided the government's interim response which is focused on the recommendations and oversight governance as we implement the recommendations and the response to the wider recommendations. Given that cabinet is still to decide on the response to the recommendations, bear with me while I walk a fine line and do not pre-empt something.

MR RATTENBURY: I am not asking you pre-empt; I am interested in the consultation that is taking place and the sorts of discussions that are happening to prepare the response. I am interested in the process side rather than the government response at this point.

Ms Orr: From my portfolio's perspective, a lot of the feedback we have had so far has been feeding into JACS, who are coordinating the broader response. It may be a question that you put to the Attorney-General, as to the work they have been doing across the board, because I can only speak to the part that we have inputted to, not to everything that they have been doing. Certainly from our perspective, a lot of work we have been doing has been, as I said previously, about advising on how things fit within our Closing the Gap priorities—commitments that we have made under the agreement—liaising with the Elected Body, and providing advice to other areas on considerations they might want to include in forming their own views on the recommendations that go to them. Ms Sabellico, do you want to add anything?

Ms Sabellico: Yes. Mr Rattenbury, in terms of what is sitting in the Jumbunna report, it intersects significantly, of course, with other national work underway. In the child and family justice space, there are similar recommendations coming through the Australian youth justice association, in terms of looking at diversion from services. In Children, Youth and Families, we have the Safe and Supported national strategy, which again goes to issues looking at overrepresentation. We have the Closing the Gap targets and we have other agreements in place.

I would say that, in terms of looking at it from a directorate and a division point of view, we are already looking at what is in those reports, particularly the Jumbunna report, and what we still need to do, in terms of closing some of the gaps that have not been

undertaken already in some of the intersecting pieces of work. That is what will then feed into a broader understanding of where we are at, what we still need to do and further work we would propose. Some of that might already be embedded in some of the work around the phase 3 agreement that is being developed with the Elected Body. It is not like we are waiting for work to be done; we are already looking at what is needed from a directorate and divisional perspective.

One of the things that is occurring within HCSD is that there will be an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander subcommittee of the board. I would expect that what we are doing around achieving our parts of the Jumbunna review will be consulted on and deliberated with that group.

MR RATTENBURY: Thank you. On this vein, are you able to give us an update on the project to establish community control of Boomanulla Oval?

Ms Orr: Yes is the short answer, Mr Rattenbury; we can. The Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs has been working with City Services and Sport and Rec, who are the current managers of the oval, and the Elected Body, to work through how to transition the oval back to community control. I believe we are making final arrangements for—I have forgotten what we are calling it—

Ms Sabellico: An interim management committee?

Ms Orr: An interim management committee is what we are calling it—an interim management committee that will allow members of community to provide oversight and strategic decisions around the use of the oval and bring community focus to the operations of the oval. While we are in that interim arrangement, my understanding is that City Services will continue to provide the operational nuts and bolts—that is, making sure the sprinklers are turned on and the grass is mowed. Once we have that established, we will look at the next steps to continue to transition further.

MR RATTENBURY: Terrific. That sounds very positive. So that I can understand the detail, does that mean that some members of the community have been appointed to an interim management committee that is now in place? That is what I think I heard you describe.

Ms Orr: My understanding is that agreement on what that model would look like has been agreed by government and the Elected Body. We have signed the briefs and we are at the point of taking the next steps to set up the interim—

MR RATTENBURY: So it is imminent?

Ms Orr: I do not believe anyone has been appointed, but we should be having one appointed soon. That is my understanding.

MR RATTENBURY: Terrific. Thank you.

THE CHAIR: I want to ask about the transformation strategy. It is mentioned on page 130 of the annual report as being in progress. I understand, based on earlier hearings this term, that the strategy is due for completion in June 2025. Where is it up

to?

Ms Orr: Ms Sabellico will take this one.

Ms Sabellico: Work has been done on collecting from all directorates the key arrangements that need to be in place that will give rise to what an overarching transformation strategy would look like. That information was collected as part of the work that people did in terms of considering phase 3. That work will need to be crafted and worked alongside the Elected Body, in terms of what different directorates have identified as being key areas and the strategy that sits on top of that. That work is ongoing, effectively, at this stage.

Ms Orr: I will add to that. The Closing the Gap Subcommittee of cabinet—and we have stood up one of the key priorities for that in the terms of reference—will finalise the transformation strategy for the ACT government, so that we can bring all components together and it is not happening just directorate by directorate. We will have a clearer cohesive overview. Through the subcommittee, we have the input of the ministers, the directors-general and the Elected Body to make sure that the actions and the approaches that go into that strategy bring in the different perspectives, to make sure that we get the best response we can.

THE CHAIR: To this point, have any directorates failed to provide input into that strategy? Are you waiting for responses?

Ms Orr: As Ms Sabellico said, there has been a lot of work going on across government to elevate it to the subcommittee. That has been to bring that work together.

THE CHAIR: I believe this came up in the Elected Body hearings—that some directorates had provided input and some were yet to provide input. I am wondering whether all areas of government have now provided the requisite input.

Ms Sabellico: That would have been a discussion more about phase 3 at that stage—

Ms Orr: Phase 3—yes—not the government transformation.

Ms Sabellico: I do not think we have looked at who has or has not under the transformation strategy. We have—

THE CHAIR: Sorry to interrupt, but you just said that the two were received concurrently. You were indicating that there was information coming in about the strategy and that was being done alongside phase 3, so you are getting input from different directorates.

Ms Sabellico: Two different spreadsheets went out at the same time. That is what that meant. We were focused on work with phase 3, in terms of who was tracking at that point in time, having provided information or otherwise. We have not done similar yet with the transformation strategy because the priority piece of work with the Elected Body has been the phase 3 work. Now we will progress the transformation.

Ms Orr: Regarding phase 3, my understanding is that the vast majority of input has

been received and has been settled with the Elected Body. I think that two items were still being worked through. Once those are settled—

Ms Sabellico: Could I confirm that I have information here that all directorates have participated in the transformation work. I am not aware of anything outstanding.

THE CHAIR: Could you please take on notice whether any part of government has not returned either of those spreadsheets?

Ms Orr: We probably do not need to take the phase 3 part on notice, because we just said everyone has now inputted to that. As far as I am aware, from the conversations I have had with the directorate and the Elected Body, all the items that need to be inputted for discussion have been inputted. I think there is still discussion around one or two. They were potentially reconciled today. I will find out after this as to exactly where we are up to, but I know that those last matters were being resolved. Regarding phase 3 and all the information that I have at hand, we can say that has been inputted and it will now go through to final sign-off. As to the government transformation, what Ms Sabellico has been referring to is the latest check on where all the work is up to. This has been an ongoing piece of work for quite a period of time, so it would be more iterative and rolling input as opposed to a point-in-time process.

Ms Sabellico: The advice provided is that all directorates have participated.

THE CHAIR: I am asking about the spreadsheets you mentioned, but then, in the responses I am getting, the language used is “have participated”. I accept that the mode of participation may have changed since the request for information was provided, but I am curious to know which parts of government did not respond to those spreadsheets, because this is key to the ability of the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs to coordinate across government. I will lodge it on notice if it is not taken on notice anyway.

Ms Orr: Ms Sabellico can probably run through that. I leave the spreadsheet coordination to the directorate, so I cannot give you too much update on that, but Ms Sabellico or Ms Arthy might be able to. I think the spreadsheet is the coordination point for the directorate—your working tool.

Ms Sabellico: I think that is right.

THE CHAIR: I am imagining a template or something like that that I send out for development plans for the team—“Here is the template. Fill it in. Come back to me,” and then no-one does and I say, “What the?” Then I take responsibility.

Ms Arthy: Mr Emerson, without knowing the details—just generally—in government we use spreadsheets and all sorts of measures to get information through. We might have received the information we need, not necessarily through a spreadsheet or otherwise. I focus on the outcomes. The advice we have is that all directorates have been involved—participated. If we may, we can look at what we have, in terms of the gaps we might have, rather than necessarily focusing on spreadsheets, because they change. We get different spreadsheets week after week. They do different things. Would it be helpful if we looked at the gaps we still have?

THE CHAIR: Perhaps where a different mode of engagement has been undertaken and how each area of government has engaged. We are here to assess the effectiveness of this office in coordinating across government in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, so I think it is a pretty fair question. I understand you are answering it in a way, but I think it would be helpful for us—and also in asking questions of other areas of government—if you could say where the resistance may have been and at what point in the process areas of government have responded to requests for information in relation to the transformation strategy and phase 3 of the agreement.

The reason I am labouring this point is that they were both due to commence already and have not. I have been chasing them in these hearings and they have been delayed multiple times, so I am trying to understand what is behind the delays. Hopefully you can appreciate that.

Ms Arthy: Now that I understand the context, we can take away and look at the most useful information to provide to you, so that the committee can make an assessment about the level of engagement from other directorates, if that helps.

THE CHAIR: The level and timing—whether we received responses and what the manner of the responses received was to these requests, for both phase 3 and the transformation strategy.

Ms Arthy: We will go to your question specifically around the spreadsheet to see whether that is helpful, but I suspect it is only part of the story and that we can provide a better set of information. We will take that offline and come back to you with information.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. I appreciate that.

Ms Arthy: I am happy to iterate the information with you if it does not meet your needs.

THE CHAIR: I appreciate that. Thank you. There is the Closing the Gap Subcommittee of cabinet that you mentioned, Minister. This is described as a 2025-26 future direction in the annual report, but we are talking about the same subcommittee—right?

Ms Orr: It is the Closing the Gap Subcommittee of cabinet.

THE CHAIR: It was a future direction in June, but it is now a current direction?

Ms Orr: Yes.

THE CHAIR: There are not two separate subcommittees on closing the gap?

Ms Orr: No. There is one. Ms Arthy has the definition on—

Ms Arthy: Housing ACT.

MS BARRY: Excellent.

Ms Arthy: Please bear with me. I will read the points that are coming. Housing ACT understands that the concept of home is unique for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, home is where culture is respected, knowledge is shared, families feel safe, and kinship is supported. Secure and stable housing is critical to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's health, education and employment. It is key to improving outcomes for the population that is disproportionately entrenched in disadvantage. Housing ACT works on an individual basis, given that it is such a broad consideration, to meet the needs of each individual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicant and tenant, respecting their own connection to land and culture under the principles of self-determination. That is the framework within which Housing ACT looks at providing culturally appropriate housing.

MS BARRY: Thank you. I appreciate you getting that response for me. I have a few questions, but I will put them on notice, noting that this is not the right—

THE CHAIR: Do you have another substantive?

MS BARRY: I do—plenty. I am interested in the child development census—the mixed results. I am concerned about the significant number of developmentally vulnerable children identified. Minister, can you talk me through how you interpret that data?

Ms Orr: Ms Barry, I am aware of the child development census; however, it would actually sit with Minister Berry's portfolio responsibilities. I am not really in a position to speak to another minister's area of responsibility. If there is a specific question that might be focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, I could try to take that and see if I could help you, but, to talk about it broadly, that would have to be put to Minister Berry.

MS BARRY: Sorry, I should have been clear: specifically on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Ms Orr: Could you repeat your question so that I can get it—

MS BARRY: There are mixed results on child developmental measures for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. I am concerned about the significant number of developmentally vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children identified. Can you talk me through how you interpret that data?

Ms Orr: When you say “interpret that data”, is that asking for my view on what the data means or is it asking for the response we put in place to improve the data?

MS BARRY: What sorts of responses have you put in place to address the issue, not just improve the data. There is the fact that, whilst the numbers seem to have gone down from previous years—2018—it is still significantly high for First Nations children.

Ms Orr: I am trying to pull up the report in front of me.

THE CHAIR: The stats that I have, if it is helpful, is that only 24.1 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the ACT are developmentally on track in all five domains. It is 43.8 per cent for non-Indigenous children. It has decreased from 41 per cent in 2009, and the fourth target in the Closing the Gap Agreement is 55 per cent.

Ms Orr: I thank the officials who helped me pull up the sheet. As I said, I am aware of it. It is not something that necessarily sits specifically within my briefing notes. It is also something that I look at in my portfolio as disability minister—considerations within that. To answer the question on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and developmental delay, the risks and the supports to ensure that children are given the best start they can have is an area that cuts across a range of government areas for response, a lot of which would sit with Minister Berry.

My understanding, in looking at the whole response to improve early development tracking within the ACT for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, is that we look at how we can have services and responses that go specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, such as cultural appropriateness and specific considerations they need. A lot of this work is done by Minister Berry within her portfolio responsibilities. From the perspectives of the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and my portfolio, we have input into supporting that. The Aboriginal Service Development branch would also potentially work with ACCOs, should they look at developing services that could go to the more culturally appropriate or culturally specific responses within that.

Ms Barry, your question was still quite broad. If there is something specific I can—

THE CHAIR: Are there any programs you can speak to? Sorry, Ms Barry.

MS BARRY: I just wanted to be a bit more specific, but I am happy for you to ask.

Ms Orr: The programs themselves would not necessarily come within the remit of my portfolio; they would sit with Minister Berry and the broader work that is done around child development services. I hope you can appreciate that I am trying to bend over backwards to not just say it is for someone else; it is to be helpful. However, it does sit with another minister. You are not putting me in an easy position.

MS BARRY: We are out of time. I will put my questions on notice, Chair.

THE CHAIR: Thank you. On behalf of the committee, I thank you all for your attendance today. If any questions were taken on notice, please provide your answers to the committee secretary within five business days of receiving the uncorrected proof *Hansard*. On behalf of the committee, I thank all witnesses who have assisted us through their experience and knowledge. I also thank broadcasting and Hansard staff for their support, and the secretariat as well. If a member wishes to ask questions on notice, please upload them to the parliamentary portal as soon as possible and no later than five business days from today.

The meeting adjourned at 4.30 pm