



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC ACCOUNTS**

(Reference: [Inquiry into Auditor-General's report No 4 of 2013:  
National partnership agreement on homelessness](#))

**Members:**

**MR B SMYTH (Chair)  
MS M PORTER (Deputy Chair)  
MS Y BERRY  
MS N LAWDER**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**FRIDAY, 17 OCTOBER 2014**

**Secretary to the committee:  
Dr A Cullen (Ph: 620 50142)**

**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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## **Privilege statement**

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*Amended 20 May 2013*

**The committee met at 10.07 am.**

**COOPER, DR MAXINE**, Auditor-General, ACT Audit Office

**STANTON, MR BRETT**, Director, Performance Audits, ACT Audit Office

**HEARNE, MR RUSSELL**, Audit Manager, ACT Audit Office

**THE CHAIR:** We move to the hearing on Auditor-General's report No 4/2013, *National partnership agreement on homelessness*. Auditor-General, I would like to welcome you and your officers here this morning. I now formally declare this part of the hearing open.

In accordance with the committee's resolution of appointment, all reports of the Auditor-General stand referred to the public accounts committee after presentation for inquiry and report. The public accounts committee has established procedures for its examination of referred Auditor-General's reports. The committee considered Auditor-General report No 4/2013 in accordance with these procedures, and resolved to further inquire into the audit report.

The terms of reference are the information contained within the audit report. While the terms of reference are the information contained within the report, the committee's inquiry is specifically focusing on three areas: measuring the success and effectiveness of policies and programs targeting homelessness; progress on implementation of audit report recommendations as agreed by the government; and any other relevant matter.

On behalf of the committee, I welcome and the Auditor-General and officials from the ACT Audit Office and thank them for attending today. The committee will suspend this part of the hearing at about 10.45 and then we will resume at 11 to hear from the Minister for Housing, Mr Andrew Barr.

I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the pink privilege statement on the table before you. Could you please confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement.

**Dr Cooper:** I understand the privilege statement.

**Mr Stanton:** I do.

**Mr Hearne:** I understand the statement.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you very much. I remind you that the proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes, and are being webstreamed as well as broadcast live.

Before we proceed to questions from the committee, Auditor-General, would you like to make an opening statement?

**Dr Cooper:** Thank you, Mr Chair. Yes, I will. The national partnership agreement on homelessness report No 4 of 2013 was one of the audit reports tabled in financial year

2012-13. In terms of being one of the audits, it was a very focused, sharp audit; and it was more on the small side rather than the large side, because in that particular year we had some significant audits underway, including emergency department performance information, public service recruitment practices, Care and Protection and many others.

So we decided to make this one quite sharp and quite focused. We focused on two objectives. The first was whether or not the government was meeting its obligation under the national partnership agreement on homelessness; that was in relation to two specific programs and one initiative. Then we also had the objective, which we were not able to achieve, of making a comment on whether the programs and initiative were making a difference for homeless people. The fieldwork for this audit concluded in December 2012, which means that the discussion today around some of these issues is based on information that is now two years old. I think that is important, and we have not updated our information.

The national partnership agreement on homelessness is a COAG—Council of Australian Governments—initiative agreed in 2009. Under this particular program initiative, each state and territory is responsible for delivering agreed programs. The ACT government received, at the time of our audit, \$10.06 million in funding from the commonwealth and contributed \$10.7 million of its own funding under this total agreement.

Importantly, for us in this audit, it was the vanguard for whether or not it would be appropriate for auditors-general across the nation to undertake concurrent audits. Each state and territory except for New South Wales and South Australia actually did an audit under the national partnership agreement on homelessness. While a common basis for the performance audit was adopted, there was flexibility in how each audit was to be undertaken to recognise jurisdiction-specific needs and priorities. We focused on the initiatives of mental health, housing and support. We also focused on two programs, “a place to call home”, and “our place”.

Some common themes emerged from the work across the nation on this particular issue. They were three-fold. First, there was a general recognition that programs had been delivered in accordance with agreed jurisdictional implementation plans. Importantly, I think there was a lack of meaningful output and outcome measurements. The fundamental question that we were trying to grapple with in the audit was: is it making a difference? We found we could not quite make a call on that. It was also a problem in many other jurisdictions.

The third issue, which was summarised in our report, was difficulties in demonstrating the contribution towards the overall outcomes from the national program.

Our conclusion is given in our report. Because this is a recorded hearing and people will be listening, I will read it:

There is no agreed international definition of homelessness and this impedes monitoring, making comparisons and facilitating community understanding on progress. Furthermore, there have been changes in the definitions of

homelessness and therefore the methods for collecting data have changed. This presents the risk that comparisons made between years may result in inaccurate conclusions and the community being misinformed. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, there are fundamental difficulties in defining homelessness and describing the characteristics of people who might be considered to be homeless.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics' cultural definition of homelessness was adopted by the *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness*. In 2012 the Australian Bureau of Statistics developed a new definition of homelessness, which has a very broad scope ...

The report goes on to say that this has contributed to an overall increase in persons in the ACT being reported as homeless through the census. I choose my emphasis on the word "reported". Our conclusion:

The ACT Government is generally meeting its obligations under the *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness* with respect to:

- A Place to Call Home Program;
- Our Place Program—

they are the two programs I mentioned—

- Housing and Support Initiative.

Several targets have ... been ... exceeded. The Community Services Directorate however, needs to make improvements with respect to its processes for managing ... funds, identifying and reporting against performance indicators for the A Place to Call Home Program and the Housing and Support Initiative, and managing service providers.

While program targets have been achieved, these are primarily about undertaking specific actions and deliverables, rather than being measures of overall success.

And, as I have just said:

Other Auditors-General have reported a lack of such measures which means the achievements of the *National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness* are not able to be fully demonstrated. Accordingly, it is not possible to determine the actual overall effect of the programs on rates of homelessness in the ACT community. Furthermore, homelessness in the ACT is influenced by a range of factors including—

I think, quite importantly—

for example, housing affordability. People are likely to remain in homelessness programs and initiatives longer if housing affordability is a problem.

Thank you, Mr Chair and committee members.

**THE CHAIR:** Dr Cooper, I am assuming that you have just read that from pages 2

and 3 of the report itself?

**Dr Cooper:** Yes, with probably a few little words changed for emphasis.

**THE CHAIR:** Members, that is on pages 2 and 3. Thank you for that. Could we start with the definition. How important is the definition, and have you a suggestion of a definition that you have seen or you would like to be used so that we can get some consistency?

**Dr Cooper:** I will say that the definition is critical. It is beyond important; it is absolutely critical. In terms of us coming up with a definition, I would leave that to people with greater expertise in this area. But I think, importantly, what has happened is that it was contained and then it was expanded. Maybe there is a need for a definition of “homelessness” that has subcategories; I am not sure. But whatever it is, we need some consistency so that when the very important issue of homelessness is mentioned, people can actually say, “Well, 10 years ago it was this, but now it’s this.” If you need a macro kind of measure, that should be clearly articulated from the definition.

If, for instance, we are talking about homelessness in the ACT, does that mean people sleeping rough if it has increased under “homelessness”? In actual fact, what we found in our research work for this audit was that in some categories there has been a reduction and in others there has been an increase. If we go to page 18, Brett might read some of it for me.

**Mr Stanton:** On page 18, table 2.1 talks about the general homelessness categories in the ACT and the shift in numbers between 2006 and 2011 in the Australian Bureau of Statistics census. That table demonstrates the sorts of changes in those categories over that five-year period.

**Dr Cooper:** For the ACT, importantly, while we have some visible homelessness through people sleeping out, and we have probably all seen that, our biggest challenge, which I think it was in category 2—Russell, could you help out.

**Mr Hearne:** The second line there on page 18, table 2.1 refers to persons in supported accommodation for the homeless. That had a 140 per cent increase due to a definitional change.

**Dr Cooper:** That is homelessness that you do not necessarily see. It is really important socially that it be addressed, but it is not that visible. Whatever definition is adopted nationally or at the ACT level, I would encourage people, while of course giving a macro measure, to be consistent over the years and also have some subcategories that really allow the changes in the different categories to come out.

**THE CHAIR:** Going to table 2.1 on page 18, it says that overall there is an 88 per cent change. How much of that was because of a definitional change and how much of it is because there are more people homeless?

**Dr Cooper:** Primarily it is around the definitional change. There are two ways you can look at that. The first is that we were under-reporting before, and if we had had

that definition before we would have been more alarmed at our situation. The second is that the expansion in the definition makes it an over-reporting. Again, I would have to leave it to the experts to determine what you should do, but the problem with this definition change is that the community could be alarmed and think there is a huge adverse impact when in actual fact, in the key categories for the ACT, it may be an improvement in some areas but in other areas it may not be. I think the changes in definition mask good information.

**THE CHAIR:** The paragraph below, para 2.25, says:

... the ACT moved from one of the lowest rates of homelessness in Australia, as recorded in ... 2001 and 2006 ... to the second highest rate of homelessness, behind the Northern Territory, in 2011.

In your opinion, what is it we need to be doing to address this?

**Dr Cooper:** No matter what the change or the percentage might be, each of the areas, the homeless categories, needed some targeted programs. We put that back to the agency, saying to the agency, “Which of your programs best target all these areas?” We audited two programs and one initiative for a particular objective to be achieved. I think that again I would leave it for experts in the department to choose where the emphasis should be.

With persons in supported accommodation for homelessness, clearly in the ACT that is an area of focus. And, as we said, it is also a matter of where is the ceiling in homelessness that prevents people going into affordable accommodation. That would certainly be one. Where are the levers that you can pull to get people out of the system?

**THE CHAIR:** A supplementary, Ms Lawder.

**MS LAWDER:** With respect to the definition, in your conclusions on pages 2 and 3, the change to the definition was actually at the request of COAG when Prime Minister Rudd brought in the *Which way home?* homelessness changes. The concerns about the changes to the definition were well raised by people in the homelessness sector at the time—comparison to previous years et cetera. So when the 2011 census results were released, and compared and contrasted to the 2006 results, the ABS had actually gone back to the 2006 results and had redone them based on the new definition. So the two census periods were comparable and there was an overall 17 or so per cent increase Australia wide.

There are a number of reasons why the figures could have increased significantly, nevertheless. It was the period of the GFC, for example. Even in your own report, on page 19, it shows that the ACT has a number of reasons why it is more difficult to exit homelessness, and that is largely around affordability of housing. My question perhaps reiterates Mr Smyth’s question: are you convinced that it is simply a definitional change that accounts for a large amount of the change, or why wouldn’t it be more related to housing affordability and exits from homelessness, for example?

**Dr Cooper:** I think your question is more of a statement, inasmuch as I did not mean



that the definition was all of it; I said it would contribute to a significant amount. Because we did not audit in detail that particular component, we tried to acknowledge that a key issue for the ACT is affordable housing, particularly given the secondary homelessness category, which is our key problem. You could look at that—staying in emergency, transitional, people residing temporarily with other households because they have no accommodation. You can see the nexus between that group of people and affordability. It is much harder, I think—in fact I think you would be drawing a long bow—to draw a direct link between primary homelessness and affordability, because people may be in that category for very different reasons. So I do think the nexus is there. I do not think the report disagrees with what you have just said.

**MS LAWDER:** Overall, Australia wide, there was a sharp increase in homelessness.

**Dr Cooper:** With those factors, yes.

**MS LAWDER:** Yes, increasing more than 20 per cent in some jurisdictions. For most jurisdictions, it was people in severely overcrowded dwellings. But the people in specialist homelessness services reflected two separate things: the reports from homelessness services—qualitative reports—and also the AIHW SHS collection. So it is actually a good news story, if you like, that more people are receiving a service from a homelessness agency. But I am still not necessarily convinced that it was not an actual increase, because that is what services were reporting—that their demand was outstripping supply. Unmet need data from the SHS, for example, supported that, with 49 per cent of people turned away. I remain to be convinced that it is a definitional change that has forced that significant increase in the ACT.

**Dr Cooper:** I respect your view. I am not really arguing with that. If the report appears to, it does not mean to. It is just that, given the definitional change, it is a factor for netting in more people to be reported than what previously would have been reported. I guess that is my message.

**MS LAWDER:** Only in some categories. For example, women escaping domestic violence and young people are significantly underreported.

**Dr Cooper:** We would agree with that, which is why that table is there, so that you can pick out the areas that net more people in to be reported. They were always probably there. I think that is an important issue. You might not have something recorded but it does not mean it was not an issue. Also, the other piece of information we picked up was that the average period that a homeless person receives support in the ACT is a far longer period than in other jurisdictions. So why is this so? Is that an indicator—again, we did not look at this in depth—that you need to be in those programs longer because there is no exit way out into the private market?

**MS LAWDER:** Or, indeed, public housing.

**Dr Cooper:** Yes, there might not be sufficient in either. So it is like the emergency department. Often their numbers are held high because you cannot get into the other parts of the hospital. With this one, I think, the analogy is there.

**MS LAWDER:** The challenge in some ways is what you have said partly on page 2.

It says that changes in definition and therefore the methods of collecting data have changed. My understanding is that the method of collecting or enumerating the data remains entirely the same; it is actually the methodology of analysing the data. There is no single question in the census that says, “Are you homeless or have you been homeless?” It is a methodology that is applied, analysing the number of addresses or something that you have had. So it is in two completely different parts. The enumeration or the counting of people remains the same; it is merely the methodology based on the definition which has changed.

**Dr Cooper:** I take from that that the words may need to have been finessed more finely. Instead of “collecting” it should have been “analysing”. We do not mind at all being challenged on precise words, so that is fine.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Porter, a new question.

**MS PORTER:** If the definition has changed and the analysing of material has changed, you talked about reporting against outputs. You said something about the fact that there was unsatisfactory reporting against outputs.

**Dr Cooper:** Let us go to that. What we have said is that it is quite important when you do report against specific targets and outcomes that you are clear in what you are reporting on. I will ask Russell to give us the reference point—chapter 3. There are two places where we deal with this.

**Mr Stanton:** That statement is made in relation to the ACT government directorate’s reporting to the commonwealth government under the NPAH and the obligations that it had in reporting.

**MS PORTER:** Does that information come only from the directorate and their services or does it also come from not-for-profit organisations that are contracted out? Is there difficulty with their information coming to the directorate and which is then reported on?

**Mr Stanton:** The information certainly goes from the directorate to the commonwealth as to how the directorate gets the information. Clearly, in relation to the “our place” program, you have a service provider there and they do rely on information from the service provider. In relation to the other programs, with “a place called home”, that information would be generated from the directorate.

**Dr Cooper:** My understanding is that it is focused through them. If you are talking about recommendation 1—improve the process for coordinating information—

**MS PORTER:** Yes.

**Dr Cooper:** if you refer to table 3.2 on page 31 and also table 5.1 on page 58, you will see the discrepancies as to why we have asked them to, if you like, better coordinate the information they provide.

**MS PORTER:** I am wondering how much of this is to do with people’s confusion about what they are reporting against. Coming from—I know Ms Lawder does, too—

not-for-profit organisations that used to fill in and do these reports, it is often enormously difficult to report when you are getting mixed messages from wherever they are coming from. It seems to be a cascading thing and there is a mixed message coming from the national instructions or opinions—or not necessarily opinions but data collection methods, definitions or whatever it is. So there are mixed messages coming from there, which is cascading down to the government level, the state level or the territory level, which is then cascading on to the not-for-profit organisations, who are the least resourced in all of this hierarchy and have, from time to time, changes of staff et cetera and that are always short staffed, it appears to me. How much of it is going to be the fixing of this definitional problem?

**Dr Cooper:** Sorry, this is back to the definition.

**MS PORTER:** When the chair asked you whether the ACT can come up with a better definition which will clarify everything, would that be helpful or would that just confuse matters more, given that we have supposedly a national definition? That is the next part of my question.

**Dr Cooper:** That actually has two answers. One is that the ACT is never shy of being a leader.

**MS PORTER:** No, it is not.

**Dr Cooper:** Throughout our history, we can be extremely proud that we go to a table; we might be, in my language, small but we are perfume, not cologne. So you have a bit of a punch when you come forward. I would say that if the agency—and I know they are quite a focused agency—could try and foster a better national definition or at least get agreement that it will be consistent for a certain amount of time into the future, that would be an achievement. That, as we know, Ms Porter, is often achieved through the ministerial meetings, through the heads of agency meetings. In that regard, since we have never been shy at being leaders, my advice would be: go forth.

In terms of your second question, as to whether it will be difficult, of course it will be difficult, but, in the end, it is this definition that then drives what you want to achieve under it. So I think it is an important issue and that it is worth knocking on the door until everybody does settle on one.

**THE CHAIR:** As a supplementary to that, the audits were done in all the jurisdictions?

**Dr Cooper:** No, South Australia and New South Wales did not. South Australia never entered into starting one. New South Wales actually started an audit in this arena and stopped. All the others actually did something in this arena. We could give you a summary of the key conclusions and findings. So we could leave that with the committee.

**Mr Stanton:** In that respect, however, it is useful to note that some of the programs and services in the other jurisdictions are very different in nature to the ACT, particularly in respect of the perhaps remote and regional services, specific services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

**MS PORTER:** Do we know why New South Wales stopped?

**Dr Cooper:** No. That is within their office. But you do get themes coming through, as I mentioned. For instance, with Victoria—I think Russell put this extract together; thank you Russell—the lack of meaningful outcome and output measurement and comprehensive evaluation means its achievements are not fully demonstrated. So they found the same thing we did. And with the others, it is a repeating theme.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Lawder, a new question or a follow-up?

**MS LAWDER:** A follow-up again. It is about that lack of measures which made it difficult to demonstrate the achievements. Whose role, then, is it to ensure that they are included in future partnership agreements? Is that the department of finance?

**Dr Cooper:** No, I would say it was Community Services Directorate.

**MS LAWDER:** But it is across all states and territories. You said Victoria, for example.

**Dr Cooper:** CSD to work in partnership with other arms within the ACT government, yes. The department might have a different view.

**THE CHAIR:** They can tell us shortly.

**Dr Cooper:** They can tell you.

**THE CHAIR:** A new question, Ms Lawder.

**MS LAWDER:** I would prefer to give Ms Berry a chance.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Berry, a question.

**MS BERRY:** I know we have talked a bit about the reporting, how the funds are spent and how that happens. You say in your report that the ACT government are pretty much meeting their requirements under the agreement. What more, then, do they need to do?

**Dr Cooper:** As to their reporting, if you look at table 3.2 and the other one, 5.1, I think those tables tell the story that what you would expect is a greater consistency between what they report as budget funds, actual expenditure, and that which they report to the commonwealth. You would actually expect that. Russell, I would not mind you talking. Russell did a lot of the fieldwork, and when those were looked at, many sources of information—correct me if I am wrong, Russell—had to be collected by the auditors in order to get a simple understanding of what did you have, what did you spend and what did you report. Really, for programs like this, for efficiency, you would expect those pieces of information to all be brought together and somebody to verify, “Yes, this is the budget. Yes, this is what we’re spending and, yes, let’s report this to the commonwealth.”

**MS BERRY:** Just before you go to that, was it a matter of it just being inconsistent funding across those agencies or is that what needs to happen, or it was just reported in all sorts of different ways?

**Mr Hearne:** There were inconsistencies in reporting, depending on the audience. There was actual expenditure reported in the directorate but the annual returns to the commonwealth reflected a different number.

**Dr Cooper:** And you can pick that up in table 3.2. You will see the discrepancy in the last two columns. And you would expect that there was not quite the discrepancy that has been displayed by the material we analysed. And this material was given back to the directorate, and they did not say that we were factually incorrect. I think this is one of the reports where they acknowledge in their response that it is an area where they will improve.

**MS BERRY:** One of the challenges—Ms Porter was just talking about this—for community organisations is that if the reporting is increased then that takes away from the good work that they are doing. So it is about having some sort of consistency in their reporting rather than more reporting?

**Dr Cooper:** Absolutely. And it is about the agency not having pieces of information scattered in all different parts that you have to bring together, to actually have it more centralised and checked. So it is more for the agency, far more for the agency than some of the community entities.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Berry, are you done?

**MS BERRY:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Perhaps we could go back to page 3 and the second last sentence in the audit conclusions:

Accordingly, it is not possible to determine the actual overall effect of the programs on rates of homelessness in the ACT community.

What would have to happen to be able to do that? Your opening statement was that you were not able to determine whether or not it was working. What has to happen to be able to do that?

**Mr Stanton:** At heart, I think an effort on the part of the directorate to conduct a review and evaluation of the programs and the initiatives and to try to ascertain, through that program evaluation, whether that is being met.

**Dr Cooper:** That takes us to chapter 5, our last recommendation. We know that the ACT is always under pressure, but we did find that at the branch level there had been an initiative undertaken to do an internal review to start to understand whether or not things were making a difference and how things were going. That had never, ever been presented to management in either the community services or health directorates, let alone go to the executive. We are always mindful that our recommendations be practical and not spend government funding where we think it would be inappropriate.

But on this particular one, we thought that it would not cost anything really more than to finish their review and the two directorates actually talk to each other about what they have found under this particular initiative. And that would be a good starting point to position themselves for future programs. Again, it is learning from what you do to then try to have that flagged. It is at pages 67 and 68. Review, get the targets right and focus your resources.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Lawder.

**MS LAWDER:** On page 5 of the summary about a place to call home, dot point 4 said:

There is an inconsistency between budgeted funds, actual expenditure and reported expenditure on the A Place to Call Home Program.

I guess it points to a bit of a lack of accurate recording and reporting of information. It does say that CSD have advised that they have substituted some properties within the program. The program was intended to fund 20 new dwellings. I am just unsure about how you can, when you have been funded to do X, decide to do Y and use existing public housing properties instead. Did you look at those arrangements as part of your audit?

**Mr Hearne:** We did. And as you say, we expected to see 20 new buildings. The directorate entered into an arrangement with the commonwealth where it was able to substitute its existing housing stock for those that it was supposed to build and reallocate those funds somewhere else within a place to call home program. It was a rather complex arrangement from an accounting point of view. However, it was accepted by the commonwealth as a legitimate expenditure of program funds.

**MS LAWDER:** I would have expected at the very least the addition of 20 new housing properties.

**Mr Hearne:** That is what happened.

**MS LAWDER:** That was the intent of the overall program, to add to the housing stock. So it does seem like a bit of a convoluted process to substitute.

**Mr Hearne:** I cannot recall the motivation for that except that the commonwealth did actually okay it against the terms of the agreement with the ACT.

**Dr Cooper:** And it may be—I do recall and I cannot quickly find where it is—that there was some conversation around providing the housing in a community where the people had links rather than new facilities somewhere else. I do recall that was a consideration.

**Mr Stanton:** That is right. The construction of the new dwellings was more likely to happen in the newer areas of Gungahlin, for example, whereas some of the people that might benefit from the program might be located in Tuggeranong and other areas.

**Dr Cooper:** That is correct, yes.

**MS PORTER:** Can I ask a question of clarification. Are you saying that 20 new dwellings were not built for the obvious reasons that you are talking about, but does that mean the number of houses was reduced by 20 because new houses were not built into the ordinary stock for people who were on the ordinary waiting list?

**Dr Cooper:** I cannot answer that, sorry. That is definitely one for the directorate. That is a detail mechanism. Mr Hearne has just found the area, dwellings funded. Paragraph 3.3 states:

... however, in acknowledgement of the importance of people's connection to family and community, wherever possible the Community Services Directorate sought to locate and substitute a property in an area appropriate ...

You can understand the objective in why they are doing that, but I cannot answer what it shifted in other programs.

**THE CHAIR:** We may find out shortly. Ms Lawder.

**MS LAWDER:** On that, you went on in 3.35 to say that there is no single data source. Was that one of the things that the directorate agreed to come back with to improve those types of processes?

**Dr Cooper:** I think they did. I think that was recommendation 3? No?

**Mr Stanton:** No. I think that is that point that Russell made earlier about the different data sources that Russell and the team and we had to go through to try to ascertain the situation in terms of that program.

**Dr Cooper:** And I think the last sentence in 3.35 the committee may wish to give a bit of consideration to, for emphasis:

Having each property identified in an inconsistent manner presents the risk that information may not be readily available for management purposes.

It really ought to be able to hit a button or go to a particular area and get the total information.

**MS PORTER:** About what is available at the time?

**Dr Cooper:** Yes.

**MS PORTER:** In whatever program?

**Dr Cooper:** That is right. And also individual data on each house should be readily available.

**MS LAWDER:** Because it was a sizeable chunk of the funding—I think 48 per cent overall?

**Dr Cooper:** Absolutely.

**MS LAWDER:** I would expect you to be able to report on that.

**Dr Cooper:** Yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Members, we are coming to the end of our time. Ms Berry, another question.

**MS BERRY:** No.

**THE CHAIR:** Any final questions? Ms Lawder.

**MS LAWDER:** You may not be able to answer this now: do you think there is a possibility of the audit office following up on this report in terms of housing affordability in the future to determine greater exit points for people?

**Dr Cooper:** We could do. When we consult with the committee and everyone—as you know, everything competes—depending on the level of priority that the committee would consider this, we would appreciate your views on its priority.

**MS LAWDER:** So many competing priorities?

**Dr Cooper:** We have many competing projects. And, in fact, in terms of affordability, one of the programs that Brett can talk to very quickly is one where we are looking at student accommodation, which is another one of the affordability issues, currently at the UC.

**Mr Stanton:** That is right. We have got an audit that is underway in relation to the ACT government arrangements with the UC in terms of support for NRAS, the national rental affordability scheme. We are trying to identify what impact those activities are having on the provision of housing for students and students' access to affordable housing.

**THE CHAIR:** We might draw it to a close there and thank the auditor and her officers for attending. I do not believe you have taken any questions on notice. You have got away there, which is good. We will provide a transcript when it is available for an opportunity to check and suggest any corrections that you might like to make. With that, we will now suspend and resume at 11 o'clock with the minister and the department. Thank you all.

**Sitting suspended from 10.49 until 11.01 am.**



**BARR, MR ANDREW**, Treasurer, Minister for Economic Development, Minister for Housing and Minister for Tourism and Events

**MATTHEWS, MR DAVID**, Executive Director, Housing and Community Services ACT, Community Services Directorate

**SHEEHAN, MS MAUREEN**, Executive Director, Service Strategy and Community Building, Community Services Directorate

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome, minister and officials. Thank you for attending this morning this public hearing of the standing committee inquiring into Auditor-General's report No 4 of 2013: National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness. On behalf of the committee, I welcome the minister and officials from the Community Services Directorate.

In accordance with the committee's resolution of appointment, all reports of the Auditor-General stand referred to the public accounts committee after presentation for inquiry and report. The public accounts committee has established procedures for its examination of referred Auditor-General reports. The committee considered Auditor-General's report No 4 of 2013 in accordance with these procedures, and resolved to inquire further into the audit report.

The terms of reference are the information contained within the audit report. While the terms of reference are the information contained within the report, the committee's inquiry is specifically focused on three areas: (a) measuring the success/effectiveness of policies and programs targeting homelessness; (b) progress on implementation of audit report recommendations as agreed by the government; and (c) any other relevant matter.

On behalf of the committee I welcome and thank the minister and his officials. I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege, and draw your attention to the pink-coloured privilege statement before you on the table. I would ask that you all confirm for the record that you understand the privilege implications of the statement. It is so acknowledged. Thank you, minister and officials. I also remind witnesses that the proceedings are being recorded by Hansard for transcription purposes as well as being webstreamed and broadcast live. Before we proceed to questions from the committee, minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr Barr:** No, thank you, chair.

**THE CHAIR:** We will go straight to some of the issues that were raised by the Auditor-General. Part of the difficulty in the report for the auditor seems to be that there is not an effective definition of homelessness. Is there movement by the government to work on a definition that makes it more workable? The Auditor-General suggested that such a definition was critical, that it needs to be consistent, and she said there need to be subcategories in the definition to address the different types of homelessness.

**Mr Barr:** Is your question in reference to the Australian government and their data collection, or the territory government?

**THE CHAIR:** No, I am asking: are you aware of the problem with the definition?

**Mr Barr:** Yes. As I understand it, there are a number of different definitions used by a number of different commonwealth agencies. So the ABS definition differs from the AIHW definition, which might well differ from perhaps a common understanding of what is meant by homelessness. I understand that this issue has not just been raised in the ACT. At the most recent census, the 2011 census, where there was a change in the definition of the way the ABS measured homelessness, it created a situation where the focus on definitional questions was sharpened. I understand this is an issue that is concerning a number of jurisdictions and is one that can perhaps best be resolved nationally through a COAG process.

**THE CHAIR:** Is that something you will bring up at COAG?

**Mr Barr:** We are happy to, yes. We will not be the only ones, I suspect, raising that issue.

**MS LAWDER:** I have a supplementary. Are you aware, minister, that the change came about through a COAG request in the first instance?

**Mr Barr:** I was not, because I was not the minister back then, but certainly the issues that have been highlighted here reflect the challenges of COAG processes in terms of getting standard definitions across the country. The states and territories have obviously had different approaches, and commonwealth governments will from time to time change their measurement rationale. The point has been made—I do not disagree with it—that having multiple definitions is a challenge, so we will see what we can do to resolve it.

**MS LAWDER:** I think part of the problem was that the ABS, who feel that they are fiercely independent, were asked by the government to relook at the definition as a result of a COAG decision. The ABS then did some consultation but felt that they were the best placed to come up with a definition themselves. Are you implying that governments might give more direction or suggest their own definition?

**Mr Barr:** Those issues can be discussed in a COAG context, but to the extent that I cannot direct the ABS on their definitions, that is absolutely true, yes.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Porter, a new question?

**MS PORTER:** Yes, but I have some further commentary on that. The Auditor-General suggested that the ACT has shown leadership on many occasions and, being a small jurisdiction, is not shy about showing leadership. She suggested to us that you, minister, might show some leadership at the next opportunity in putting forward a very strong argument for a consistent definition, so that the reporting can be consistent, because it is obviously throwing up a lot of difficulties in the reporting, and not just for government. It appears to also be the case for service providers in the not-for-profit sector. As you know, they are usually fairly poorly resourced in many ways and could have difficulty with the shifting goalposts all the time.

**Mr Barr:** I make the observation across all of the areas where we have national

partnership agreements with the commonwealth that are outcomes focused that having a robust definition and robust data are pretty critical to being able to report effectively against particular targets that are set for jurisdictions. I take the point, in the context of this particular national partnership and definitions of homelessness, that I think the issues are germane across a range of these areas.

That does not escape the attention of treasurers in our response to the commonwealth. There has been a bipartisan response across all state and territory treasurers, in writing to the commonwealth about the future of all of the national partnerships. We have taken it up through the federal financial relations council. This has been quite pertinent to the future of this funding agreement, but indeed to many others. So there is not only a need for greater certainty in the future around the length and renewal of these sorts of partnerships but also on the question of definitions, targets and outcomes. A lot of the previous approach has been focused on inputs. I think there is a trend now across the commonwealth for more outcomes-based partnership agreements between levels of government.

Overlaying all of this, though, is the review of the Federation. There is a taxation element to that, and there is also the question of which level of government would have responsibility for particular areas of service delivery, or whether in fact there should be a continuation of shared responsibility. All of these issues are pertinent. This is one example—one very important example, though—of some of these issues needing resolution in 2015 through the processes that the commonwealth has outlined. David Matthews might want to add something on that.

**Mr Matthews:** The only thing I would add to what the minister said is that, obviously, when we are looking at outcomes it is important to be able to compare apples with apples and oranges with oranges. That certainly was not the case between the 2006 and 2011 ABS census because of those changes in definition.

The changes that were made by the ABS have meant that the ACT's outcomes are very different in nature. The fact that the ACT offers a lot of accommodation support and other services to homeless people in fact counts against us in that definition of homelessness as determined by the ABS. So it is very important to note, when people make claims about the level of homelessness in the ACT, that often the claim is that the ACT has the second-highest rate nationally based on the definition in the 2011 ABS census. It certainly was not the case in 2006, and if you take aside the definitional issues about how you count people in crisis accommodation services, the ACT either has the lowest or equal level of homelessness in all other categories of homelessness, and also saw a reduction in the definition of people that were rough sleeping between those two censuses.

These are all very important issues when determining the impact of policies and programs. Everybody wants to see positive outcomes and a reduction in homelessness overall, but the definition and consistency in the measurement of that are very important to be able to identify that impact and attract those outcomes.

**MS PORTER:** Having said that, the Auditor-General did identify what she thought was a block in the exit, so that some of the figures will remain, in her opinion—I hope I am not verballing her—high in whatever way they are interpreted because of a lack

of a way of exiting the system. And she stressed the need for us to be looking at the affordable housing issue again in relation to that. I was wondering if you would want to make some comment around that.

**Mr Barr:** The issues are predominantly on the supply side and will continue to be. I guess the amelioration of growth in demand in recent time as a result of contracting employment in the city has seen our rents fall by about 20 per cent in the last three years, between 12 and 20 depending on the housing type and our overall housing market. The commentary from those who are looking for 10 per cent price increases every year is that our market is a bit flat, and, compared with other cities in this part of Australia, we have not seen the rapid house price acceleration that those cities have seen.

So a combination of increased supply and dampened demand has seen the private market adjust. That said, the private market is still predominantly geared to providing housing for at least a high, single-income earner if not two moderate, double-income earners when you look at what largely comes onto the market. So there is a market failure in the ACT. There is a need for government intervention in the housing market, and we do that predominantly through the provision of public housing, where we have the highest proportion of public housing of any state or territory in Australia, and we seek to grow our community housing sector through Community Housing Canberra and through the introduction of new players and a desire to look at some innovative models to attract new funding in the sector. I have said before, and I will continue to say, that it is only through building new houses that we will put downward pressure on prices.

The tax mix has some capacity also to impact. I will repeat that abolishing stamp duty is a good policy to assist in housing affordability, and we will continue to pursue that.

Ultimately, though, we need a continuation of strong supply of housing across the different sectors, and that will require investment from government in renewal of the public housing stock. Obviously that process is underway. There is a significant planning process to identify new sites for public housing in the city, and there will be an omnibus territory plan variation presented to the Assembly later this year or early next that will identify a range of new sites for new housing.

Clearly the Northbourne corridor housing will be renewed, as will a number of the ageing multi-unit complexes at various points around the city. As I have said before, and I will repeat, we need to build the new accommodation before we can knock down the old. So there will be a process of new housing construction in identified sites before a number of the ageing multi-unit sites are demolished and then new housing built on those sites.

**MS PORTER:** In regard to building new homes, a place to call home is a capital development initiative, and the commonwealth money was for 20 new dwellings, I understand, and they were not actually built. There was an agreement with the commonwealth that we could actually use existing stock in order to help people who have homes in the locality where they had their networks, which is all reasonable and fine, and I do not think anyone would argue with that, rather than being stuck in a suburb on the edge of Gungahlin where they had no networks or support. But what

happened in that regard? Where did the money go? Did that mean that we had 20 fewer homes in the normal waiting list stock because we used those homes for people who were in that particular—

**Mr Barr:** Housing manage their portfolio renewal through a program of divestment and investment in new stock, largely to meet the needs of those existing tenants and those on a waiting list, and they are particularly looking at the changing demographic trends in the city, the ageing of the population and where people actually want to live.

That evidence is perhaps somewhat different from commonly held perceptions, particularly amongst certain lobby groups in the sector, that everyone wants to live in high density on Northbourne Avenue or in flats in Reid or Braddon or the like. The evidence appears to be for a much greater dispersal of housing, different housing types. The strongest demand appears to be for two-bedroom style accommodation, principally in areas like Belconnen, Gungahlin and Tuggeranong, not so much in some of the more-established areas of the city where housing was built for historic purposes in the formation of the city largely to accommodate public servants who moved into the area.

The overall asset management process for housing sees movement in the levels of stock from time to time, with a view to it better meeting the needs of existing and future tenants, and in large part that has meant disposal of older stock with replacement by more-compact, two-bedroom stock in those outer locations—not exclusively, but if you asked me to pick a trend in terms of what is happening in—

**MS PORTER:** No, I was interested to know if the existing stock was used, not new houses, under this agreement for the 20 houses. The Auditor-General said—

**Mr Barr:** In the context of nearly 12,000 properties, the movement of 20 here or there under one program is pretty well subsumed by larger—

**MS PORTER:** We were just interested to know where the money that was for the 20 new houses went and what the agreement with the commonwealth was that they agreed that we could use the money. Where did it go? Did it build 20 other houses somewhere else? One would presume it did, but we just wanted to clarify that.

**Mr Matthews:** That is correct. Certainly 20 additional properties were funded under a place to call home initiative, and what the minister has been explaining is how we were able to leverage off our whole portfolio in getting the right housing outcome for each of those individual clients. The properties that we constructed with those actual dollars, in fact, were not the right properties for the clients that we wished to house. With the commonwealth's support, we were able to substitute some of the existing housing and be able to allocate housing to those families in a form of housing in a location that was most suitable to those needs.

Then the actual properties that were funded under the program were allocated through the normal public housing arrangements. I think this is a really good example about how we can work flexibly with our total resource space to make sure that we are getting the best outcome for people whilst making sure that we can be accountable for the spending of those funds to the commonwealth.

The only other thing, if I can say, about a place to call home that is noteworthy and worth while making at this point is that it was a housing-first model, which is a new approach and one that is a very important approach. The traditional approach to homelessness has been to often move people through supported accommodation, get them stabilised and then look at transitioning them to the place where they will live ultimately. Of course, the disadvantage of that is that it creates a point of disruption where people have to leave that crisis accommodation service and get settled in a new area.

The logic behind the housing-first model is that you house homeless people directly and then you put in a period of intensive support to begin with and establish that person in that house and in that community, and when they are ready they transition into the public housing system as a tenant in their own right. Most of those arrangements were established through head tenancies. A community organisation actually took the lease for that initial period while the family was getting established and supported and then, by agreement, those people transitioned into public housing once they were in a position to be able to sustain their tenancies.

Those kinds of directions around housing first and providing different models of support go exactly to that question that you were raising around how you manage supply and the crisis system itself and provide different exit points and different housing pathways for different people which better meet their needs.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Lawder, I think you had a supplementary.

**MS LAWDER:** A supplementary, yes, going back a bit. I have got a couple of supplementaries now.

**THE CHAIR:** Go to those first.

**MS LAWDER:** Firstly, I want to question something you said about the census and using the new definition. According to the 2006 census, Australia wide there were about 105,000 people experiencing homelessness. When the 2011 census took place and was analysed using the new definition, the ABS also went back to the 2006 numbers and recalibrated based on the new definition. The 2006 figure became about 89,000 Australia wide. There was still a 17 per cent increase between 2006 and 2011. Potentially, even if there was not a new definition, even under the old definition, there may well have been an increase over the original 105,000. The ABS definition is now, whether we like it or not, the accepted definition.

You said people claim that the ACT has the second highest rate of homelessness. I do not think it is a claim; it is according to the ABS census. The ACT has the second highest rate of homelessness in Australia. It is not a claim, if you like. It is based on the census.

**Mr Matthews:** Thank you for providing that additional information. The point I was making in commenting on the definition of the 2011 census was that the nature of that definition and the changes in that definition to focus on tenure, in particular, and the definition around the changes around the inadequate “no” or “not extendable form of

tenure” and the access and control of space for social relations were a driver of the ACT’s results. So my comment was that the definition has produced an outcome—and I accept your comments that that is the definition that the ABS have taken. I was attempting to explain how that definition reflects the story on the ground in the ACT and how the fact that we have a high provision of homelessness support actually serves to increase that number.

I am sure all people in the community would want to be assured that people that are homeless are being adequately supported and would not want a definition to drive a particular service response with individuals. But I think it is important to place it in the context that, as you know from your prior role, homelessness does take place in different forms. There is primary homelessness, rough sleeping. There are people that are couch surfing or in inadequate accommodation or people that are in boarding house arrangements. The different cohorts that experience homelessness are very diverse, as you are aware, and their experiences are very diverse.

The ACT over the period going back to 2003 has been really seeking to reshape its homelessness services to make sure that we can provide the most appropriate form of response for those different cohorts. I just think it is important and worth while being able to get into some of the detail for people that are interested in it, the policy issues around why that particular definition that the ABS has got has given us that particular result.

**THE CHAIR:** You accept that, according to the ABS census in 2011, we have the second highest level of homelessness in the country?

**MS LAWDER:** Rate.

**Mr Barr:** According to that data, yes, but if you were to abolish all supported accommodation programs, we could have the lowest. It would be a perverse outcome, which I understand is what the Auditor-General observed as well.

**MS LAWDER:** That leads me to where I was getting to with my question. Does that mean you believe that if someone is in supported accommodation, they are not homeless? Because they have a roof over their head, they are not homeless? They still do not have security of tenure, for example. It is not a safe, secure place to call their own. So under both the previous cultural definition of “homelessness” and the new definition of “homelessness”, these people are still not in their own home with security of tenure.

**Mr Barr:** We could make the observation that it is better to be in supported accommodation than to be in no accommodation at all.

**MS LAWDER:** Certainly, I think it is a good news story that there are so many people receiving a service from those specialist homelessness services. It is absolutely a great thing, and the ACT is, on that basis, doing better than many other states and territories. However, those people still count technically as homeless.

**Mr Matthews:** They do, Ms Lawder. I make the point, though, that some of those people, as I explained with the “A place to call home” program actually are in what

will become their permanent home. Another example of that is the accommodation support provided by the Canberra Men's Centre, who in particular are supporting exits from the Alexander Maconochie Centre. So, absolutely, at the time that the census was taken, if those people were under the support of the Canberra Men's Centre they will be counted as being part of that homelessness system, but in terms of where they are actually living, their particular pathway and their support option, they are in their home that they will continue to live in after they exit the homelessness system.

There are lots of variations and lots of complexities with the data that we are starting to get into today. It is important to have these discussions, because I think it helps to raise awareness in the community about the complexity of homelessness and the increasing sophistication of some of the responses that are being put in place, largely led by the community sector and with strong support by the ACT government, to really innovate and make sure that we can try very different approaches to addressing what is a very complex problem.

**MS LAWDER:** When Ms Porter asked about “A place to call home” and the 20 new properties, obviously you are accountable for the spending of those moneys to the commonwealth. The ACT Auditor-General's report indicated that there were some difficulties with the accurate reporting of those moneys. Are you able to give us an update of what you may have done to improve the accounting of those moneys?

**Mr Matthews:** Absolutely, Ms Lawder. Again, we definitely acknowledge the commentary provided in the Auditor-General's report. The ACT government has agreed to and accepted that recommendation. The point I would make, which we provided in our management comments, was that we definitely acknowledge the reconciliation issue, but there was certainly no question that the ACT government delivered what it was required to under that agreement. That was acknowledged by the commonwealth and, indeed, by the Auditor-General's report.

The issues around reconciliation came very much back to that question of substitution, which we were exploring before. When we put in our funding proposal, we had an estimated cost for a particular program. If we use an existing asset, which in fact might be a higher value asset, that is going to change the contribution that the ACT government makes to that particular initiative. That has been the cause of the issues around the reporting for “A place to call home”. As the minister said, these 20 properties fit within a capital program which delivers dozens or hundreds of properties per year, and it is within that wider context that we report through the annual report and through to the Assembly.

In terms of what we have specifically done to address that recommendation, we have certainly implemented quarterly reconciliation meetings to make sure that we have a single source of truth around what those financial contributions are for that particular program and others. We have also made sure that there is additional oversight from Housing ACT's capital committee—again, consistent with the idea that we deliver a capital program to support social housing and homelessness outcomes from a variety of sources, including self-funded work from Housing ACT and specific purpose payments or national partnership agreements. So the Housing ACT capital committee has overall responsibility for ensuring that the reconciliations are done appropriately and that the information is correct.



**MS LAWDER:** What does that mean—“additional oversight”? When the government agreed to the recommendations you said, “We will provide additional oversight.” So what has actually changed?

**Mr Matthews:** What has changed is that that is a specific item of business which has come forward, and it is reported on under our monthly capital committee process. We have a monthly capital committee; it is responsible for the delivery of all of our capital works and also the accountability and reporting requirements for that particular program. So “A place to call home” is now, through the period since the audit, identified as a specific reporting responsibility for that committee.

**Mr Barr:** Some people would say it is a whole lot more red tape, but there you go. It is the nature of agreements between the commonwealth and the states.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Berry.

**MS BERRY:** Minister, thank you for the information that you have already provided today. It talked about replacing and renewing stock, the omnibus legislation that the government will be putting through to allow for the replacement and renewal of stock, taking into account people’s existing connections, where they want to live and things like that.

In June this year—I know we are talking about 2011 but things have moved on, and you have already given evidence about some of the things the ACT government is doing—you and Mr Rattenbury put out a press release talking about some agreements that cabinet had made around housing, including accelerating the renewal and redevelopment of ageing public housing stock, which you have just talked about, responding to the needs and preferences of tenants along the proposed Northbourne Avenue redevelopment sites by providing accommodation within the 800-metre corridor, including Flemington Road, growing social housing through new partnerships, innovation, intelligent design, public-private partnerships and specific project budget bids that align with government priorities, and maintaining the salt-and-pepper approach to public housing in existing suburbs and expanding this approach to public housing in new and developing areas.

Having regard to that press release and the sale of existing public housing sites through this legislation that you are talking about that might be presented to the Assembly, will the profits from that sale, as well as renewing, provide additional public housing stock? Will there be an increase?

**Mr Barr:** Outside the Northbourne Avenue corridor, yes. Within the corridor, it is roof-for-roof replacement.

**MS BERRY:** Thank you for that. With respect to the omnibus bill that will be put before the Assembly—

**Mr Barr:** The consultation on the omnibus territory plan variations is underway now. That identifies about 17 sites across the territory where we are having consultation now on potential sites for new housing. That consultation process will conclude in the

next four weeks or so, which will then form the omnibus variation.

I could characterise the community response as being that, with respect to about two-thirds of those sites, significant issues have not been raised. With about one-third, there are some concerns that we need to do some further work to address. So the government's approach here will be to bring two-thirds of the sites in an initial omnibus variation. These are, as you say, the least contentious ones that we can get on with quickly, and then undertake some further work on the remaining sites and bring in a second omnibus variation.

When you think about it, 17 sites will create many years of supply in terms of available land, so there is time to undertake a staged approach. Even if you put all 17 sites through the planning process, you would not be able to construct on all 17 sites simultaneously. There is clearly a pipeline and a number of years of construction that are necessary. Our approach is to be able to address the short-term needs through the initial omnibus variation and then have a second one that will follow in 2015.

My goal here is really to create a decade-long pipeline of available land for new public housing to be constructed. That will allow for an orderly and managed process associated with divesting from and moving out of some of the 50 and 60-year-old least economically and socially efficient outcomes that we have within our public housing stock at the moment. It is not going to be a dramatic change; it is going to be measured over a period of time. I think this represents a good long-term asset management strategy for the portfolio. But the number one focus is on ensuring that we are meeting the needs of current and future tenants.

It is a big, multibillion dollar territory asset. The assets need to be managed well, but then sitting on top of that is a social policy question about effective tenancy management and meeting future needs. That, I think, is one challenge, and then asset management is another. The two obviously have their points of intersection.

The other elements of the policy approach that you outlined in the press release also go to how we can attract new investment into social housing, public and community. There are a number of innovative models that are being explored; some are being examined or trialled in other parts of Australia and we can certainly look at that model. There is no shortage of ethical investor interest in long-term assets like housing. So a model that might work for superannuation funds to invest in, for example, is something that we are pursuing.

There is a lively debate about where particular institutions may wish to place their investments in the longer term. There appear to be some who are wanting to move away from fossil fuels, for example, who might wish to invest in social housing. If we can construct the right model, I think there is considerable merit in that. The ultimate objective here is to attract more resources—government and non-government—into the sector and build more houses. It is as simple as that, really.

**MS BERRY:** To be clear, there will be, as a result of sales of existing housing stock, an increase in public housing?

**Mr Barr:** Yes.

**MS BERRY:** As well as a renewal of existing ageing public housing?

**Mr Barr:** As well as a renewal, yes, that is correct. Essentially, the properties within the Northbourne corridor are replaced on a roof-for-roof basis. Outside the Northbourne corridor we anticipate there being a capacity to utilise the proceeds of divestment to invest in more stock.

**MS BERRY:** Within Northbourne, within the 800 metres, will be the roof-for-roof?

**Mr Barr:** That is correct.

**MS BERRY:** And outside that you can continue on with the salt-and-pepper approach?

**Mr Barr:** Even within the 800 metres of Northbourne, there will still be salt and peppering. At the moment you have very high concentrations. It is not a matter of being all pepper and no salt, depending on how you want to view it.

**MS BERRY:** A mix of spices.

**Mr Barr:** Indeed.

**MS BERRY:** How does that happen? How is that accountable to the community? If that \$2 million is the profit, how does that \$2 million go to 10 new houses?

**Mr Barr:** We will report. There will be a number of different mechanisms through which this is reported. People will see a headline figure from year to year on the total level of housing within the system. Because there will be a lot of interest in this, we will be reporting, as much as we can anyway, on divestment of property X where so many properties have generated Y funds, and that has then allowed us to invest in a certain number of new properties.

The interesting question comes down to measurement, really. It will be the extent to which the housing mix may change away from, for example, bedsits and one-bedroom properties to more two-bedroom properties. One measure might be the number of bedrooms. We could report in a number of different ways, but certainly we will examine the options there. In certain circumstances if you remove 20 bedsits, that property would have a very low value—20 very small properties. The funds generated by replacing 20 bedsits might only get you 10 two-bedroom properties, for example. That could be considered a net loss of stock, but you have probably, in fact, replaced 20 bedrooms with 20 bedrooms. You have just got a better configuration of housing so that it is meeting the needs of those on the list. These are all pertinent issues to consider.

The issue is going to be that the process of construction of new properties will be ahead of the disposal of old properties in most instances. It is just a practical thing that if you are going to demolish a property that someone is living in, they need to live somewhere else and you need to have built the new place they live in before you can demolish the old one.

**MS BERRY:** Will it always be a matter of building new ones or will it be maybe purchasing? For example, there is no public housing in Crace.

**Mr Barr:** There is some capacity to do that, but you would do that principally to match a specific tenant need. Purchasing existing properties is not adding to the housing stock; it is substituting out of it—taking one out of the private stock and adding it into the public. Ultimately—I will come back to this and we will keep coming back to this—we want to add to supply. But I would not rule out a circumstance where there might be a privately built house that might have had, for example, disability modifications. It may be ideal for a particular purpose; we could acquire it quickly and at a relative cost that is better than constructing a brand new one ourselves. You would do that. Common sense says you would do that, but it is probably going to be the exception.

**THE CHAIR:** I will defer my question to Ms Lawder.

**MS LAWDER:** Thanks. Minister, I want to ask a few questions about the housing and support initiative, as in the Auditor-General's report from page 53. According to the Auditor-General, the proposed expenditure for HASI was revised downwards to approximately 66 per cent of the initial expected expenditure. There was some inconsistency between the budget actual and reported expenditure; the performance indicators identified and reported on are different from the performance indicators initially envisaged; there was a lack of consistency, completeness and accuracy in the information provided in relation to performance indicators; and the limited capacity to house homeless persons under HASI caused an average delay of six months. I have got a couple of questions, including this: what happened to that difference in money? If you only spent 66 per cent, what happened to the rest of it?

**Mr Barr:** It was all before my time; I will ask David to answer.

**Mr Matthews:** Ms Lawder, in term of our overall obligations under the agreement, if we underspend in one area, we have to seek approval from the commonwealth to overspend in another area. Essentially, the total investment is covered by the agreement; the ACT has to report and be accountable to that both by putting in implementation plans and also by doing retrospective reporting which explains what we have actually spent the money on.

In terms of the housing and support initiative, it was one of those really interesting and exciting initiatives for the ACT that we believe has been really successful. It has been very much a learning process as we have gone through that to get that absolutely strong interface between mental health service delivery and the provision of appropriate housing. That is really very much the cornerstone of the initiative. Because of your background, you may well have a background in the New South Wales program, but the difference between HASI and normal housing allocations for people with a mental illness is, firstly, that they get a guaranteed support package with it. So they are not left; they are not housed and then left by support providers to fend for themselves.

The other element of the model is that we look for a very appropriate form of

accommodation that suits the need of people with quite acute mental illness. In a lot of cases, of course, that means that housing people in high housing density environments is not appropriate. In terms of the reasons for the delay in actually getting people housed and formally into the program, one was that issue of how we provide the most appropriate form of housing for people. We could have allocated them less suitable properties earlier, but in the spirit of the program, and with recognition of the complex needs of the client group, we took that additional time to find properties in lower density environments, often without close proximity to neighbours or adjoining nature reserves or open spaces, all of which can help support somebody to live their lives with privacy and dignity but also minimise any potential conflict or impact on neighbours, for example.

The housing and support initiative, when it was established, was built very much on the basis of a strong, independent evaluation that was undertaken by New South Wales Health and New South Wales Housing. There was a strong evidence base to support that initiative as it was established. As it got translated into an ACT context, clearly the most important element was us working effectively with ACT Health and also the funded community organisations who were the support providers.

One of the unique elements of HASI at that time, if I can say it again, was that the clients were able to choose the support organisation that would be their support provider. Whilst that might not sound like a big thing to be speaking about today, normally what we would have done with services in the past was allocate people to their support providers and give people with a mental illness less choice in who would be that personal support provider. So HASI also had a part of the model which allowed people to do that.

The other thing that happened very quickly after HASI was established in the ACT was a strong acknowledgement from ACT Health that it was a very important program, and the bringing in of funding under the national partnership agreement on improving public hospital services. So Health actually became a funder of and financial contributor to the program. That program was called HARI; it is called HASI/HARI now. It gave us the capacity to increase the number of people in the program from, I believe, the 14 that were reported in the Auditor-General's report to a current 50 clients today that are receiving that mixture of accommodation and support.

On the whole, it has been a very successful program. It has been particularly important in continuing to strengthen relationships between mental health services and Housing ACT, in particular, and the support providers that are supporting the HASI/HARI clients.

**MS LAWDER:** Thank you. I agree that it is another good housing-first sort of approach. I am not sure whether you answered my question about what happened to the remaining 34 per cent of the funding.

**Mr Matthews:** I would have to take that on notice, Ms Lawder, if you want the specifics. In general, as I said, if we were underspending in a particular area in a particular financial year—

**MS LAWDER:** I understood that the first time you said it, yes.

**Mr Matthews:** That is the general answer. If you would like a specific answer about how we reallocated that funding, I can do that.

**MS LAWDER:** Thank you. Also, when the government responded to the Auditor-General's report, you said that CSD would work collaboratively with the Health Directorate to finalise a review of HASI. Has that taken place, and is that publicly available?

**Mr Matthews:** It has not been published, so it is not in the public domain, Ms Lawder, but the review has been completed now. To provide some context, the review was instigated in 2011 originally; it looked at the initial intake of, I believe, eight clients that had come into the program as part of a post-implementation review—having built off the evidence base provided by the New South Wales government, translating that to the ACT. The purpose of that evaluation at that time was to see how it was being “operationalised” in the ACT and to identify any issues.

At that time, seven issues were identified around governance and service delivery criteria. All of those issues were actioned and incorporated as part of the ongoing development of the HASI/HARI document. What was not done was the formalisation or the closing off of the actual evaluation. As I reported previously, that has now been completed, and we have reached agreement with ACT Health around that. We are able to report that we did incorporate the findings of that post-implementation review into the way the program evolved and was implemented.

**MS LAWDER:** I presume, given that you said that ACT Health found it beneficial and provided some funding for it, it would have been based on some evaluation results. Are you able to provide the committee with a copy of that evaluation report?

**Mr Barr:** I will check with the Minister for Health to make sure there are no issues, but I cannot imagine that is a problem.

**MS LAWDER:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** As a supplementary to that, in the last dot point on page 54, the auditor said:

The changes to the targets and accompanying method for reporting over time, combined with a lack of specificity, makes it difficult to assess whether the initiative has actually achieved its intent.

How do you respond to that?

**Mr Matthews:** In terms of the original performance indicators that were identified for HASI, I think the Auditor-General also comments that they were probably very difficult to measure, particularly with episodes of people returning to the PSU. Essentially, during the national partnership agreement we did change the performance indicators because they were not effective or measurable. We sought permission to make those changes with the commonwealth.

In terms of a broader sense of how we know whether the program is successful or not, obviously we have an existing cohort of people that are in the program that are receiving support from both health and community organisations, and Housing ACT, and the outcomes for those individuals are monitored. The Auditor-General's report also shows that a large portion of those people have remained in their housing. Obviously that is the most significant positive outcome that this program is going to achieve.

**Ms Sheehan:** I am responsible for the implementation of the national disability insurance scheme in the ACT. With those two programs, HASI and HARI, as Mr Matthews said, there are 50 clients in those programs. It is anticipated that those clients will transition through to the national disability insurance scheme. In our early negotiations with the commonwealth, we identified those programs as having urgency in making sure that those clients were properly transitioned. It is not supported accommodation in the sense that the committee would understand—for example, a disability group home is supported accommodation—but it is accommodation provided through Housing ACT with very definite support. It is important that those clients get the same sort of fast-track attention that people in disability supported accommodation get.

In the environment of the national disability insurance scheme, what is really wonderful about HASI and HARI, as Mr Matthews was saying, is that, from the very start, it embodied control and choice: people in that program were able to identify their own providers and choose the providers. Those people are in a perfect position as they go through to the National Disability Insurance Agency and begin the discussion about what plan they have to achieve what they want in their life. They have already been through a planning process in order to enter those two schemes; they have chosen providers. This will provide an opportunity to reassess whether they are still happy with their plan and they still want to have those providers, but it is one of those schemes that fit very well with the new model, which is very well supported across the country.

I think it would be fair to say that, in terms of a program that is really successful, you might say that this model of control and choice is actually embraced by the national disability insurance scheme, which those clients will move into.

**THE CHAIR:** A new question, Ms Porter?

**MS PORTER:** On a matter of clarification first, going back to the 17 areas proposed to be developed that you mentioned, minister, they vary in size, one would imagine. Could you give us an idea about how big or small these areas for development are?

**Mr Barr:** They range from section 72 in Dickson, which is to the east of Dickson pool and extends all the way up to the Dickson playing fields, and would incorporate the old Downer Club site. That is a fairly large parcel that is within close proximity of the Dickson flats, the ones that have been the subject of one of the more interesting interim heritage listings in the history of the territory, but that is a whole other matter. There are various locations in the inner south, Woden, Belconnen and Tuggeranong. The list will be refined once the consultation period has concluded, and then we will put forward the ones that have had no comments or issues, or are resolvable in the

immediate term. And some further work will be necessary on some of the other sites.

**MS PORTER:** You have been talking quite a bit, in the last few comments that have been made and answers to questions, around the different agencies that are involved in reporting back about what is being done. There was a comment by the Auditor-General, or some criticism, about the fact that there seems to be information scattered all over the place, and that they have had to bring all of that together in order to make sense of it. I hope I am not misinterpreting her. One of the issues is that the directorates and the agencies need to bring that information together in a more central location so that it can be accounted for more easily. Would you like to make a comment about that, minister?

**Mr Barr:** The annual report process and the budget process provide some opportunity for consolidation of information. Mr Matthews might want to answer that.

**Mr Matthews:** In terms of our relationship generally between government and the community sector, it is really important. Obviously the community sector do vital work, and the funding that is provided by government is also critical to that. Your comments, Ms Porter, have been very much in the area that we have been working on with our community sector reform program as well—how we are trying to streamline funding and reporting arrangements with our non-government sector partners.

We have just moved to a single relationship manager model within the Community Services Directorate, so that an individual non-government organisation that might receive funding from more than one area has a key contact person who is their main liaison point, who is responsible for making sure that they get a single service from the Community Services Directorate in their engagement with us.

That obviously goes very much to the heart of ensuring that there are single points of information, that there is continuity of engagement between the directorate and the community sector in the way that people are delivering their services. That is just one element of our wider package of community sector reform, but it is a really critical one to make sure that we are paying due attention and respect to that relationship with our community partners, and that we are making it as easy for them as possible to engage with government and to get a holistic response.

**MS PORTER:** Yes, you agreed with me when I referred to the earlier discussion we were having about definitions—that it became problematic for the states and territories to understand what they had to report if the definition had been unclear and changing over time. The not-for-profit organisations that work to the different government agencies may find that the messages being filtered down get even more difficult, and the resources that the not-for-profit organisation have to respond to sometimes shifting goalposts make the whole thing very complicated and difficult for the not-for-profit staff, who are always under the pump.

I think there is another question about cross-government-agency reporting. You talked a lot about Health. The question was asked, “Can we have this information?” You have to seek that information from Health. So it is not just this area that needs to be presenting information; there is also Health. How do you bring information across whole of government together rather than having to go here, here and here?



**Mr Barr:** It is an interesting question. In some instances there is a bureaucratic response, and that can be delivered. In other areas you would have to, absolutely and fundamentally, change the nature of output classes. Our budgeting and ministerial responsibility system, like it or not, is geared towards certain silos. That is a reflection of the nature of a Westminster system. It does not necessarily mean that there cannot be greater collaboration—and there should be, in a small government.

I take on board all of those questions but make the observation that the trend year on year of this place and of successive auditors-general and the like is to demand more and more reporting, red tape and accountability. That is all fine; that is the nature of it. But it does not come without consequences. We were so input focused; we need to be more output focused. That cultural change takes time, but unfortunately the minutiae of Auditor-General recommendations often are not based on that overall philosophical framework. They are a little bit more about: where did this widget move across the course of a program?

By way of a philosophical view, this is the worst system except for all the rest of them. Churchill said that. There will always be these difficulties, but we will strive to ensure that we can unify datasets where we can. In publishing annual reports and that sort of stuff, in the end the system still demands a report from the Community Services area and a report from Health. Unless we fundamentally change the structure of government, you are still going to get a bit of that silo, unfortunately. If someone comes up with a better idea, let us know. Maureen, go for it.

**Ms Sheehan:** Thank you. So—

**THE CHAIR:** Before you answer, Ms Sheehan, I think it is more fundamental than you portray, minister, and it is not even necessarily across portfolios. The Auditor-General and the officer responsible actually told the committee they had to put together the data from various sources because CSD had not done it. CSD had never reconciled these programs, so could not tell you what they cost. So it is within your department, fundamentally.

**Mr Barr:** Okay. I was making a more general comment, but point taken.

**MS PORTER:** I had actually expanded it across portfolios.

**THE CHAIR:** Paragraph 3.20 reads:

It was difficult for the Audit Office to ascertain accurate actual expenditure on the program due to different sources of information being used by the Community Services Directorate.

It goes on in paragraph 3.22 to say:

There is no single source of information for funding arrangements under the A Place to Call Home Program, nor are budgeted funds, actual expenditure and reported expenditure periodically reconciled.

So there was no reconciliation at all. It continued:

The inconsistency of financial information and a lack of reconciliation of this information creates the risk that inaccurate financial information is:

- used to inform the management and administration of the program; and
- reported publicly.

I take the discussion in the broad about silos and intergovernment activities, but they sat here, and you can view the *Hansard* yourself, and said that CSD could not tell them.

**Mr Barr:** That has been acknowledged by the directorate in the response, and they are addressing that. My comments were obviously broader, given the nature of the question.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Berry had a supplementary. Is that on the same—

**MS BERRY:** Yes, I was going to add to it. It was about a very simple thing. The Auditor-General mentioned in the report the problem even of finding the location of the houses, because they were described in different ways. They were described by address or by block and section number. I know this was done in 2011, and things might have moved on and changed since then, but it was a simple thing that they referred to in their report that I would have thought would have been easily addressed.

**Mr Matthews:** Indeed, Ms Berry. Certainly we acknowledge the comments in the Auditor-General's report. But like the non-government sector, we have to report to the commonwealth in different ways for different programs as well. I guess that adds to the complexity. This is one particular funding source that had one set of reporting requirements. The social housing national partnership agreement at the same time had another set of reports to the Australian government, as did the stimulus nation building program. We all understand the challenges of making sure those processes work effectively, and we need to work to that same goal of making sure that information is clear and transparent and that the directorate takes that feedback on board from the Auditor-General.

**THE CHAIR:** I think Ms Sheehan was going to give an answer.

**Ms Sheehan:** On the issue of consolidation of information, it is as important to look at where is consolidation of information around services to the clients of all of these programs. At the same time as this national partnership was developed, the new national information system for homelessness was developed; that is called the SHIP, the social housing information platform. At the same time as the national partnership was being rolled out, a new national minimum dataset was developed for homelessness services. There was a national tender process, and then the new data system was installed in every homelessness service around the country. That began operating on 1 July 2011. As a result of that, Mr Matthews was telling me we are now into our third year of reporting under the national system, and the services provided in all of those services under the national partnership on homelessness, and all the services in the national affordable housing agreement, are all reported in the SHIP,

and the SHIP then produces reports on services generally.

**MS PORTER:** I hope it is not like *Titanic*!

**Mr Barr:** No, it is a good SHIP, obviously.

**Ms Sheehan:** It is important to understand that the services to clients are actually very well reported in that system. You can certainly track what is happening for clients through that system. So whatever problems there may have been with reconciling some dollars at some points in time, there is no doubt that we are accurately recording those services in the national system for all of the homelessness services.

**THE CHAIR:** Just to finish Ms Porter's question, have the quarterly reconciliation meetings all occurred?

**Ms Sheehan:** You will have to ask Mr Matthews.

**Mr Matthews:** They have, Mr Smyth. I would point out, though, that that component of the program no longer attracts a funding source.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, but until it finished the quarterly meetings had occurred?

**Mr Matthews:** Yes.

**Mr Barr:** So they cleared the decks on the SHIP.

**THE CHAIR:** Roger that. Everything is now SHIP-shape. A new question, Ms Lawder, and then Ms Berry.

**MS LAWDER:** On page 18 of the Auditor-General's report, there is a table with information from the censuses in 2006 and 2011.

**Mr Barr:** Censi. What is the plural? Censi or is it census?

**MS LAWDER:** Censuses, it says here.

**Mr Barr:** Perhaps the committee could make a recommendation on the standard definition of the plural of census.

**MS LAWDER:** Notwithstanding whether you agree with the definition or not—

**Mr Barr:** Sorry.

**MS LAWDER:** people in improvised dwellings, or sleeping out or sleeping rough, as it used to be generally called, represent the largest, and in fact only, improvement in the ACT figures, a change of 43 per cent. That is excellent and reflects, I guess, the headline goal of the white paper about focusing on rough sleepers.

I have got two questions. My first one is about what you attribute that very positive change to. I know it is a negative, but it is a positive change. Secondly, the one near

the bottom is about people living in overcrowded dwellings. The term “severely overcrowded” generally means you may need four or more additional bedrooms to adequately house those in the household. It has the largest percentage change of any. Whilst we focused quite a bit on the supported accommodation, severely overcrowded dwellings are the largest change. I am wondering what the ACT government may be doing to focus on or improve that situation, and to what you attribute such change.

**Ms Sheehan:** I am happy to start with that, Ms Lawder. The drop in rough sleepers we would attribute to one of the programs funded under the national partnership on homelessness, the street to home program. That was a great example of adding value to some existing programs. St Vincent de Paul was funded under the street to home program to work with chronic rough sleepers, many of whom might have previously been resistant to moving out of rough sleeping into housing. They were taking a very active approach with those rough sleepers, going out to where you would find them sleeping in a park or on Mount Ainslie, working to get their confidence, working with another St Vincent de Paul program, the food van, the night patrol van, working with other workers who would come in contact with rough sleepers, such as park rangers and so on, working with mental health workers, and then getting their confidence and trust to the point where they would be prepared to move into housing options which were provided by Housing ACT. If the figures could speak, I think that those figures would speak.

With the persons living in severely overcrowded dwellings, there was one change in the definition of overcrowding which was used by ROGS, the report on government services. That was until the point in time of change. I might have to defer to Mr Matthews or take on notice the point of time in which the definition of overcrowding changed, but we moved to adopt the Canadian definition of overcrowding. The overcrowding used to be people who required two extra bedrooms; the definition changed to requiring one extra bedroom. It might be simply a definitional change, but we can certainly look into that and provide the committee with some information.

**MS LAWDER:** I guess I should point out that people living in severely overcrowded dwellings did increase Australia wide. Mr Matthews might prefer to—

**Mr Matthews:** I was just supporting your commentary, Ms Lawder. Indeed, that was part of the national trend. The ACT does report on overcrowding in public housing, and on underutilisation, as part of the report on government services. That is the comment that Ms Sheehan was making. On a household-by-household basis, there is an element of both overcrowding and underutilisation.

In terms of the particular characteristics of homeless people where there are large families involved, one of the key objectives of the government’s response to the nation building and stimulus package was to support older people to downsize from their family homes to appropriate older persons accommodation. That had a very specific and deliberate policy goal of freeing up properties for larger families that required them. That was a wonderfully successful initiative in meeting both of those dual outcomes.

Today the minister has been speaking about housing supply issues. We recognise that

there are limited stocks available at the very high bedroom number. The ones that are owned by Housing ACT or made available to homelessness services to use are very precious and rare. We need to make sure that we can utilise them in the best possible way. You will continue to see that emphasis in our upcoming construction program, supporting people to have that appropriate form of housing so that we can continue to either transfer people or allocate people to dwellings that are right for their family composition.

**MS LAWDER:** It is a really interesting area. Potentially with some component of it, though certainly not all of it, there are theories that it could be a sort of cultural thing, with extended families, for example.

**Mr Barr:** Or changing expectations. I do not know. Does anyone do bunk beds anymore? I had to share a room with my brother, for argument's sake.

**MS LAWDER:** That is right.

**THE CHAIR:** And only one brother.

**Mr Barr:** Indeed, yes.

**MS LAWDER:** Another thing is about student accommodation where there are a lot of students in one place. Do you look at that—

**Mr Barr:** But all of these definitions are based on one kid per bedroom.

**Ms Sheehan:** Housing ACT has allocation rules which aim to give a mix of setting a reasonable community standard about sharing rooms and whether siblings of different sexes should share a room based on different ages. Housing ACT tries to take a community standard approach.

**MS PORTER:** I just wanted to ask a—

**Mr Barr:** There is no doubt that expectations have changed

**MS PORTER:** Yes, they have. My sons would be in bunk beds. I wanted to ask for clarification around the different demographics. Is it also true that some of the overcrowding may be students who are finding it difficult? I know that we are working towards solving the student accommodation problem, but I am just wondering whether historically some of the overcrowding was young people bunking together in whichever way to save on money for rental.

**Mr Barr:** Yes, there would be some anecdotal evidence.

**MS LAWDER:** Or unscrupulous landlords.

**MS PORTER:** Or unscrupulous landlords.

**Mr Barr:** Yes. There have been a few—

**MS PORTER:** Particularly with workers coming into this city from other places.

**Mr Barr:** There have been a few press reports that would reinforce that view.

**MS PORTER:** I do not know whether or not it is caught up in that.

**Mr Barr:** I am not sure that we have any hard data on it.

**Mr Matthews:** There are different cohorts, as you have made reference to, Ms Porter. In terms of students or young people, yes, group living arrangements are a normal part of a lot of people's housing careers; at times they can be in quite overcrowded situations. In terms of some of those—

**Mr Barr:** The best group houses ever are in Ainslie, apparently, aren't they? There are a few people who could probably attest to that.

**Mr Matthews:** I was living in O'Connor, minister. The other issue, though, about those sorts of boarding house type arrangements is that obviously there is a regulatory regime around boarding houses in the ACT. We are very fortunate not to have a plethora of boarding houses and that type of really semi-insecure, inappropriate accommodation, which is where a lot of homeless people in the major capital cities are residing. Both the New South Wales and Victorian governments would give their right arm to be rid of their boarding houses, because of the negative outcomes they have for the people who are living in them. Whilst that is something we will always need to be vigilant about, and overcrowding is an important part of the whole issue, it does represent differently for different groups. The evidence on the boarding houses is not strong, but of course we would take action whenever we saw that.

**MS BERRY:** I have a supplementary on that. I want clarification on overcrowding. I was not quite clear where that little conversation was going. When people report to the census and say, "I'm living in an overcrowded home," what does that mean and how did you say that Housing—

**Mr Barr:** The number of extra bedrooms needed has reduced to the—

**Ms Sheehan:** It has changed over time. We will confirm that. And that is also reported in the report on government services as well. If the definition of "severe overcrowding" is two bedrooms under what you require rather than one bedroom under what you require and it has moved down to one bedroom, then it means that people who had previously not fitted into the category of severe overcrowding suddenly do fit in. So it is not that more people have changed their circumstances; it is that the definition has changed.

**MS BERRY:** And my substantive question is: given that this report was done some time ago, are you able to update the committee—I think you said a review has been done on some of the things in this report—on where the people that were being provided with support under these programs are now? Are they still being provided with the support under these schemes or have the schemes been successful and they have been able to move on?

**Mr Matthews:** The specialist homelessness data collection is a unit record data system, so it actually does record the pathway of each individual client through the homelessness system through a unique identifier. And that is where we get some real richness in the data that is reported because we know what people's circumstances were at the time that they came into the homelessness system and then afterwards. Obviously that information is then aggregated up in terms of reporting at the national and jurisdictional level.

We would not be able to identify each, obviously, on an individual basis, but what we can do through the analysis of the data is look at the outcomes of people that come into homelessness services in terms of their, for example, ability to get an income, their ability to get work, their involvement in case management activities. All of those elements are captured as part of the data system and are one of the key quality measures that we are looking for in terms of measuring the impact of our service delivery.

If I can, I might also briefly mention to the committee—and if you would like, I can go into some details—the fact that the government has undertaken to do an evaluation of the reforms of ACT specialist homelessness services. That was announced in the most recent budget. The important element of that is that we will be looking at all homelessness services—not just the NPAR funding or any one particular funding program, but the total delivery of homelessness services in the ACT since the beginning of the significant reform process in 2009 through to 2014. Obviously that comes after the federal government's white paper on homelessness and the actual instigation of the national partnership agreement.

But there has been a commitment to independently evaluate outcomes at systems, service delivery and sector levels to make sure that we can understand the benefit or otherwise of the changes that have been made and make sure that we can continue to learn from our experience of reform over that five-year period to inform our future service delivery.

At the moment we are going through a select tender process to engage the external evaluator. That is being done in absolute partnership with our community sector colleagues. They are, in fact, on the steering committee and are involved in the assessment of that tender. It is expected that we will have that report finalised in April 2015.

**MS BERRY:** I was looking at the “A place to call home” initiative. It seems, with small numbers in the ACT, that we should know what is going on with these people that we have been providing some support to. That goes to what I think the minister said earlier about how we measure outcomes as well as inputs. How do we measure the outcomes?

**Mr Matthews:** My memory—and I have to find the reference in the report—is that within this evidence-gathering stage of this report it does provide some guidance about what the status of the outcomes were for the people in “A place to call home”.

**MS BERRY:** But I was thinking that was 2011 and now it is the end of 2014. I was after what has happened now with those people. If you do not have it now—

**Mr Matthews:** That information would not be readily available in that there is no data source that would be able to identify those 20 people automatically. We would obviously know who those people are because they have been largely allocated public housing, but it would take some effort to get that material together.

**MS BERRY:** I just wonder how we then know if these programs have worked if we do not know where these people are now. That is my question. It would be good to know.

**Mr Barr:** It is a good question. As long as it does not involve huge amounts of time or any invasion of privacy, we will see what we can do to provide the committee with some general information about outcomes post the program.

**THE CHAIR:** We will close the hearing with a quick question from Ms Lawder.

**MS LAWDER:** On page 19 of the Auditor-General's report it talks about the average period that a homeless person or a person experiencing homelessness receives support for, which is longer than the Australian average. The average number of days, which is longer than the Australian average, is not necessarily a bad thing, if you are providing the support that someone needs. However, the next two dot points state that we have a greater number of clients experiencing repeated periods of homelessness than the national average and that we are lower than the national average for people who obtain or maintain independent housing after a supported period, which are not as positive as the previous two dot points. I am interested in your analysis about the nexus between perhaps lack of exit from homelessness, which may well be linked to a lack of affordable housing in the ACT, and how that impacts or causes those figures.

**Mr Matthews:** Obviously in terms of addressing people's homelessness, there is that combination of providing them with an appropriate form of housing and the right level of support. Some people very successfully transition into private rental accommodation or social housing but then become homeless later as a result of another life event or a chronic issue in their life such as mental illness. So there will always be different pathways that homeless people go through.

The objective of the ACT's homelessness system is very much to get that nexus between housing and support right. So the housing has to complement the support arrangements and the support arrangements have to complement the housing. And all of the initiatives under the national partnership agreement in particular went to that in one way or another to try to find that.

In term of this data analysis, obviously the Auditor-General has picked out one year, the 2011-12 year, and there is further reporting available since that time, for 2012-13, and we get some access to more ready, real-time information for the most recent financial year. I would want to assure the committee that we take that information and data very seriously. We are very much looking to see how the ACT does perform against other jurisdictions, what are the reasons for that difference in performance and what are the particular characteristics and needs of our homelessness population.

There is certainly anecdotal evidence over the years that the ACT is an attractor of homeless people because of the perceived good level of support in our system and our social housing provision. That is to some degree recognising our role as a regional



city. People do come from surrounding areas to the ACT. So there is an argument that the cohort of people that come into the ACT homelessness systems are of a higher need and require a higher level of support.

But we are obviously wanting to make sure that people do not experience repeat periods of homelessness. That is one of our key drivers. Clearly, breaking the cycle of homelessness is one of the absolute key drivers of our activity. It is a key performance measure that we have included in our homelessness outcome measurement framework so that we are focusing ourselves and all of our sector partners on the fact that we want to break those cycles of homelessness.

**MS LAWDER:** Given you mention that you have access to more recent data and this ROGS was for 2011-12, what has been the trend?

**Mr Matthews:** Broadly, the trend is that it is fairly consistent over years in terms of the profile of people accessing homelessness services and their outcomes. What is apparent is that the data itself is a product of the services you provide. If you provide a lot of accommodation-based services, then the data reflects that you are providing a lot of accommodation services. What we are continuing to try to do is reform the mix of our services to get the right range of accommodation and non-accommodation responses to get the right range of preventative activities in place. We have not really talked about prevention yet in today's hearings, but a lot of the emphasis of the initiatives under the national partnership agreement was about turning off the tap, as described by the Australian government as one of the key objectives of the whole homelessness reform process.

The data says to us that we continue to experience quite prolonged periods of involvement in our ACT homelessness services. That is a mixture of housing and support. We need to continue to work with the sector to get that balance right between the right level of support and not prolonging people's involvement beyond where it is helpful. But that repeat cycle of homelessness will continue to be a key driver.

**THE CHAIR:** Ms Porter has a four-second comment to make, apparently.

**MS PORTER:** It is just that years ago when we were doing an inquiry—you remember that inquiry into mental health and housing—we went to Melbourne and one of the things that seemed to work really well down there was the fact that housing and health were in the same building and were co-located. It worked. There was a lot of cross-discussion and they talked about how it had been beforehand, how it was then and how I presume it still is. The sooner we can do that, as far as I am concerned, the better.

**THE CHAIR:** With those parting comments, we will now call today's hearing to a close. Our time is over. A number of items were taken on notice, minister. There is no set deadline, but perhaps two weeks from today would be a normal expectation. When available, a proof transcript will be forwarded to provide the opportunity to check and suggest any corrections if necessary. Minister, on behalf of the committee, thank you and your officials for appearing today. With that, I declare the hearing closed.

**The committee adjourned at 12.33 pm.**