



Debates

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Wednesday, 12 October 2022

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Wednesday, 12 October 2022

MADAM SPEAKER (Ms Burch) (10.00): Members:

Dhawura nguna, dhawura Ngunnawal.
Yanggu ngalawiri, dhunimanyin Ngunnawalwari dhawurawari.
Nginggada Dindi dhawura Ngunnaawalbun yindjumaralidjinyin.

The words I have just spoken are in the language of the traditional custodians and translate to:

This is Ngunnawal Country.
Today we are gathering on Ngunnawal Country.
We always pay respect to Elders, female and male, and Ngunnawal Country.

I ask you to stand in silence and pray or reflect on our responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

Petition

The following petition was lodged for presentation:

Shepherds Lookout—Brontë Haskins tribute—petition 33-22

By Mr Cain, from 234 residents:

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

Reason for this Petition

The following residents of the ACT draw to the attention of the Assembly:

- a) Brontë Haskins was a beloved daughter, sister, and friend. Affectionately known as “Poppy”, she experienced significant mental health issues until she tragically passed away at the age of 23.
- b) Shepherds Lookout in Strathnairn was Brontë’s ‘go to’ place. When she needed to escape the struggles in her life, it provided her with a sense of peace and respite.
- c) Brontë’s family now feel the same tranquillity when they visit Shepherd’s Lookout: a wonderful place to just ‘be’ and reflect on the beauty of nature.
- d) A bench seat would benefit the wider community. A place to rest, relax and reflect, whilst absorbing the majestic countryside of Canberra.
- e) Brontë saved four people’s lives through organ donation and saved the lives of many dogs whom she fostered and rehomed, including Allan, who is an important part of the Haskins family and another legacy of Brontë.

Requested Actions

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to support the installation of a bench seat at Shepherd’s Lookout in memory of Brontë Haskins.

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

Motion to take note of petition

MADAM SPEAKER: Pursuant to standing order 98A, I propose the question:

That the petition so lodged be noted.

Shepherds Lookout—Brontë Haskins tribute—petition 33-22

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (10.02): The petition I bring to the attention of this Assembly today honours a beloved daughter, sister and friend, Brontë Eloise Haskins, who was affectionately known as Poppy to those closest to her.

I have lodged a petition of 234 signatures. I seek leave to table an out-of-order petition containing 362 out-of-order signatures in similar terms.

Leave granted.

MR CAIN: I table:

Petition which does not conform with the standing orders—Shepherds Lookout—The Brontë Haskins memorial bench—Mr Cain (342 signatures).

In total, these petitions attracted the signatures of almost 600 Australians, mostly Canberrans. Of this, 234 signatures are in order with an extra 22 signed from outside the ACT and 342 signatures out of order.

It is my great honour to be entrusted by Brontë's parents, Ms Janine Haskins and Mr Peter McLaren, with telling the story of Brontë here today. I acknowledge Janine and Peter in the gallery. Thank you for entrusting me with this story. I advocate on their behalf in remembering and paying tribute to Brontë's life. This is a very emotional and special subject for them, and indeed for me, and I want to thank them for connecting with me on this very, very important issue.

Brontë Eloise Haskins tragically passed away in 2020 at the age of just 23 while experiencing significant mental health and substance issues in her short life. The petition I bring to your attention proposes a park bench memorial erected in Brontë's memory at her favourite place to just be, Shepherds Lookout in Strathnairn. Shepherds Lookout was the one place that provided her with a sense of peace and respite to escape the struggles of her life. Today Brontë's family now feels the same sense of tranquillity when they visit Shepherds Lookout, a place to reflect on the beauty of nature and Brontë's memory. It was my honour to accompany them on one of these visits.

Brontë was an active member of the community and a spirited lover of animals. She was prolific in fostering and rehoming dogs, including creatively named Allan, an important part of the Haskins family and a legacy of Brontë. She saved lives as well.

In 2011, she rescued a fellow venturer from drowning, receiving a meritorious medal from the Chief Scout for her heroics. Following her passing, Brontë donated her organs to those in need, saving the lives of a further four individuals. Brontë embodied the sense of community, generosity and love that we as the Canberran community cherish and strive for.

I have already written to the planning and city services ministers about this issue, and I understand that under the current protocol, memorial infrastructure needs to be for notable Canberrans who can reflect the spirit of Australians and of Canberra. Sadly, the application for a memorial bench has thus far been declined.

While Brontë was young, she lived a full and purposeful life and, more importantly, she represents hundreds of young Australians gone too soon in tragic circumstances. A memorial to her would be also one to them.

The government has previously rejected installing the bench, but based on Brontë's incredible service to the community, even after her passing, I believe this rejection lacks merit. I urge the government to reconsider the installation of this bench as a memorial of her—a memorial of life lost too soon, a sentiment that is unfortunately not uncommon and one that regrettably connects our community in many ways. I mention as well that Janine and Peter have offered to bear the full cost of the installation of this bench and they propose it to be made of recyclable material. *(Extension of time granted.)*

While unfortunately only 234 of these signatures are in order and can therefore be lodged, I would like the Assembly to take note that approximately 600 people wanted the opportunity for Brontë to have her memorial bench. I am very, very confident that if we polled the community, particularly in West Belconnen, there would be almost unanimous support for this installation.

Shepherds Lookout has become a destination known around the country and is greatly appreciated by non-ACT residents as well. It is a place to visit in the territory. I do urge the government to reconsider this bench as it is a reminder and a reflection of the unsung community contributions that make Canberra the special place it is. This bench proposed at Shepherds Lookout would serve as a memorial of a deeply loved and missed person and as a reminder of lives lost too soon. Further, the bench's addition would be of major benefit to the wider community, a place for locals or people from far away to rest, relax and reflect, while absorbing the majestic countryside Canberra has to offer.

Supported by almost 600 Canberrans and residents from the surrounds, I call on the government to install a bench in honour of Brontë Haskins at Shepherds Lookout. Again, the cost would be borne by the parents. I urge the government to consider the life and legacy of not just Brontë but of unsung contributions that make our community all the richer. A memorial bench at Shepherds Lookout in memory of Brontë is something I believe the ACT community, as I have said, would strongly support. It would be a tribute to her and her family, and a reminder that even those challenged by mental health and harmful substances can find solace and hope for a better life.

Again, I want to thank Janine and Peter for entrusting me with telling this story and for their own courage in coming out publicly with Brontë's story. It is a great honour for me to be a part of that.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Assistant Minister for Economic Development, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Business and Better Regulation, Minister for Human Rights and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (10.09): I want to rise in support of this petition and to thank Mr Cain and of course Brontë's family for bringing this, and I acknowledge what is perhaps an error in the approach of the current small memorials policy. Could I also acknowledge, Madam Speaker, the presence of Brontë's family here today. And to echo Mr Cain's words regarding their courage and just how much they have shone a light, not only on Brontë's legacy and her contribution but also what this means going forward for other Canberrans and to hopefully effect change more broadly, including with our justice system. Thank you for continuing this deeply hard work on behalf of so many, but of course, on Brontë's behalf as well.

We do have the small memorials policy in our ACT forests and reserves. As Mr Cain outlined there is a scope, which is not unusual for these types of things, which flags that requests will be considered for small memorials that commemorate an outstanding contribution by a person, group, or organisation, to the ACT, the ACT government, a particular area of land or an event of historical significance to that area of land. If we take a step back here, Brontë's contribution, and that of her family, is something that is extraordinary, not just in the contribution that Brontë made to her family and to her friends, to animals that she loved so dearly and cared for, but particularly what I spoke of earlier, Madam Speaker, her legacy. There is something really quite extraordinary that has come from this absolute tragedy. I acknowledge there has been such strong support for the community and a real rallying around the last two and a half years since the tragic death of Brontë and that there is change as a result of this. Shepherds Lookout, as Mr Cain flagged, is a special place. I know it is special for all members of Belconnen and indeed all community members of Belconnen. It really is that place to just be and to reflect. I think this would be a very fitting memorial, a very fitting way to recognise Brontë and her legacy and the tireless efforts of her family.

I certainly wholeheartedly support the petition and urge those responsible for the policy to perhaps take another look at this. I do think it would be a very fitting part of remembering Brontë, but also to provide that support for people who are there at that space, whether they knew Brontë or they did not. I think everyone deserves to understand her legacy and what this means for Canberrans. A simple bench, supported by Brontë's family, is a small way that we can do that.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Early Childhood Development, Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women) (10.13): I wanted to express again my condolences to Janine and Peter and friends of Brontë. I wanted to apologise for not getting back in touch with Janine and Peter about this bench and the memorial to Brontë. I hope you will accept my apology. I am very sorry.

I have been working with Mick Gentleman and his office about looking through some of the policies of government so that a memorial can be installed at Shepherds Lookout. It is a great place for comfort. I go there myself when I need some quiet reflection. Having a bench to sit on, rather than the rocky floor, would be a lovely place to spend some time and reflect on the lives, like Brontë's, and the contributions she made to our community, but just as a daughter, a loved daughter of Janine and Peter.

I just wanted to say that I commit myself absolutely, Janine and Peter, to continue this with you. And we will resolve this. Again, I am so sorry it took me so long. I want to acknowledge again Janine and Peter being here. Thank you, Peter for bringing in the petition and for all the petitioners as well. I know Tara and I will work very closely with you and have this overcome as quickly as we can. Thank you for giving me the chance to speak again on this today. And again, I am so sorry I did not catch up with you sooner.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.15): I just wanted to express my condolences too. I am really, really, pleased to see the petition come forward. I am hoping we resolve it soon. I cannot—I have a daughter, I cannot imagine. I honestly cannot imagine. I am really sorry, Janine and Peter, that you have to be in here talking about this again and hearing this. Yes, it is good to see this moving forward.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

High-risk weather season—preparation Ministerial statement

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Manager of Government Business, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (10.17): I rise today to provide the Assembly and Canberrans with an update on the extensive work that has been undertaken to prepare our community and our emergency services for the high-risk weather season.

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the ACT Emergency Services Agency and the ACT Parks and Conservation Service for their preparedness and readiness activities.

The storm season began on 1 October, and the bushfire season has been delayed until 1 November due to above average rainfall over the winter months and the high moisture content of grasslands and heavy forest fuels. Unless conditions warrant otherwise, the bushfire and storm seasons will end on 31 March 2023.

I encourage all Canberrans to take the necessary steps to prepare their homes and local community for any emergency threat. By being prepared, the Canberra community can assist our frontline personnel to minimise the effects of natural hazards and build a more resilient community.

As we move into the spring and summer period, it is expected that the ACT will continue to experience wetter than average conditions. This season will be the third

La Niña event in a row. This outlook means that the ACT is more likely to experience an increase in storm and flood incidents.

Grass growth due to increased rain also increases the risk of fast-moving grass fires this summer during the hot periods. Canberrans should continue to prepare by taking actions to reduce the bushfire risks around and within their property, and to review their survival plans.

The ESA's annual preparedness program ensures the ACT community is bushfire, flood and storm prepared. The ESA has undertaken both internal and external preparedness workshops with key stakeholders, including the delivery of both incident management and operational exercise programs to suitably qualified personnel.

Despite the ongoing challenges of the pandemic, the ESA has worked tirelessly to maintain skills and keep up to date on current safe practices through virtual and online training and refreshers.

The ESA, in collaboration with Emergency Management Australia, hosted the jurisdictional, annual, high-risk weather season briefing in September. This briefing provided a shared understanding across the emergency management spectrum of the risks and preparedness for the upcoming high-risk weather season.

The ESA continues to undertake significant planning to ensure its operational capability is able to be maintained in a COVID-restricted environment. ESA remains well equipped to enact business continuity plans, should the need arise, whilst ensuring that Canberrans are kept safe during the high-risk weather season.

The ACT government has led the way on utilising technology as part of our emergency service response to natural hazards, and the ACT government will continue to invest in state-of-the-art appliances, tools and equipment that keep our volunteers and members safe during frontline operations. The ESA has also begun work on the design, manufacture and supply of the first low or zero emission operational emergency-service heavy vehicles.

The ACT has contracted one light helicopter with specialist intelligence gathering capability and two medium helicopters to provide dedicated aerial firefighting services to the ACT for the high-risk weather season. The use of the SIG helicopter for the season will provide a valuable asset in early detection and confirmation of active fires. The high definition and infrared camera on board will allow for imagery to be streamed into the ESA incident management room in real time, providing critical fire line and hotspot information.

PCS, through its annual Bushfire Operations Plan, has proposed over 650 activities to manage fire fuels across the territory's parks and reserves. Fuel reduction activities include nearly 1,300 hectares of prescribed burns, including approximately 160 hectares of ecological burns and 20 hectares of cultural burns; approximately 450 kilometres of fire trail maintenance and upgrades; scheduling of over 100 kilometres and 200 hectares of chemical treatment of fuels, including fire trail verge vegetation control. There is over 1,000 hectares of physical fuel removal, close to 4,000 hectares of stock grazing across unleased territory land and over

4,400 hectares of grass slashing when and where required. These are strategic implementations.

A significant number of these activities were completed in the 2021-22 time line, representing 90 per cent of the total planned Bushfire Operations Plan activities, which is an outstanding result, given the difficulties to on-ground work implementation posed by COVID-19.

The ESA continues to increase community awareness through the Be Emergency Ready campaign initiative. As a result of the campaign in 2021-22, there were more than 37,000 visits to the Be Emergency Ready page on the ESA website. Some 4,000 emergency survival plans, fact sheets and other emergency preparedness material was downloaded from the ESA website. The 2022-23 community engagement campaign is building on this success to further support the community's awareness and understanding of preparedness actions.

The ESA continues to maintain strong cross-border relationships with its operational counterparts, as well as the services available nationally through the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council. The ESA has relationships across a variety of government levels, allowing emergency coordination not just across the ACT-New South Wales border but also to be enhanced between the ACT and Australian governments.

ACT Rural Fire Service members have worked with members from New South Wales Rural Fire Service Southern Tablelands to further strengthen working relationships and to develop a better understanding of operational command, control and communications. ACT Rural Fire Service has been heavily involved in the national level, as well as locally with surrounding New South Wales areas, to implement the Australian Fire Danger Rating System.

The new national system went live on 1 September 2022, providing increased community awareness of fire risk that is nationally consistent. ACT RFS has also worked collaboratively with surrounding New South Wales districts, providing valuable input towards the drafting of their new bushfire risk management plans, recognising threats that may originate from the ACT or cross over from the ACT to New South Wales.

The government will continue to make the investments needed to help keep Canberrans safe as our city grows. Our city is better prepared than ever before as a result of the hard work of our volunteers and staff across government, and I encourage the community to prepare as well. Together, we can all play our part in keeping Canberra safe during the 2022-23 high-risk weather season.

I present the paper to the Assembly:

ACT High-risk Weather Season Preparedness and Seasonal Outlook 2022-23—
Ministerial statement, 12 October 2022.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS DAVIDSON (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Veterans and Seniors) (10.25): I want to note that on Monday 3 January 2022 the ACT experienced a very significant supercell storm, with hail up to three centimetres in diameter. I want to make note of some of the work that was done in order to support our community through that event.

A community information hub was set up at the ACT Rural Fire Service Molonglo brigade station from 5 pm on Wednesday 5 January, and it opened every day from 11 am until 7 pm until Sunday 9 January. During that period of time, 600 members of the community attended in order to do things like seek information and charge devices—and we are not just talking about mobile phones and things like that, which are incredibly important to keep charged during an event like that; there was also someone who needed their electric wheelchair charged and we were able to support them with that. They disposed of rubbish—there were 1½ skips of spoiled food that had to be taken away. They picked up ice—we went through 752 bags of ice. We provided people with food and hygiene hampers, and there were also washers and dryers made available for people during that event.

Some of the people who needed to come into that community information hub also just needed a place to come and talk about what they were going through. So even if they did not necessarily need to specifically pick up ice or do some of those practical things, they still needed to maintain that human connection and talk through their experience.

There was also a lot of work done by Access Canberra, EPSDD and TCCS during and in the follow-up after the event. There were 870 calls to Access Canberra from 3 to 7 January. It was an enormous workload during an already very busy period. There were 1,023 calls for assistance to the SES. There were around 4,250 cases to be dealt with for EPSDD and TCCS for things like trees that had come down.

All of this additional workload has a really big impact on people in CSD, TCCS and EPSDD, and coming on the back of everything that we had experienced during COVID-19 and the bushfires of the summer of 2019-2020. They had an enormous amount of work to do, and a lot of staff were not able to take a break. That really does have an impact on people's wellbeing.

The ACT has a social recovery plan following major events like this. I tabled an update on our work on that social recovery plan in the September sitting period. I am hoping to speak about it during the November sitting period and have a conversation with our counterparts in the Assembly about how we go about creating an ACT social recovery framework that works for everyone.

CSD's legislated social recovery response includes things like managing and delivering social recovery services during and following an emergency. That includes things like emergency accommodation, food, water, clothing, emergency finance, and activating and operating evacuation centres. They also lead interjurisdictional and national liaison on social recovery for the ACT. I would like to thank all those staff in CSD who have been working so hard to make sure that we are as well prepared as we

possibly can be for the next storm season and for future fire seasons. I thank them also for the support that they offered to New South Wales during the floods earlier this year.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Mental health—Mental Health Month Ministerial statement

MS DAVIDSON (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Veterans and Seniors) (10.29): This week is recognised as Mental Health Week. Monday was World Mental Health Day, and the month of October is recognised as Mental Health Month in the ACT.

It is very important that we remember that someone who is experiencing mental health conditions has a very full life with connections throughout our community—recognising all of the things that we heard about Brontë Haskins this morning while her parents were in here—and make sure that we are looking at the whole person and how we can best support each other in our community.

The ACT government is proud to partner with Mental Health Community Coalition ACT to coordinate events throughout October to raise awareness and understanding of mental health and wellbeing, reduce mental health stigma and promote the mental health and wellbeing of the ACT community. I want to thank Mental Health Community Coalition for its work in supporting the ACT community and its coordination of these events, including the launch event on Saturday 8 October and the Mental Health & Wellbeing Expo on Sunday 9 October.

Mental Health Month is an opportunity to recognise the importance of mental health and wellbeing in every aspect of our community and as individuals. The theme of this year's Mental Health Month is Awareness, Belonging, and Connection. Awareness recognises the importance of being aware of our own mental health and wellbeing as well as that of our family, friends and colleagues, and that we all sometimes need support. Belonging recognises that by fostering a sense of belonging and feeling safe and supported, we can look out for one another and encourage seeking help and early intervention when we need it. Connection recognises that the mental health and wellbeing of our community, and in turn our own, is strengthened through connection with others in our wider school, work, family and community networks.

Mental Health Month and the theme of Awareness, Belonging and Connection provides us all with the opportunity to reflect on how we can best support others towards improved mental health and wellbeing, and how we can foster our own positive mental health and wellbeing.

This Mental Health Month, I would like to recognise the ACT mental health sector, who support the community towards better mental health and wellbeing, and that includes the advocacy of Janine Haskins through the Mental Health Advisory Council and through her advocacy to government on how we can improve services.

The ACT government is proud to work with community organisations and clinical services within the mental health sector and holds these partnerships in high esteem. The work done every day by our mental health sector, particularly throughout the COVID-19 pandemic period, has been vital to maintaining the community's mental health and wellbeing and continues to support us all as we experience the ongoing effects of the pandemic. On behalf of the ACT government, I would like to personally thank the whole of the ACT mental health sector for their work to support us all during this time and recognise that this work has been and continues to be invaluable to our community.

Something we have all learnt throughout the pandemic, as well as through our community's recovery from increasingly more common extreme weather events such as the 2020 hailstorm and 2022 supercell storm and the bushfires of the summer of 2019/2020, is the importance of working together. We have seen extraordinary acts of kindness across our community as people have offered a hand of friendship and support to those who have been hardest hit by environmental, health or economic disasters. These connections have strengthened our community and helped protect those most at risk.

So, too, is the strengthening effect of working together to support mental health and wellbeing. The ACT government continues to work with and support the mental health sector to improve mental health and wellbeing in the ACT community. This is being done through initiatives from the Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing and the ACT Health Directorate with assistance from the commonwealth government, such as the MindMap Youth Portal, a dedicated 24/7 online portal for children and young people to help them navigate Canberra's mental health system.

MindMap supports young people and their families or carers with a deeper awareness of the diversity of mental health conditions, as well as connection to services that can help. Importantly, it also provides connection to youth navigators who can hold the space for young people while they wait for their first appointment.

The Youth Aware of Mental Health Program, YAM, also continues to provide an evidence-based mental health and suicide prevention program designed to build resilience and mental health literacy in young people aged 14 to 16 years. I am very pleased to say that it has helped thousands of young people, around 2,700 year 9 students each year, who tell me they now have greater awareness of mental wellbeing and managing stress and anxiety and supporting their friends.

The Expanding Public Healthcare Services for Eating Disorders Project, which collaborates with clinical and community services to improve and expand eating disorder services in the ACT, has included the development of the Clinical Hub for Eating Disorders. The Clinical Hub is a centralised point of access to support people with an eating disorder across the full spectrum of care to engage in the best treatment for an eating disorder when and where they need it. It includes connection to the STRIDE, Short Term Recovery Intervention for Disordered Eating, program, and the Eating Disorder Program, as well as a parenting group for the families of people with eating disorders.

Work is underway to procure a service provider for an early intervention service for eating disorders and to build the ACT's first eating disorders residential centre. When I visited Queensland's eating disorders residential centre recently, participants in their treatment program told me that the sense of belonging and connection that comes with peer support and group therapy is an important part of their recovery.

Each of these initiatives is important for the continual improvement of the ACT community's mental health and wellbeing because they support the development of skills for better mental health and enhance the services that support our community when we most need it.

To ensure the improved mental health and wellbeing of our community, the ACT government recognises the impact of social determinants, such as housing, economic security, and living free from violence and abuse, on mental health. It is due to this understanding that the ACT government is currently undertaking projects such as a strategic analysis of accommodation and support needs of people with mental illness, and the development of collaborative and integrated approaches to assist people with both mental health and alcohol and other drugs disorders. Through undertaking projects such as these, the ACT government acknowledges that addressing the social determinants of health requires shared responsibility and collaborative action with partners beyond the health system.

A significant achievement nationally and in the ACT was the signing of the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement, the National Agreement, with the commonwealth and other state and territory governments. The National Agreement sets out a national, integrated, system-level framework for mental health and suicide prevention reform and commitments between the commonwealth, state and territory governments.

Alongside the National Agreement, the ACT government and commonwealth government has also negotiated the ACT Bilateral Schedule, detailing local priorities and investment. The ACT Bilateral Schedule includes over \$38 million of new co-funded investment in the ACT mental health sector, which will make a significant difference in the lives of people in the Canberra community. This investment includes: \$6.25 million over four years to work towards universal aftercare services to support individuals following a suicide attempt and/or suicidal crisis, including enhancing and expanding existing aftercare supports and improving system integration across local prevention services; \$1.91 million over four years to boost funding for the Early Intervention Service for Eating Disorders, which I mentioned earlier; \$8.09 million over four years to commission a youth at risk program to address identified system gaps and unmet need. This will also contribute to delivering a territory-wide multidisciplinary response for young people who have experienced trauma or are at risk of developing mental illness, and is informed by the ACT Health Directorate's scoping study of support needs for adolescents with trauma histories or complex needs; and \$9.03 million investment in child mental health and social and emotional wellbeing to improve access to multidisciplinary care, informed by local co-design and based on the National Kids Head to Health hub model.

These initiatives will continue to deliver on our commitment to improve integration across mental health services and other service systems, address gaps and unmet need, and prioritise investment in prevention and early intervention.

The mental health and wellbeing of our community is integral to ensuring the ACT is a healthy, happy and successful place to live, work and play. I would encourage anyone who is interested to participate in Mental Health Month activities such as the Mental Health Trail or organise a Wellbeing Priority Tea in their workplace. There is also a new event for 2022 especially for workers in the community-managed mental health sector—Networking for Change, an event presented by Mental Health Community Coalition in partnership with Canberra Innovation Network.

These Mental Health Month events are an additional way for us all to stay connected with each other and to promote and protect the mental health and wellbeing of our community together.

I present the following paper:

Mental Health Month—Ministerial statement, 12 October 2022.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Standing orders—suspension

Motion (by **Mr Gentleman**) agreed to, with the concurrence of an absolute majority:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent order of the day Assembly Business relating to the Government response to the Select Committee on Estimates 2022-2023 report on the Appropriation Bill 2022-2023 and the Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2022-2023 being called on and debated cognately with orders of the day Nos. 1 and 2, Executive Business, relating to the Appropriation Bill 2021-2022 and Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2021-2022, being called on forthwith.

Appropriation Bill 2022-2023

[Cognate bill:

Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2022-2023]

Cognate papers:

Estimates 2022-2023—Select Committee report

Estimates 2022-2023—Select Committee report—government response]

Debate resumed from 4 August 2022, on motion by **Mr Barr**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MADAM SPEAKER: I remind members that, in debating order of the day No 1, executive business, they may also address their remarks to executive business order of

the day No 2 and Assembly business order of the day No 2 relating to the government response to the Select Committee on Estimates 2022-2023 report on the inquiry into Appropriation Bill 2022-2023 and Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2022-2023.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Manager of Government Business, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (10.41), in reply: On behalf of the Treasurer, I close the in-principle debate and thank everybody for their contributions so far.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Detail stage

MADAM SPEAKER: Standing order 180 sets down the order in which this bill will be considered. That is, in the detail stage, any schedule expressing the services for which the appropriation is to be made must be considered before the clauses and, unless the Assembly otherwise orders, the schedules will be considered by proposed expenditure in the order shown. With the concurrence of the Assembly, I am proposing that the Assembly consider schedule 1 of each part, consisting of net cost of outputs, capital injection and payments on behalf of territory.

Is this the wish of the Assembly?

That being so, schedule 1 will be considered by each part, consisting of net cost of outputs, capital injection and payments on behalf of the territory, then the clauses and the title.

Schedule 1—Appropriations—Proposed expenditure.

ACT Local Hospital Network—Part 1.1

ACT Health Directorate—Part 1.2

Canberra Health Services—Part 1.3

MADAM SPEAKER: I understand that it is the wish of the Assembly to debate parts 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 together, being the ACT local hospital network, ACT Health Directorate and Canberra Health Services. That being the case, the question is that the proposed expenditure for parts 1.1, 1.2 and 1.3 be agreed to.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (10.43): I rise today to talk about Appropriation Bill 2022-23 as shadow health minister. The government's health budgets require particular scrutiny, given the underfunding and neglect of the portfolio dating to 2015-16, the first budget handed down by Chief Minister Barr and Greens leader Rattenbury.

Put simply, Canberra's health system is in crisis. It is timely, given the health minister has been given the job for more than three years, to look at her record and prepare a report card on the achievements. But, sadly, looking for achievements in health care is a lost cause.

Let me run through a few of the key statistics from this budget that paint a damning picture of our health system. Budget statements C reveals the number of patients forced to wait longer than clinically recommended for elective surgery. The target was 430 days. However, it turns out that we ended up at 1,364 days, which is longer than clinically recommended. This is almost 320 per cent over the minister's budget. Only 52 per cent, barely half of all patients, were seen in four hours or less in our emergency department, which is five per cent worse than last year.

The wait times have declined despite the minister's promise to increase this number to 70 per cent by October last year. The number of avoidable re-admissions to the hospital were more than double what the minister targeted. We could talk about staff absences due to occupational violence. This has also blown out, which is concerning when we learn that Canberra Health Services and ACT Health are forecasting a decrease of 124 FTE staff. Canberra's health system is on its knees.

During 2021-22 a total of 1,065 health staff reported mental stress to Canberra Health Services. This mental stress category had the biggest number of incidents in the RiskMan system. Mental stress comprised almost 40 per cent of all reported incidents. This means that every month approximately 90 of our hardworking, much-valued health workers are reporting that their work has caused them mental stress. That is a lot, 90.

This is no surprise when we read media reports of nurses and midwives protesting outside the Assembly asking and pleading for this government to take their concerns seriously; exhausted nurses wearing incontinence pads because they do not get toilet breaks; staff walking past patients in the corridors afraid of what they are going to see; and midwives fearing a catastrophic incident is imminent.

The results of the November 2020-21 culture survey reflected the dire state of our health system and how our health workers are suffering. More than in one in eight staff revealed that they want to leave in the next two years; two out of three staff have confessed that they do not trust management; and almost two-thirds of staff did not believe the organisation had made any significant improvements in the past 12 months.

The budget reveals that there are at least 18 projects that have been delayed by CHS and ACT Health. Furthermore, the government has failed to spend one-third of its capital works budget for health infrastructure over the past five years. This adds up to \$250 million that was not spent on health infrastructure. One significant example is, of course, the Canberra Hospital. This was promised for 2020, and now we know that it will be—or we hope—that it will be completed by 2024.

Former Labor Chief Minister Jon Stanhope and former Treasury official Khalid Ahmed have referred to a 150-bed shortfall compared to the 2011 capital asset plan. The supply of hospital beds has been significantly less than what was initially promised, despite Canberra's rapidly ageing population and the growing demands on our health system.

In recent estimates hearings we learned that the government has again failed to meet its own elective surgery waiting targets. During the 2021-22 financial year, the

median wait time for an initial appointment for paediatric surgery has almost tripled, from 62 days to 161. That is a really sorry state for a sick child—62 days to 161. Kids cannot wait that long. They grow so fast—and this is for an initial appointment.

It was also revealed during estimates that the government is cutting surgery numbers for the elective joint replacement program, from 500 down to 340 patients this year. A patient wrote to me about this program and said, “Yesterday I was informed by a booking nurse that the surgery I desperately need will not be available until 2023. My chronic pain and lack of mobility is causing my quality of life to be very poor. My mental health is rapidly deteriorating.”

Canberrans can only wonder if this patient, the sick children or one of the thousands of other overdue patients would have been seen on time if the Barr-Rattenbury government had provided those 150 extra hospital beds. Might they all have received the quality and timely health care that they deserve?

In the 2021-22 budget the health minister announced that the government would implement nurse-to-patient ratios, and this was negotiated with the Nursing and Midwifery Federation. Canberra Health Services declared that they were confident they would be fully compliant by June 2022, with phase 1. On this issue of nurse-to-patient ratios, like most others I examined in the health portfolio, the government has failed to meet its commitments. When asked in estimates, the health minister admitted that ratios had not been met. This means more stress and pressure on our hardworking nurses and health workers.

The health minister announced last week an \$8.7 million wellbeing fund to address staff burnout and stress. The nursing and midwives union rejected it as a bandaid solution, with Secretary Matthew Daniel adding: “I do not know how the government sees this will address the significant workforce issues, apart from possibly providing a slight feel-good factor”. Our health workers deserve better from this tired, incompetent government—so much better.

Before concluding, I should point out that the Canberra Hospital this year has passed its minimum requirements to be an accredited tertiary hospital. This was trumpeted by the health minister because four years ago the government failed the first round and just passed the second inspection.

The Canberra Hospital’s accreditation is a victory that belongs solely to our incredible, dedicated, hardworking hospital staff who give their all to care for our sick and vulnerable Canberrans. Hospital staff achieved this accreditation despite the government’s neglect and underfunding and despite this government’s repeated failures to properly resource our health and hospital system and to properly recognise and reward our nurses, midwives and other health staff.

I said at the outset that, after more than three years in the role, it is timely to shine a spotlight on our health system and see how our health minister has fared. The report card is not good. It is a fail for the minister and the government for its appalling neglect and constant underfunding of our health system. This government has let down its greatest asset, our nurses, doctors and our amazing health workers. And this government has also let down the Canberra community.

MR DAVIS (Brindabella) (10.52): As one would expect, I will probably provide a little bit more nuance in my contribution to the debate than members of the opposition—not only as the ACT Green spokesperson for health but also as somebody who, on a rough estimate, has spent close to 130 hours in TCH just in the last six weeks alone meeting and speaking with a number of doctors, nurses, midwives, AINs, hospital administrators, cleaners and even the hospitality staff at Zouki’s Cafe.

There is no denying that there are a number of opportunities in the health sector and in the health budget. I have been critical of areas where I think there is room for improvement, in particular, through my sponsorship of the petition from nurses, midwives and AINs, from the Australian Nursing Midwifery Federation. This has subsequently now formed an enquiry open for submissions in the Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing.

As Ms Castley rightly points out, there are a number of challenges—sector-wide and nationwide challenges—for our frontline healthcare workers, but no doubt there are some specific challenges related to our hospitals and our healthcare systems. It is important that we take a forensic look at those and provide recommendations. It would be my hope and expectation that, once that report is finalised, we might be able to see some funding that meets the unions’ and the workforces’ expectations in subsequent budgets.

I too have some reservations around the most recent announcement for supporting healthcare workers—the around \$8 million funding announcement. I do have some reservations about the work that has been done to consult with those frontline healthcare workers to ensure that that funding is meeting their expectations. There is, of course, going to be a challenge in how that funding is delivered in the coming weeks and months. I trust, along with Ms Castley, we will both be paying close attention to that.

Obviously what this budget does in large part is fund to the tune of tens of millions of dollars, nearly a hundred million dollars, the infrastructure needed for a growing city, and in particular the Canberra Hospital expansion project. I accept that it is a little bit of a challenge getting around the Canberra Hospital currently and getting around the precinct. Getting around a construction zone is never easy. But I am excited to see the cranes in the air, as I know many healthcare consumers and frontline healthcare workers are. I am excited to see the inevitable delivery of that hospital, which includes design and fit-out of a 64-bed inpatient unit; design work, costing and demolition for a new pathology building; design and costing for a new inpatient building; the demolition of Building 4; wayfinding upgrades; and staging and decanting planning for the next phases of the master plan. So there is an awful lot of work happening there.

One of the things that I perhaps would have like to have seen a little bit more of in the budget—and we will certainly be talking about it more in coming months—is a ‘prevention better than cure’ strategy. I, and I think most Canberrans, appreciate that ACT Health and Canberra Health Services have been focused on responding to the pandemic. There are some in our community, of course, who would like to pretend that the pandemic is over, but the pandemic is still very relevant and top of mind to all

decisions being made in healthcare settings like our hospital. But, of course, as we grow from the pandemic, I would like us thinking quite deliberately and purposefully with the community about how we keep people out of the hospital in the first place.

A lot of our commentary around health funding, where we are spending, where we are not spending, and some of the key numbers that we use to measure the success or failure of our health system, seems to be specifically around the hospital. I would like us thinking, with time, more about how we can keep people out of hospital, getting care in their community, delivering care for themselves, living healthy and active lives, to hopefully keep them out of healthcare settings in particular. It is one of the reasons that the ACT Greens are such big supporters of our nurse-led walk-in healthcare centres. I think it is a huge credit to the staff of our nurse-led walk-in healthcare centres here in the ACT that we do keep many, many, people out of hospital.

I have raised with the minister and her office some of my reservations around the current triaging process funded in the budget, which is to walk-in clinic-like services provided at the emergency room. I would really like us to keep a focus on keeping people out of the emergency room where we can and receiving health care in community from those nurse-led walk-in centres where we can.

I have received a lot of correspondence from my constituents in Tuggeranong about some of the challenges based on staffing over the short history of the Tuggeranong nurse-led walk-in centre. Of course, the investments made in the budget to recruit and retain a high-quality frontline healthcare workforce is really, really, important. I do think, though, that we have to prioritise one of those two, recruitment or retention. It would be great to do both well, but, if I could put my two cents in here, I really think the priority must be on retention.

I say that as somebody who has spent a lot of time talking to the high-quality staff we are already blessed to have in Canberra Health Services in ACT Health. We have some of the finest in the country. We should be really, really, proud of that, and we should be concerned that many of them, based on their unions' own reporting's, seem to be finding their way to the door. I am not sure that we could throw enough money at recruitment to replace the current talent that we may risk losing if we do not address some of these short- to medium-term challenges that that frontline healthcare workforce are identifying for us.

One of the other key things that I really want to mention in the budget—a bit of a niche one but one that I am really quite interested in as the Greens spokesperson for drug harm reduction—is the funding in the budget for the development and then delivery of the Drug Strategy Action Plan. The government has committed \$13 million in additional support. That is in addition to the \$20 million of investments that have been made over the last three years to improve drug and alcohol services for the community. I will be the first to tell you that it is not nearly enough. It is not nearly enough, based on the feedback that we have received from stakeholders during the inquiry work on Mr Pettersson's private members bill to decriminalise drug use. It is not nearly enough, based on the work the ACT Greens did prior to the last election to develop our policy initiatives, which were to double funding.

My hope and expectation—and enthusiasm—is to see that perhaps maybe by the end of this parliamentary term we will reach that Greens policy commitment of doubling funding for the alcohol and other drugs sector. The reason I flag that is of particular importance. As we know, the inevitable consequence of the hopeful passage of drug decriminalisation through this place will be an increased demand on those alcohol and other drug services. That is not a bad thing; that is a good thing. We should be excited about that and we should be preparing the sector and our community for that, because the inevitable consequence of removing the prejudice, the stigma and the discrimination away from the criminalisation of drug use will be that more people who have been suffering in our community for a very, very long time will hopefully come out of the shadows and be able to access services. The challenge for us is making sure that those services are there for them in community when they need them and that they are well funded by experts.

The funding in this budget goes a long way to doing that. I want to be the eternal optimist, but I do have some reservations about whether we have appropriated enough to potentially meet that demand. One of the challenges is that we really do not really know what the demand will be. We frankly do not have a full read of the picture of just how many in our community have been suffering for months, if not years, with their drug or alcohol addiction. Hopefully the policy shift that this Assembly is on track to make will draw a light on that problem. Our challenge is to make sure that those services are there.

In summary, the Greens support the appropriations for the health department in this budget. I think there is an opportunity in future budgets—once we have gone through this very ambitious building and infrastructure phase, particularly with the Canberra Hospital Expansion project and the inevitable planning for the north side hospital—for a body of work to be done. I am interested in participating in that body of work to ensure that, as a community, we are thinking very deliberately about keeping people out of hospital in the first place, keeping people out of healthcare settings in the first place and keeping our community from getting sick in the first place. This budget goes a long way to doing that, but I do think there are some opportunities for us in the future.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health) (11.02): I thank Ms Castley and Mr Davis for their contributions. In relation to Ms Castley's comments, I would note that, yes, I have been health minister for three years. In that time there have been three shadow ministers for health, and we are yet to find one who can read a budget paper or understand how the health system works. Knock yourself out, Ms Castley, in trying to achieve that goal; your predecessors did not.

I rise today very proudly to set out for members how the 2022-23 ACT budget delivers on our ambitious and comprehensive plan for our health system, with record investment delivering more services, more healthcare workers, a pipeline of world-class infrastructure and, of course, nation-leading community-based health services.

The initiatives in this budget deliver for Canberrans now and into the future. The ACT government has committed to investing \$2.6 billion across health portfolios in 2022-23 and \$10 billion across the four years of the forward estimates. Compared to the previous four years, that is an increase of \$1.5 billion. So it is a very significant investment. We are talking about around 30 per cent of the ACT budget being committed to the health portfolios.

In this particular budget, there is \$250 million of new recurrent funding initiatives and an additional \$130 million in capital investment. My remarks today will focus on the recurrent initiatives, where we talk a lot about our significant capital funding. This is, of course, a record investment and reflects the Barr government's plan to continue delivering world-class health care now, while delivering on our comprehensive plans and vision for the future of the health system, which—and I would reflect on Mr Davis's comments—have a heavy focus on health care closer to home, delivering more care in the community, keeping people out of hospital as much as possible and keeping them healthy and well, and empowering them to manage their own health care wherever possible. The government's commitments also reflect our commitment to invest in public health care and boost our nation-leading response to alcohol and other drug services, as well as continuing our response to COVID-19.

We know that COVID-19 has, of course, significantly impacted the nation's public hospital systems, with referred care driving increased waiting lists across the country. I recognise Ms Castley has drawn out some of those issues here in the ACT, but we are absolutely not unique in having that experience. Indeed we have been on the front foot in boosting our services throughout the pandemic, with that initial successful reboot program delivering record outcomes in 2020-21. This budget builds on those significant investments made over the last couple of budgets, responding to the impact of COVID-19 and building for the future.

Even with the significant barriers that have been faced over the last year with COVID waves, the ACT still delivered the second-highest number of elective surgeries ever, with 14,035 delivered. This is a slight difference to the budget papers, as new numbers come through. This is a credit to our territory-wide surgical services and the work we do with our private partners. This builds on the strong platform and the record 15,324 elective surgeries in the year before. Building on that, we are investing nearly \$30 million to deliver more elective surgeries over the coming three years, with the aim of meeting our election commitment of delivering 60,000 through to 2024-25.

The government has also invested to continue and expand the Good Life with osteoArthritis Denmark program, which was a commitment made at the last election that is delivering real results for Canberrans living with osteoarthritis, deferring and in some cases removing the need for significant surgeries.

Last year, the government provided funding to boost endoscopy services at Canberra Hospital in response to the impact of COVID-19 and in advance of our ongoing redevelopment work. This investment and the skill of our team at Canberra Health Services led to real improvements that will be built on over the coming two years, with a \$5.7 million injection to boost procedures and reduce waiting times, continuing our work to manage the impact of deferred care caused by the pandemic.

At Calvary Public Hospital, we are funding four more inpatient beds and intensive care capacity to meet demand on the north side, while also growing outpatient appointments. With part of the government's \$12.1 million investment to support our 10-year public maternity services plan, the government has also committed to expanding the Calvary Public Hospital Bruce special care nursery by three cots and establishing a new gestational diabetes mellitus service for the north of Canberra.

Specialist health services for children and young people are also being expanded, with the establishment of a neurodevelopmental and behavioural assessment and treatment service, focused investment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and the expansion of the Child at Risk Health Unit. As members would be aware, these initiatives speak to the government's aim to deliver better care when and where people need it. We are boosting surgeries, procedures and outpatient appointments, delivering more beds and cots to meet the demand we have seen grow due to COVID-19 and the growth in our community.

Mr Assistant Speaker Davis, you spoke about our workforce. We know that we cannot deliver these new and expanded services to the community without the skill, compassion and dedication of our health workers. This budget reflects our commitment to grow our workforce to lighten the load, to plan for the future and to invest in the culture and safety of our workforce. The government is boosting our acute allied health workforce across Canberra, with more than 40 full-time equivalent positions progressively rolled out across our emergency department, intensive care unit, and women, youth and children services over the next four years.

This \$16.3 million investment will deliver significant benefits for Canberrans, reducing length of stay, improving patient recovery and outcomes, and reducing readmissions. The first tranche of this investment will see more allied health professionals employed in our emergency department to drive better outcomes for those who need it most.

Reflecting on your comments, Mr Assistant Speaker, I would say that we need nurse-led care, both in our emergency department and in our fantastic walk-in centres. I was very pleased that Tuggeranong was able to reopen to full hours recently, and I am also extremely pleased that the inner north walk-in centre will reopen in November, which is fantastic for constituents in my own electorate. But we can, in fact, do both.

The investments in this budget will fund 100 new full-time equivalent staff in 2022-23, growing to more than 170 full-time equivalent staff in 2023-24. These investments, though, should not be seen in isolation. Our investments in this term of government have meant that, since the 2020-21 budget, we have committed funding to employ 400 more frontline healthcare staff. Members present will recall this was a key commitment to deliver more healthcare workers for our public system in the last election—more doctors, nurses, midwives and allied health professionals during this term of government. I am pleased to say that we have not only met this commitment but we will have met it two years ahead of schedule. We will see over 510 more frontline healthcare workers funded by the time of the 2024 election, so far, and we know that we still have subsequent budgets to come.

We on this side of the chamber know how important this commitment has been. In a challenging national and international environment for health care, investing in our workforce is key, and that is why the government has also committed to a \$7.2 million package to continue our work to embed a positive safety culture across our public health system—delivering on the next steps of the nurses and midwives Towards a Safer Culture strategy that was developed with the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation and was delivered in partnership with them and with our staff. We will deliver more occupational violence training and improve safety infrastructure across the Canberra Hospital campus with this funding. The significant expansion in funding for the Towards a Safer Culture strategy reflects our commitment to build on the success of the first phase and to deliver a better and safer workplace for our dedicated staff.

Reflecting on the subsequent post-budget announcement, Mr Assistant Speaker, again, I respect your views about this matter, but I can assure you that this fund was and will be co-designed with staff. That is why we had some fantastic nurses standing up with us in relation to the announcement and talking about the work they have been doing on the working group that engages staff in co-designing these initiatives, both territory wide and at the individual team level, to ensure that that funding is delivering exactly what the staff prioritise and what they say they need.

Of course, the government has been delivering a comprehensive plan for the future of our health system. A key commitment and significant reform is the implementation of the digital health record. The government is ensuring that our frontline workforce will be best placed to take advantage of the digital health record, with more than \$51 million committed through this budget.

“Go live” on this significant project is rapidly approaching. In fact, it is 30 days—one month—away today. This will deliver improved safety, improved care and better outcomes for Canberrans. It is a huge project and it will transform the way care is provided. This funding ensures that we have skilled super users and training for all of our staff completed as part of the “go live”, in readiness for this digital innovation.

The government has also made a down payment on the future of our health system with a \$6 million investment to boost our core regulatory planning and governance capabilities. This investment will boost our system for years to come, with funding to plan our future workforce to ensure we have the right mix being trained, recruited and retained; implement a whole-of-system clinical system governance framework to deliver a clinically excellent system that is continually improving its service delivery; enhance our regulation of healthcare facilities to ensure Canberrans are receiving the best care in the safest environments, and ensuring that, as our public health system continues to grow in scope, scale and complexity, the government is receiving expert independent advice and analysis, with the establishment of a local hospital network council.

A small investment in the scheme of things but one that I was very pleased to make was the \$260,000 that has been set aside to support the development of the ACT Disability Health Strategy and its corresponding first action plan. This is a key commitment that I was proud to make during the last election campaign, and I look forward to continuing to work with those living with a disability, their families and

carers on co-designing this with the government, to set the ACT public health system up as an exemplar for other services to follow. I know that we have work to do in that space.

The government is also continuing to support better care in the community through targeted investments with our community partners. This budget delivers ongoing support for Palliative Care ACT's Leo's Place, following the successful piloting of this program through the 2020-21 budget and delivering on an election commitment.

We are also building a new public hydrotherapy pool at the Tuggeranong Lakeside Leisure Centre, to be open by mid-2024, with an \$8.5 million allocation to deliver this project and provide more options for our community partners, including Arthritis ACT. We promised we would build it and we are delivering on that promise.

The Barr government also promised to significantly reduce the cost of medical and surgical abortions in the lead-up to the 2020 election. I was proud to stand with the Deputy Chief Minister and announce that the government was doing that and again leading the nation with a \$4.6 million investment. Abortions are health care. We know this and, under a Barr government, we will continue to lead the way in ensuring that women's rights are protected and expanded upon.

As members know, primary care is principally a commonwealth government responsibility. However, we all know that over the past decade it has been gutted by the federal Liberal government, and primary care is now in crisis. I do not use that word lightly. This is not new, and it is not a surprise to Canberrans, who know you cannot trust the Liberal Party with public health care. While it is a welcome change to have an Albanese Labor government, which has committed to investing to fix the mess left by the former Liberal government, the ACT government has also continued our investment to provide care in the community.

To support better care, we are delivering on our election commitment to employ an addition five nurse practitioners for our walk-in centres, meaning that by 2024 a nurse practitioner will be on every shift at every walk-in centre, delivering more care closer to home when Canberrans need it.

In addition to the nurse practitioners in our walk-in centres, the government is also investing to protect and support the most vulnerable in our community, with just over \$3.4 million committed to supporting Directions Health, Junction Youth Health Service and Companion House to continue delivering their successful primary care programs. These programs represent a key aim of this government—ensuring that everyone is able to access the care and services they need by delivering innovative and targeted services to some of the most vulnerable community members, including refugees and asylum seekers, young people who are at risk, people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and people with alcohol and other drug dependency issues.

Finally, the government has continued to build on our nation-leading alcohol and drug sector, with investments to boost services now and for the future. We make these investments because we know that addiction is a health issue. We also know that, in partnership with our excellent community sector, we can change the opportunities for

some of those who are most in need in our community to access support and change their lives.

Since the 2019-20 budget, the ACT government has invested more than \$32 million in new harm minimisation initiatives, including more than \$13 million in new initiatives in this year's budget. The government is continuing our partnership with Ted Noffs, CatholicCare and Winnunga Nimmityjah to redevelop the Watson health precinct, with \$3 million allocated to support site preparation, detailed design and commissioning work, as well as staff, in preparation for a new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residential rehabilitation facility. This was a key commitment and we are delivering on it.

The government is also working to transition to a residential service at the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm, with funding set aside to commence this work. And we are boosting funding for residential rehabilitation services more broadly—expanding targeted treatment for methamphetamine dependants and funding a new support service for families, carers and children of people who use drugs. These investments build on our track record of investment to support our community partners to reduce harm through evidence-based programs and policies.

The government set out with an ambitious and comprehensive health platform at the start of this term. We are the only ones with a plan that responds to the challenges that COVID-19 presents to our health system. We are the only ones with a plan for our future infrastructure requirements. We are the only ones with a plan that ensures that the most vulnerable in our community are able to access care, and we are the only ones with a plan that supports our healthcare workers to deliver, with state-of-the-art facilities, safe and supportive workplaces and more services closer to home for Canberrans.

Through this budget the Barr government is continuing to deliver on our plan, with record investments, new services, more nurses, more doctors, more midwives and more allied health professionals, and the support that they need. I commend this budget to the Assembly.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (11.18): I rise as the shadow minister for mental health. I note that I do so, as the minister explained this morning, in the middle of mental health month and mental health week, and in the shadow of World Mental Health Day, which occurred only a couple of days ago.

One of the themes of World Mental Health Day is that mental health matters. Let me say that mental health matters irrespective of whether we are in a special month, week or day. What we see in this budget is a budget that is large on announceables and low on the strategic vision that we need to make sure we have a mental health system that works.

There are deep systemic issues in the ACT's mental health system that will not be solved by this budget. They will not be solved by adding more complexity, more small programs and neglecting the engagement with the mental health sector and people with lived and living experience of mental health, who I have been hearing about during the months since I was appointed to this role.

There is no evidence in this budget that the mental health system will be improved in the wake of a once-in-a-lifetime shock to our community. Over the last 900-odd days of lockdowns and fear, our health system and our mental health system have been tested and stretched like never before. It has been held together by mental health workers, by health workers, who have done their utmost to make sure we all get through this, but there is no doubting the level of impact that the pandemic has had on all of us, on our system and on our workers.

We have endured lockdowns. We did get vaccinated. We did come together as a community to protect each other from a disease which could have taken far more than it did. But the past 2½ years have left our mental health system at breaking point.

We must recognise the efforts of our mental health workers and everyone who makes an effort to make sure that the mental health of people in our community is supported—not just the mental health services but the wraparound supports that are so vital in keeping people well mentally, in supporting us when we are struggling.

I want to recognise at this point that a large part of the government's budget has in fact been funded and driven by the commonwealth government and, very specifically, by the vision of the former Minister for Health and the former federal minister for mental health, former ministers Hunt and Coleman.

That federal Liberal government set about establishing a strategic way forward, funding that strategic way forward, and working with the ACT government to bring it along. The difference between that government and this particular budget is stark. I know that that federal government invested in its commitments, and we can see that today in this budget. The critical step now will be execution. What I have been hearing from the mental health community, from those people who are working in mental health every day, and from those people experiencing mental health issues, is that they feel they have been locked out. They have been ignored; they have been walked away from.

While I was a bureaucrat in the public service, I used to say that one of my key roles was to make politicians' good ideas work in the real world. But no-one can do that without listening to those on the ground who make it happen. When I speak to constituents, to stakeholders who consistently tell me that they have not been heard, it tells me that this budget is not the budget that they asked for.

We do face deep systemic issues. We face widening cracks in our mental health system. There are too many services that have had to be constrained to very strict conditions before people can access them. There are too many services that do not have the resources to respond to the need in the community. There are too many services that have become dysfunctional under this government, and it would be remiss of me not to mention the crisis faced at the Dhulwa centre.

It is time that we see a government that is willing to put in the effort and come up with a strategic vision that will address these issues, that will make sure nurses feel safe to work and patients feel that the system is looking after them. Unfortunately, this is not that budget.

MS DAVIDSON (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Veterans and Seniors) (11.24): The budget priorities for mental health in this budget are aligned with the vision of the ACT’s Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing—a kind, connected and informed community working together to promote and protect the mental health and wellbeing of all. The investments that we are making in this budget demonstrate the value of our Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing in being able to build upon their years of research and analysis and strong working relationships across ACT government, with commonwealth Health and with our community sector partners.

The need for mental health services has been increasing for years in the ACT, as it has across Australia. COVID-19 brought additional challenges, with social isolation and economic impacts. All of this built upon the existential anxiety around our changing climate and growing levels of social and economic inequality, layer upon layer. These mental wellbeing impacts will be felt by our community long after the virus itself has ceased to be a threat.

COVID-19 also brought additional pressures to bear on our mental health workforce. Nurses, doctors and clinicians, allied health professionals, and the food service and security and administrative staff across our health services have all had to deal with more than two years of relentless extra workload, wearing uncomfortable PPE and responding with compassion to our community in a time of need. It is great to see CHS consulting with the workforce on how we can better support their mental wellbeing, with the \$8.75 million investment in the Health Workforce Wellbeing and Recovery Fund. Our healthcare workers are the best experts in knowing what is most useful to them, and initiatives that are co-designed with them are the right way to provide that much-needed support.

For some services in particular, such as Dhulwa forensic mental health service, there have been specific work health and safety issues that needed to be addressed urgently. I look forward to receiving the report from the independently chaired inquiry into Dhulwa in the first week of November, in particular the draft implementation plan, and discussing next steps and actions with Canberra Health Services and unions, including the ANMF.

One of the biggest pressures on our health system has been the increased volume of demand, combined with increased acuity of people in need of care. This is why our budget investments this year continue to focus on earlier intervention and delivery of services in the community closer to where people live.

PACER—the police, ambulance, clinician and early response team—has demonstrated effectiveness in reducing the need for a person in mental health crisis to go to the emergency department. This is important for more effective, long-term mental health outcomes, because it keeps the person connected to services that can help them in the community. Emergency departments, with their bright lights and noise, are not a great place to be for anyone, but especially for someone in a mental health crisis. The success of the first PACER team prompted investment in a trial of a second PACER team. This has now been extended to a full-year trial of the second

team, as well as an evaluation—an important element of any trial process. This funding, at \$1.997 million, expands PACER to two teams, seven days a week, serving the whole of Canberra.

The success shown by the Way Back program, delivered by Woden Community Service, has also resulted in the investment of \$3.533 million over four years to expand the program to support more people. Way Back provides prevention support for people experiencing suicidal ideation and distress, as well as aftercare. There is also funding in this initiative to further enhance the postvention support offered through coronial counselling delivered by Relationships Australia.

We want to reduce the number of people presenting to hospital with mental health by increasing the accessibility of appropriate mental health supports in the community. That is why this budget includes \$9.384 million over four years for services that reduce people's need for presentations to hospital, such as ongoing funding for the home assessment acute response team—HAART—including a specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander position, ongoing support for the homeless outreach team after the success of their recent 12-month pilot program, and a new adult dialectical behaviour therapy program.

Dialectical behaviour therapy is a skills-based approach, alongside both physical and meditative exercises, specifically addressing self-image, impulsive behaviours, mood instability and poor relationships. To address these areas, DBT tries to build behavioural skill in mindfulness, distress tolerance, emotional regulation and interpersonal effectiveness. It is proven to be effective in treating borderline personality disorder and complex PTSD, suicidality and self-harm behaviours.

Support for expanded access to dialectical behaviour therapy is also included in this year's budget initiative, totalling \$14.462 million over four years, to strengthen mental health support for families and young children, with the establishment of a mother-infant DBT program. This initiative also includes universal perinatal mental health screening and data collection—something I have discussed in this place previously, as part of the bilateral agreement with the commonwealth government on mental health and suicide prevention, which was signed in late March this year, establishing a multidisciplinary early intervention service to address young people at risk of developing mental health concerns, as part of that bilateral agreement, and expansion of the childhood early intervention team to Gungahlin Child and Family Centre.

I would particularly like to thank the Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing and ACT Health for their work to ensure that what was delivered in that bilateral was driven by the years of ACT research and advocacy of Canberrans with lived experience, rather than just repeating the same investments made by other jurisdictions without understanding the specifics of the ACT mental health sector, including our hardworking NGO sector.

Continuing our efforts to increase services addressing youth mental health, this budget also includes \$8.1 million over four years for a youth-at-risk trauma service, based on years of detailed research and analysis by the Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing. The *2020 Review of children and young people in the ACT*, the children and young

people in the missing middle report of 2022, the Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs inquiry into youth mental health in the ACT of 2020, and the *Review of the service system and implementation requirements for raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility in the ACT* final report of 2021 detailed the importance of earlier support, the need to make services more accessible and integrated, and the current gaps in services for the 12- to 18-year-old age group in the ACT.

The six-month scoping project undertaken in 2021 provided detailed advice on an evidence-based response to meet the needs of young people identified in these reports. This scoping work included an environmental scan, evidence review and broad consultation across more than 70 ACT agencies.

In response, ACT government will develop a youth-at-risk program to deliver a territory-wide, multidisciplinary response to trauma in young people at risk of developing and during mental illness. The service will support young people facing different challenges within our community as early as possible to ensure they are provided with the skills, care and support required to enable them to grow, learn and lead a meaningful and fulfilling life. A key element of this program is an evidence-guided therapeutic approach that delivers integrated care through a new adolescent trauma service. The service will build sector partnerships and enhance flexible outreach. It will be delivered by multidisciplinary clinicians and engagement teams in both government and non-government agencies, in partnership with young people, carers and families.

These budget initiatives build on investments made in prevention, early intervention and the delivery of care in the community closer to where people live in past budgets, as well as COVID-19 support packages and the bilateral agreement with the commonwealth government. Those investments include the ongoing work to deliver the ACT's first eating disorder residential centre and early intervention service for eating disorders, and engaging Thirrili, an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation to provide a new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention, intervention, postvention and aftercare program.

There is more to do, particularly in areas such as mental health supported accommodation, and understanding the mental health and wellbeing needs of our First Nations community. I hope to see further investment in areas such as these in future budgets.

I would also like specifically to address the work that has been done by our justice health team to address the needs of people in the Alexander Maconochie Centre and in Bimberi Youth Justice Centre. If we are to achieve our goals of reducing recidivism and the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our justice system, health services are an important part of our justice reinvestment plan.

Delivering health services within the physical constraints of the Hume Health Centre at the AMC is not easy. Care is often shared across justice health services, Winnunga and Canberra Health Services outside the AMC, including sharing clinical information and transition between services. Corrections officers also have an important role in the wellbeing of people in the AMC. These challenges increased

during COVID-19 public health restrictions and the associated workforce impacts on healthcare workers and corrections officers in quarantine or COVID-19 isolation.

Despite these challenges, our justice health team and Winnunga were able to manage COVID-19 outbreaks within the AMC to protect the health of people at particularly high risk from this virus. We also saw the continued implementation of actions from the Disability Justice Strategy, continuing the work of the previous minister with responsibility for justice health, Shane Rattenbury.

This budget continues our commitment to implementing the recommendations of the 2016 Moss inquiry through increased funding of \$9.4 million over four years for the delivery of Winnunga services at the AMC. This includes funding for nurses, GPs, psychologists and administrative support.

As with our mental health work, there is more to do in justice health. I look forward to being able to provide updates to the Assembly on the justice health strategy that is currently being developed, as well as celebrating the successful rollout of the digital health record in the AMC this November. The use of the digital health record by justice health, Winnunga and CHS will make the sharing of important clinical information easier, while still protecting patient privacy. I commend this budget to the Assembly.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Education Directorate—Part 1.4.

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (11.35): I would like to start by offering my thanks and respect to our teachers and frontline workers in the ACT education system. I think we would all agree that they do an incredible job, working all sorts of hours in all manner of circumstances, and staying focused day after day to deliver for the children of our community.

Since taking this portfolio, I have been in touch with many of our educators and also with the Education Union. I have been encouraged by the common ground that we have struck. We share their view that the profession and the system are not getting enough support. We acknowledge the work that they do. We recognise the challenges that they face. We value their vital role in one of the most important parts of territory services. To our teachers, I say thank you.

Given that, it is notable that the education portion of this budget does not give them the support or answers they need. In fact, it is notable for the questions it does not answer. For example, one of the key topics raised by teachers and parents throughout the year was that of class sizes. The Education Union raised it in their report of last year entitled *Under-staffed, under-resourced, under-appreciated: The teacher shortage and its impact on our schools*. What the AEU said was:

When a school cannot source a relief teacher, it turns to ‘splitting’ or ‘collapsing’ the class—that is, distributing the students among other classes, or at worst, having one teacher run a class for two class groups of students.

Ninety per cent of principals and deputy principals who responded to the survey said that split, collapsed or cancelled classes negatively impact their staff. When a class is split or collapsed, class sizes can reach over 50 students. Schools are splitting or collapsing classes regularly, with 78 per cent of respondents saying that this occurs once a week or more, on average. For some schools it is an everyday occurrence, with 12 per cent of respondents saying that their school splits or collapses classes at least one class every day in an average week. This problem is getting worse. More than 80 per cent of respondents say that split or cancelled classes are more of an issue this year than in the past.

Naturally, we expected this topic to form part of the government's position in the budget, but it did not appear to do so, so we inquired on this topic. During estimates we asked a straight-bat question on just how many classes were being combined and how often teachers were actually facing the sorts of class sizes noted in the union's report. I must say that I was a little surprised that the minister was not prepared with an answer during those hearings. We put the question on notice, knowing that the directorate should be able to provide a response. The answer that we got was, "Class size information is not collected centrally." I repeat: "Class size information is not collected centrally."

That directorate, and therefore the minister, do not know what the extent of the problem is. How can you possibly provide a solution to the class size problem, then? It begs a further question: why is it not collected centrally? How can they deal with a problem that, according to 90 per cent of teachers, negatively affects staff, where 78 per cent say it occurs once a week or more and 12 per cent say it happens every day, and they do not even collect that information? How can this information not be collected, when teachers report having to teach classes of over 50, and 80 per cent say the problem is real and getting worse?

As I said, it is fundamental to understanding the problem and crucial in providing a solution that does not burn out teachers and disadvantage students. This is a failure of governance and highlights an appalling lack of support from the government of the territory. That is but one example that I have given you there, Mr Assistant Speaker.

Another troubling aspect of the management of our schools came to light when parents, students and teachers reported the loss of class spaces, and the fact that libraries and specialist teaching spaces were being lost. This led to reports of students being taught in hallways, in staffrooms or in rooms that used to be school libraries. Again, we asked a straight question as to what extent this problem was occurring. We asked how often it happened, which school cohorts were affected and how long students had been moved into these communal spaces instead of dedicated classrooms.

Here is the answer: "The directorate does not maintain a register of the use of communal multi-use spaces." The response goes on to say that this is due to the fact that these arrangements are temporary, but without the data and information how can they know that? We know that many of these ad hoc classrooms are anything but temporary. It is certainly not the answer that teachers and parents need and deserve. It seems that, once again, the minister does not know the answer.

In another question, about new and expanded schools, we asked: “When can residents of Canberra’s north expect the much-needed expansion of college capacity?” Again, it was a simple question. The answer was: “The government is undertaking master planning and preliminary design work during 2022-23 which will inform the time frame for delivery.” This relates to the school in Gungahlin that is already over capacity. That means that not only does the government not know when it will actually be able to deliver extra capacity for schools but it does not know when it will have a time frame for delivery. The current work will inform the development of a time frame. This is capacity that is needed right now. Gungahlin P&C have said that the college is already full.

When we raised teacher shortages last year, we asked repeatedly how many vacancies there were for schoolteachers in the ACT. Repeatedly, the minister said there was only one vacancy. This went through estimates, it went through the budget debate and it went through question time, with the minister digging in and saying, “No, there is only one vacancy for teachers in schools.” I bring to members’ attention to the following advertisement, currently placed on Seek. This advertisement states:

The ACT Education Directorate is anticipating 300 permanent vacancies for 2023.

Members, we have gone from only one vacancy—“All fine; nothing to see here,” from the minister, repeatedly, in question time—to the directorate now advertising for 300 vacancies. This shows that the minister either misled the Assembly or she was wildly and wilfully ill-informed.

Lastly, I want to touch briefly on a matter relating to early childhood education. It was interesting, to say the least, to note the move by the New South Wales and Victorian governments to extend the government-provided period for early childhood education. For them, this is a very significant reform, totalling many billions, between those two states. It was more interesting to discover that, even though we are an island within New South Wales, the minister was not involved in those discussions. That means that for the ACT it is still uncertain, but I look forward to hearing from the minister, now that she is aware, what the ACT response will be.

I will finish by repeating my support for those most affected by these issues—our teachers, our students and their parents. Our teachers do an amazing job in very difficult circumstances, and they have our wholehearted support, but I will not be supporting a government that does not support them. It does not have the information; it does not have the plans to address the chronic problems that we see. This area of government, like so many others, is suffering from a lack of funding for frontline services, and the cost of that is clearly evident in schools across Canberra. We will not be supporting this government in providing too little funding—and we know that that is what is happening—too few resources and way too little respect for our teachers and our schools.

MS ORR (Yerrabi) (11.45): The latest available data suggests that there are currently more than 46,500 students in ACT public schools. To support these students, the 2022-23 budget includes \$1.6 billion of overall investment in education. That is 23 per cent of the total spend and second only to the health budget.

Before noting and speaking on what is to come, I think it is important to outline the important work which has been supporting our students and their families through the ACT government's ongoing pandemic response. Indeed, I am proud to say that to ensure continuity of learning for our young people almost 1,000 public school students were provided with internet services during the COVID-19 remote learning period. More than 25 schools have received new external shade structures to provide external learning facilities, and more than 500 three-year-olds experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage have been referred into the quality early childhood education for three-year-olds initiative. These are all critical initiatives which will continue to positively impact children and families across the ACT, and I commend the minister and the ACT government and public servants involved in their implementation.

Last census, the ABS reaffirmed that the ACT has had the fastest growing population of any jurisdiction over the last 10 years, with an increase of 23 per cent between 2011 and 2021. In fact, the top three suburbs with the largest growth in the ACT include Bonner, Moncrieff and Casey, all of which fall within my electorate of Yerrabi. I am delighted to advise that the children, students and families of Yerrabi, and their city more broadly, can expect even more investments in education over the next few years, from this budget, to support our growing need.

For instance, this budget provides \$240 million in additional funding over four years to support education and skills, including investments in initiatives such as additional support to ensure continued access to 15 hours per week, 600 hours per year, of free public preschool education for all four-year-old children living in Canberra; extending and refreshing Study Canberra to focus on partnering with our tertiary education institutions to help the recovery of this sector; and laptop devices for all teachers, casual relief teachers and administrative staff based in ACT public schools. I am particularly excited about this one. As members of this place will know, I previously moved to prioritise digital access and inclusion through the Libraries ACT Imagine 2030 co-design process, and it is very encouraging to see that digital access and inclusion continue to be prioritised in our public education system.

As I mentioned earlier, Yerrabi is indeed going to benefit from this budget, due in no small part to our exceptional rate of population growth and meeting that need. This includes \$165 million in additional funding for new and expanded schools across Yerrabi, such as the additional funding for the construction of a new high school in Taylor, providing 800 places for students, and the expansion of the Margaret Hendry School, delivering 600 more places. Indeed, there will be \$700 million invested in the schools' infrastructure over five years, with many investments set to be finalised between 2025 and 2026, all building on what we have already seen to date, such as the opening of Throsby School, the completion of the Franklin School expansion, the Amaroo School expansion and the Gold Creek senior campus expansion.

In 2023, we can expect to see the completion of the Margaret Hendry School expansion, featuring learning spaces for general learning settings; specialist learning settings, including food technology, science and technology, engineering, art, and maths; and small group programs. In 2024, we will see the east Gungahlin and the Taylor high schools opening, with Taylor offering general and specialist learning

areas, small group programs, a library and interactive learning centre, and sport and recreation spaces for students and the community, which will include a double gymnasium hall, performing arts spaces and hard courts.

I am also very encouraged to see the master planning and preliminary design works for a second public college in the Gungahlin area—something that, through a very good and responsive planning process, will deliver for our community and for our growing need within the college system. As I said, as the fastest growing electorate in the fastest growing state or territory in this country, Yerrabi has seen and will continue to see a great deal of investment in the education space because this government is committed to every student in the ACT having access to quality public education. I welcome this commitment and the investments that are coming forward to support it. I commend this section of the budget to the Assembly.

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi) (11.50): I rise today to commend the ongoing investment in education across my electorate of Yerrabi. Gungahlin is one of the fastest growing regions in the country and it is also home to the largest number of young Canberrans. In Canberra, the suburbs of Bonner, Forde and Amaroo are home to the highest proportion of households with children. Roughly 65 per cent of households in these suburbs have children, well above the national average.

Naturally, parents want to raise their children in an area with good schools, efficient public transport and quality community facilities. This is what makes Gungahlin so appealing for so many. To support this fast rate of population growth, continued strong investment in our local education system is essential. In this year's budget, the ACT government has announced important initiatives that will help to boost, support and grow our local schools.

This year's budget provides funding for a new high school in Taylor, which will cater for 800 students. This new high school will offer general and specialist learning areas, small group programs, a library and an interactive learning centre. The new high school will offer sport and recreation spaces for students that can also be used by the community. These facilities will include a double gymnasium, a hall, performing arts spaces and hard courts. I am excited to see this work completed and I look forward to the new school opening.

On top of this commitment, funding has been provided for the Margaret Hendry School expansion, which will allow for 600 extra students. This expansion will feature specialist learning settings, including food technology, science and technology, engineering, art, and maths, as well as general learning settings. An additional 140 parking spaces will also be delivered, which will be very well received. The project is due to be completed in 2023, and I am excited to see even more students experience the innovative teaching practices in place at the school. Having previously toured the school, I will personally attest that Margaret Hendry School is one of the most innovative schools in the ACT.

Importantly for the Gungahlin community, planning and design work will soon commence for a second college in Gungahlin. This is a much-needed addition for our community. I have heard clearly from the community for many years a desire for a second public college, due to ongoing capacity issues at Gungahlin College. This will

provide a long-term solution to those issues, and I hope that this will address those community concerns.

These investments are essential for our growing community. Strong investment in our public education system is a core priority for this government. The Gungahlin school upgrades are part of a wider strategy that sees an additional \$240 million being invested across the ACT in our public school system. This investment will create additional school places for almost 5,000 children throughout Canberra. Altogether, the ACT government has allocated roughly \$1.7 billion for education and skills in this year's budget. I look forward to the delivery of these upgrades and new schools over the coming years, and I know the community does as well. Thank you.

MR DAVIS (Brindabella) (11.53): On behalf of the ACT Greens, I rise to support the Appropriation Bill as it pertains to education. The Greens will always prioritise public schools, public school students, public school parents and public school educators. It has been a privilege, in my almost two years of service in this Assembly, to have a very close working relationship with teachers, through their union, the Australian Education Union, and I take this opportunity to thank them for their ongoing support, healthy critique and wisdom as I undertake my responsibilities as my party's spokesperson for education.

Labor and the Greens do share a belief that public education is one of the most important investments in the public good that a government can make. One recent report from the OECD, for example, found that the societal benefits of early childhood education, and public education more broadly, included reduced healthcare costs, reduced expenditure on social safety nets, increased rates of volunteerism, increased feelings of safety and trust, and reduced costs in our criminal justice system.

That last one seems especially relevant in light of recent criticism in this chamber of the Greens' approach to reducing crime and recidivism through justice reinvestment. The OECD report also underlined how important public education, and particularly good early childhood education, is to improving equity. It said:

The impact of early childhood education on disadvantaged children has been demonstrated in a number of longitudinal studies. The longest running study started in the 1960s. The Perry Preschool Study involved children from underprivileged families, one group of them who received two years of preschool education while the control group did not.

Taking into account half a dozen different measures, including the rate of high school graduation, the income level and the rates of arrest, the kids who had been to preschool did better than the kids who had not. The societal benefit to cost ratio by the time those kids hit 40 was running at 16 to one. In other words, public education yields whole-of-society benefits, not just benefits to individuals. People who do not have kids benefit from this kind of investment just as much as people who do.

Labor and the Greens do sometimes differ on the detail of how this vital investment in public education is best delivered, but that is a healthy argument, I think, and not a destructive one. We agree on the destination, which is a well-funded, smartly funded public education system from early childhood onwards, but there are many different routes to get there, and choosing the right one can require some robust debate.

The education budget for the coming year includes welcome commitments to expanding the future of education equity fund, modernising and expanding Majura Primary School, putting in three new modular learning centres and re-using eight existing ones, and building a new primary school in Whitlam, a new high school in Taylor, an expanded Margaret Hendry School and another secondary college in Gungahlin.

This adds up to nine major school infrastructure projects on the way and another five to begin over the next four years. All of this is great, and undoubtedly necessary, but of course our education budget is not just about having enough space for more kids; nor is it about a lot of very nice equipment and facilities.

I will digress just for a moment to note that one of our Greens team here in the Assembly staff, just a few months ago, did help transfer a horse float load of cast-off furniture from Radford College to Melba Copland Secondary School. What lavishly-funded Radford was casually throwing away, cash-strapped Melba Copland was eager to receive. That says a lot about the inequalities in our federal education funding model, but it is telling, nonetheless.

I want to talk a little bit about some of the upcoming challenges that we see, particularly things that I have learnt through my service on the education and community inclusion committee and our recently concluded inquiry into school infrastructure and maintenance. At the territory level, apart from lobbying for a more equity-based distribution of federal public money towards education, we do need, as part of future budget decisions, to make sure that we are spending our own education budget in ways that will also see a second kind of return on investment, to top off the one I just talked about.

This is a difficult conversation but one I think we need to start now. While we are building a lot of very nice new schools in areas of growth, many of the school buildings in our inner suburbs, the inner north and inner south, are now showing their age, in terms of their energy efficiency, as just one example. Each one needs to be properly assessed as to whether renovation or an entire knockdown rebuild would be the best approach and yield the best return on investment for ACT ratepayers.

The up-front cost of this is high, I understand, but the savings on energy and the enhancement of learning environments for kids and teachers will be significant and ongoing down the track. It is worth noting that, of the submissions that we received on the education committee, the schools who highlighted the most concerns with infrastructure and maintenance were older schools, relics of a time pre self-government, particularly concentrated in the inner north and the inner south of the ACT.

In commissioning new school designs, the government does need to pay close attention to circular economy principles as well. We do not want to see the ACT government 30 years from now—who knows, it may even be a Canberra Liberals government—having to face these same expensive renovation or knockdown decisions again. I think the government, to their credit, have shown a real understanding for and appetite to make tough decisions when it comes to weighing up the balance of renovation over knockdown rebuilding.

I think the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Strategy, which Minister Berry also has carriage of, is a great example. Throughout the housing portfolio, the ACT government does own a certain number of assets that are beyond their useful life, and in order to ensure that good people have good homes, difficult decisions have needed to be made about where to redevelop and what that redevelopment looks like.

I think in future budgets, and as we make future decisions for planning school infrastructure, we may need to consider some equally difficult but not at all unimportant conversations about some of our school campuses, particularly concentrated in the inner north and the inner south.

In the budget, there are two relatively smaller but very, very important investments that I am keen to support and that I do want to highlight in my remaining minutes. The first is of course the Teacher Shortage Taskforce, and I acknowledge that we hope that some of its recommendations are funded in future budgets. I will take this opportunity to really highlight that work and give a lot of credit to the minister and to her directorate.

I think the value of that work has been missed by a lot of Canberrans, not just in that it acknowledges the problem of recruiting and retaining a high quality teaching workforce which, alone, is bigger than any other state or territory government across the country. We are surrounded by governments keen to ignore the problem. The fact that we have even acknowledged it is a step in the right direction. It is a really wonderful example and, I hope, the first of many, many more examples of the government, as the employer, and the union, as the employee representative, collaborating and forming consensus on a shared pathway forward for challenges.

I think it would be wonderful for other ministers to take Minister Berry's lead in the areas of charge—to look at the way that the Teacher Shortage Taskforce has established, worked and subsequently reported back to government and consider other ways of using that same sort of collaboration with workers and unions to identify problems and work through some solutions as well.

I am also very interested to see the \$1.14 million, I believe it is, appropriated for the Safe@School Taskforce. I think that is a very important taskforce and I very much look forward to those recommendations. I appreciate that we will not be debating the next budget for a year to come, but I want to put on record now that the Teacher Shortage Taskforce and the Safe@School Taskforce are both very important bodies of work.

The Teacher Shortage Taskforce, to start, and the Safe@School Taskforce that will come later will no doubt have recommendations that will require government investment. I do think that the way that we can actually give value to this work and value to these reports and honour the hard work of representatives of the Education Directorate and of the AEU and teachers who have participated in these two taskforces is to ensure that they are funded in subsequent budgets.

In summary, the Greens are pleased to support the education appropriations in this budget.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Early Childhood Development, Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women) (12.03): I am happy to speak to the education commitments in the ACT budget for 2022. At the start, I will note one matter for Mr Hanson's benefit. It is not something terrible, Mr Hanson; I just suggest that Mr Hanson has a habit of coming into this place and confusing the data that he is provided. I think that is a bit confusing for the community and I just wanted to make a note of that. The data that Mr Hanson used at the start of his speech today around teacher vacancies is point-in-time data. Making comparisons between the types of data is not very helpful. It is not very helpful at all, but you do you, Mr Hanson! It is all good; it is all part of the politics.

But what I did want to talk about is the budget and its record investment in education. As the ACT leads the way, it prioritises equity to achieve results to ensure that every child, regardless of their background, gets the same chance at a great education. Yet again, the ACT government has invested in Chromebooks for public high school and college students, ensuring that they all have equal access to technology-based education that they need to learn in the 21st century. This initiative is a Labor commitment delivered in 2018 and continued into this budget. It takes the financial pressure off families and means that teachers and school staff do not need to troubleshoot across a range of devices. This year we also committed to an additional \$6.8 million for more devices for teachers. This means that teachers will not need to share a laptop, even if they are working part-time or job sharing.

I am happy that this budget also delivers the Labor election commitment to support the Winanggaay Ngunnawal Language Group to promote Ngunnawal language and culture in ACT public schools. We know that this will contribute to better outcomes for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students for generations to come. It also contributes to our commitment to reconciliation—a way of change that our schools can make every day.

The budget also sees \$1.1 million to establish the Safe@School Taskforce. This builds on the previous government's investments in addressing occupational violence and safety in public schools, because learning cannot happen unless it is put first, and that is what this investment is all about. School cleaners are vital in keeping our schools safe and clean. Their work has never been more important than it was during the pandemic to ensure that our schools were safe and clean. This budget recognises their vital role and sees a permanent expansion to the public school cleaning service, with \$17.3 million invested to ensure more secure jobs for this workforce and that the government is in-sourced from 2019.

This budget also demonstrates our commitment to ensuring that every family has the access to a great local school, as Canberra's population grows and as more people choose public schools. The budget provides \$76.7 million for a new public school in the new suburb of Whitlam. This school will have a capacity for up to 800 primary students, and will also provide early childhood education and care services with a 130-place capacity. Whitlam residents can look forward to the school opening its doors in time for the 2025 school year.

The budget also provides public school capacity in the inner north, with a \$39 million expansion to Majura Primary School. This will see 300 more spaces in the school as well as upgrades to existing classrooms. We are also investing in Gungahlin, with addition funding to complete the expansion of Margaret Hendry School as well as the construction of a new public high school in Taylor, which is due to open in 2024. The new high school in Taylor will offer general and specialist learning areas, small group program areas and a library as well as interactive learning centres. Sport and recreation spaces for students as well as the community will include a double gymnasium, hall and performing arts spaces, as well as hard courts.

This budget also sees \$1 million to undertake master planning and preliminary design works for a second college in Gungahlin. Gungahlin College is a hugely popular school for our young people in our city's north, and I know the community is keen to get on with a second public college to ensure that every family can access an excellent public senior education. Yet again, this government is prioritising education in the budget because we know that it changes lives. And, finally and most importantly, I want to acknowledge and thank our schoolteachers; school principals; school staff; their unions, the CPSU and the Australian Education Unit; as well as our school communities; the P&C Council and individual P&Cs. The last couple of years have been challenging and it has had a long tail, and I wanted to personally thank them and pass on my respect and acknowledgement for the important work that they do in our community. Thank you.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

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

Sitting suspended from 12.09 to 2.00 pm.

Questions without notice

Budget—convention centre

MS LEE: My question is to the Chief Minister. In their budget submission this year, the National Convention Centre estimated that Canberra is missing out on at least \$25 million in direct tourism spend per year because our conference and event facilities are limited. They proposed a \$12 million temporary facility to cover some of this shortfall until a new convention centre could be built. Chief Minister, why did the Convention Centre not receive funding for this proposal in the 2022-23 budget?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Lee for the question. The government is pursuing an alternate strategy in relation to increased exhibition and largescale banqueting space.

MS LEE: Chief Minister, have you had discussions about funding for a new convention centre in the ACT with the Albanese federal government and, if so, what was the outcome of those discussions?

MR BARR: I have had discussions in relation to infrastructure priorities with both the former federal government and, in the short time since the new government has taken

office, with senior members of that government. There has been no commitment for a national convention centre that is commonwealth government funded from either government at this point in time.

MS CASTLEY: Chief Minister, when will Canberra get a new convention centre?

MR BARR: Of course, the question is what we would build. Ms Castley may not be across all of the history of this particular infrastructure proposal, but in essence there are two choices. One is a national level facility that is bigger than this economy could possibly ever utilise that would be federally funded and used by the Australian government for major national and international events. That is one model. The other is an enhanced Canberra convention centre that would meet the needs of a city of around half a million people. The two are very different in scale and obviously in cost.

There are ways to deliver increased exhibition space, banqueting space and event space in the ACT without going to a national level facility. So, in the absence of a commitment from the federal government towards a national facility, a territory level facility is the government's preferred pathway at this point in time.

Chief Minister—conduct in response to petitions 23-22, 24-22 and 25-22

MR HANSON: My question is to the Chief Minister. Yesterday, a number of parents of children who have died on Canberra roads and as victims of crime were present in the chamber for the presentation of petitions and debate on a motion. Your failure to acknowledge them and their trauma in any way has deeply upset them. One parent said, "Every one of us present felt insulted and diminished." Chief Minister, why did you choose to ignore the parents while every other member who spoke expressed their sympathy?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Hanson for the question. I made a mistake yesterday in not explicitly acknowledging the presence in the chamber—for Mr Hanson's petition and a no confidence motion in the Attorney-General—of those families. I unreservedly apologise for not acknowledging them explicitly, and I will seek to learn from that mistake.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary, Mr Hanson?

Mr Hanson: No. I will just thank the Chief Minister for those comments. Thank you, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: A supplementary, Ms Lee?

MS LEE: Yes, thank you, Madam Speaker. Chief Minister, will you meet with the families, as you have indicated that you wish to work with the community to progress what they are advocating for so fiercely?

MR BARR: I understand the families have stated publicly that they do not wish to meet with me. I understand and respect that position. I acknowledge that not explicitly referencing them yesterday would not have enhanced their desire to meet with me.

I acknowledge also that there are irreconcilable differences in relation to the outcomes being sought through the petitions that were tabled yesterday.

I acknowledge that I have an in-principle objection and I will never support mandatory sentencing, or indeed a US-style approach to the appointment of judicial officers. I have been clear on that, and I would not seek to sack the Attorney-General in the terms in which the petition asked me to do, and I was very clear about that yesterday.

What the Assembly resolved in the policy debate in the afternoon, that I referred to in my remarks yesterday, sets a pathway forward. I understand that ministers will continue the work that they have already started to address some of the concerns that have been raised. But, as has been extensively canvassed, there is not universal agreement on this matter. I acknowledge that, but I also stand by the principles on which I stood for this place, and have been elected to this place on multiple occasions. So I cannot support what was contained within those petitions.

Environment—wood heaters

MR DAVIS: My question is to the Minister for the Environment. Minister, on 8 June this year the Assembly unanimously supported my motion calling on the ACT government to reform the wood heater replacement scheme to improve uptake and access to the scheme and eliminate up-front costs for the scheme, particularly for low income households. Can you please provide an update on the work being done to reform the wood heater replacement scheme?

MS VASSAROTTI: Thank you, Mr Davis, for the question. It was a really useful motion and it was great to see the Assembly support the motion. EPSDD are currently investigating and will be presenting a paper next month that outlines some of the options for improvements to the existing program, particularly a small trial for low income households, looking at costs and timing.

The options in the trial will include a waiver, to reduce up-front costs for low income households, including those living in rental accommodation such as public and community housing, and looking at adjustments to the current or incoming programs. This is really important, because we do know that a recent community survey found that the most common reason by far for keeping a wood fire is ambience. Wood heaters are also seen as low cost heating by some.

Secondly, we have also reviewed and retargeted the promotion of the wood fire replacement program. This campaign has been really successful this winter. Some of the results, to date, include seeing an increase in applications for the program this year to 24 applications during the campaign period, compared with five from the same time last year. In addition we have seen a 904 per cent increase in traffic to the Burn Right Tonight website. We also saw a 255 per cent increase in the website traffic to the Wood Heater Replacement Program during the campaign.

MR DAVIS: Minister, can you elaborate further on the government's findings from the recent YourSay panel survey relating to wood heaters and the effects of wood smoke?

MS VASSAROTTI: Thanks very much for the question. The survey and social research have been really important in understanding more about what we know is a complex and quite split issue. It is another instance where we can ask the community and get more consultation to assist us as we move towards a second action plan under our air quality strategy.

In relation to the recent YourSay panel survey, we had 1,955 responses submitted during the open period of the wood-fired heater survey. I understand that that is one of the highest responses of any survey outside of the COVID-19 questionnaire. The survey captured a vast range of ages, with the panel being open to Canberrans over the age of 16. Overall, survey respondents were considered very reflective of the Canberra community in relation to gender, age, housing composition and geographic location.

This is a contentious issue, with the community quite split on what to do. Fifty-two per cent of the respondents supported a gradual phase-out of wood heaters over all of Canberra, with 27 opposing it. Nineteen per cent did not have a view either way. Having said that, amongst those who oppose the phase-out, four out of 10 are open to removing heaters that do not meet emissions standards. Approximately one in 10 respondents currently have a wood fire or heater in their home, which is higher than the general population. The highest penetration was in Weston Creek, followed by the Molonglo Valley and Tuggeranong, where we know there is a problem with air quality. The presence of a wood heater is related to home ownership and increases with age.

MS CLAY: Minister, what other work is the ACT government doing to improve and protect air quality?

MS VASSAROTTI: As people would know, we are working through the air quality strategy at the moment. That is continuing to phase out all the dirty wood-fired heaters, under the action plan, and ban the installation of old, dirty wood heaters that are sometimes over 20 times more polluting. I know, Ms Clay, that you do like a circular economy, but this is one area where we really do not want to be seeing the use of second-hand wood-fired heaters.

A strong message that came out of the YourSay community panel was the importance of air quality monitoring, with half of Canberrans saying that the ACT government should be doing more to monitor air quality. This is part of the bushfire smoke and air quality strategy. I am really looking forward to being briefed, with Minister Stephen-Smith, by Health officials on the progress of a trial for low cost sensors that is coming soon.

Minister Gentleman is also working on some of the forecasting on bushfires coming out of the recommendations of the royal commission. I am also really heartened and interested to see that Dr Sophie Lewis, the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, will be conducting further investigations into wood fires in the ACT. That will add more evidence to the discussion that we are having with the community.

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, before I give Ms Orr the call, can I just remind you that I know that ministers are enthusiastic when waiting to reply to a question, but can you wait for the call.

MS VASSAROTTI: Sorry. I love question time so much!

ACT Policing—Operation TORIC

MS ORR: My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. Minister, can you please provide a further update on ACT Policing's efforts to reduce instances of dangerous driving and stolen vehicles in the ACT.

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Orr for this important question and for her interest in community safety across the ACT. Operation TORIC, which we talked a little bit about yesterday, was established by ACT Policing in August to address an increase in stolen vehicles and related property offences, dangerous driving, failure to stop for police and deliberate ramming of police vehicle incidents occurring on ACT roads. The operation focuses on offenders in our community who wilfully and without care put themselves, their passengers and all other road users at significant risk through their driving behaviours.

Recidivism in the ACT results in a significant diversion of police resources to respond to dangerous driving events on our roads every day, and this affects ACT Policing's ability to support the rest of the community at the same time. Offenders typically show a total disregard for both personal and public property, including deliberately causing damage to stolen vehicles and police vehicles to avoid apprehension.

I am pleased to report that Operation TORIC continues to make excellent progress. To date, the operation has achieved great success, with more than 70 apprehensions and more than 220 charges laid. The taskforce has been relentless in its mission, ensuring that those who believe they are above the law are arrested and placed before the court for their actions. Of those individuals charged, 25 were on bail for other offences, eight were on good behaviour orders, and two were subject to intensive corrections orders.

Importantly, the focus of Operation TORIC has been to reduce the risk to the community via a range of policing methods and to apprehend offenders with the least risk possible to the community. I commend the work of officers who were involved in Operation TORIC, and thank them for their excellent work.

MS ORR: Minister, what capabilities and specialised resources have been brought together to ensure Operation TORIC is a success?

MR GENTLEMAN: The officers who make up Operation TORIC are from a range of areas across ACT Policing, including the road policing area, general duties, intelligence, and the proactive intervention and diversion team. Specialist areas such as forensics, tactical response, drones, canine and others from across ACT Policing and the broader AFP are also supporting Operation TORIC. A key aspect of Operation TORIC is the use of non-traditional policing methods and intelligence gathering capabilities to identify key offenders and apprehend them using the safest

means for our road users. The experience and skills of ACT Policing officers working in TORIC have been vital to the successful outcomes to date, and I thank them for their ongoing commitment and dedication to our community.

Mr Hanson: Madam Speaker, I seek your guidance on a point of order. I asked a question about Operation TORIC yesterday and the minister refused to answer because he said that these are operational matters for the chief police officer, but today he is waxing lyrical about these issues. I am confused, I must say, because he said yesterday that it was not within the administrative orders an ability for him to answer; today it is.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, resume your seat. You may be confused; I am not confused. He is answering the question.

MR GENTLEMAN: I did try to wax lyrical about it yesterday, but Mr Hanson kept interjecting. The new capabilities and skills of these officers will go to benefit the whole of the ACT police as officers return to those other teams, as well. ACT Policing is doing terrific work; however, ultimately, compliance with the law is a shared responsibility amongst our community. Information from the community remains crucial, and details of vehicles and individuals involved are extremely helpful to police. While the information can be provided anonymously, a public willingness to provide information greatly enhances ACT Policing's ability to take action. So I strongly encourage Canberrans to continue to report any incidents.

DR PATERSON: Minister, has ACT Policing observed further impacts on different crime types in the Canberra community stemming from its activities under Operation TORIC?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Dr Paterson for the question. I am pleased to report that Operation TORIC has seen a positive impact on other crime types. We know that stolen vehicles are used to facilitate other crimes, and ACT Policing has observed that all offenders apprehended to date were previously known to police. So, since Operation TORIC began, police have seen reductions in other offences such as burglaries and numberplate theft. Police suspect that this will be one of the additional benefits of this operation, and it is good to see that the early results have confirmed that.

Importantly, this reduction in targeted and associated crime types frees other police to respond to incidents still occurring across the ACT. So, it is great work from ACT Policing in Operation TORIC. It is a win for the safety of the Canberra community through the apprehension of serious offenders, and a commensurate reduction in the number of crime types. So Operation TORIC has been so successful the CPO has now advised that it is an ongoing taskforce. I look forward to informing the Assembly about Operation TORIC's future successes.

I commend the ACT Policing's efforts to address this serious issue, and the ongoing work of ACT Policing. Of course, ACT Policing members constantly face the challenge and dangers work environment—an inherent feature of policing. The last few years have undoubtedly tested their resilience, professionalism and dedication in new ways. They have met the challenges that they have faced, and at all times have

continued to keep our community safe. I thank the ACT Policing officers for their ongoing dedication and professionalism, the families that support our officers, and the broader AFP and its partner agencies, for working together to ensure the safety of our community.

Canberra Hospital—intensive care unit

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the health minister. I refer to a *Canberra Times* article on 25 September, which reported on a review into Canberra Hospital's intensive care unit that reveals staff are fatigued, feel unsupported and undervalued and did not feel they were sufficiently skilled to take on duties allocated to them. Minister, why do we have staff at the Canberra Hospital's intensive care unit who work so hard but have said they do not have the skills to perform the duties asked of them?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Castley for the question. Of course, the reason this work was undertaken was because Canberra Health Services is proactively responding to issues that are arising through things like the survey of culture that was conducted in November last year; identifying areas where there were specific concerns, particularly areas where concerns had come up over a number of surveys, and in doing that deeper work, to understand what is driving those concerns from staff; what is driving the poor culture outcomes that are being seen in the survey. So this work reflects proactive activity from Canberra Health Services to address those deeper issues. When you do that, people are going to tell you what is driving the concerns that they have been expressing through the surveys. That is exactly what has happened here. When we have asked the question, we hear those answers. Then we can respond to them. Of course it is a concern to me, it is a concern to the leadership of Canberra Health Services, when we get this feedback that staff are not feeling as well supported as we would like. But that is what gives us the opportunity to then respond to that and to do something about it, which is exactly what is happening.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, what specific actions have you taken in response to the finding that the ICU staff are not skilled to perform the tasks asked of them.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: There are a range of actions that Canberra Health Services is taking in response to this work more broadly. So I will take the question on notice to provide a comprehensive response to Ms Castley about that.

MR CAIN: Minister, why do intensive care unit staff feel unsupported and undervalued as reported.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Cain for the question. This is exactly why that work is done. To understand how staff are feeling, why they are feeling that way; to do the deeper dive with them, to engage them in understanding the problem so that we can engage them in the solution. As I have indicated in my previous response to Ms Castley, there is now a range of work that is going on to respond to that. I would note that some of these questions were asked a little while ago. There have been some changes in the intensive care unit already, and I am very hopeful that is already changing the culture and the experience of staff in the intensive care unit. We also acknowledged some time ago there were staff coming into the intensive care unit that

did not necessarily have as much experience in that environment, while more experienced staff had been leaving. This is something we have seen across health systems. It has been a very, very busy and difficult time for our critical care qualified staff. I understand also this is something sometimes seen in these critical care spaces; that very experienced staff leave, less experienced staff come in. They need to be supported to learn those skills of critical care. That's exactly what's happening. As I said in Ms Castley's previous question, I'll come back to the chamber in response to that question with more detail of what is happening.

Canberra Hospital—intensive care unit

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the health minister. I refer to the *Canberra Times* article on 25 September, the report about the review into the Canberra Hospital's ICU. It revealed that 21 out of more than 200 ICU staff were interviewed, and almost half of those 21 were executives. The article also revealed that five nurses have left the intensive care unit in September, while 21 have left this year. The staff also questioned why a culture review was needed, given they have been voicing concerns for years with no meaningful action taken.

How will yet another culture review help, given staff have been voicing these same concerns for years with no meaningful action taken?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: There were a number of questions in Ms Castley's question, and I think she answered her last one herself. As I said, in response to the first question, these issues have been coming up for some years through a range of culture surveys, and hence it is important to respond to those issues. This is Canberra Health Services leadership taking action to respond to those concerns—to invite staff to come forward to have a more detailed conversation about exactly what they are experiencing and exactly what their concerns are so that those concerns can be addressed. They cannot be addressed if you do not ask staff what is driving them and what their experiences are.

To go to Ms Castley's earlier question, all of the staff in the intensive care unit were invited to participate in that process. My understanding is—and I have been advised by Canberra Health Services and in fact the deputy CEO said this to the media the other day when we stood up on another matter—that the *Canberra Times* report was incorrect in the proportion of people who participated who were “executive”. That was absolutely wrong. I cannot give you the exact numbers right here, right now—

Opposition members interjecting—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I can if you ask me, and I will take it on notice if you want to know that information. If you want to get the right information, I am happy to do that.

As usual, the opposition, the Canberra Liberals, have relied entirely on the *Canberra Times* for their information. Everything the *Canberra Times* says they rely on as fact. They bring it into the chamber. They ask a question, “The *Canberra Times* said on 25 September; the *Canberra Times* said on 4 September”!

Ms Lee: Here's your opportunity to explain and you can't!

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Ask questions, and we will give you the answers.

Ms Lee: We just did, and you can't!

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, enough!

MS CASTLEY: Will this latest culture review stop intensive care nurses leaving Canberra's health system?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: As I also indicated in that earlier response, it is part of the life of an intensive care unit that staff come and staff go. That is quite normal in any workplace. Some of the information I can provide in relation to the tenure of nursing staff in the intensive care unit. The average tenure for nurses working within the intensive care unit at the end of May 2022 is more than six years—6.17 years.

Also, to go to Ms Castley's earlier point, she noted that 21 nurses had left the intensive care unit. Twenty-two have been recruited over that same period, so it is not short on headcount. In fact, between January 2020 and 25 May 2022, the headcount for nursing staff in the intensive care unit increased by 14.8 per cent.

MR CAIN: Minister, what unit or department of your health system is next on the list for a culture review?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Cain for the question, but I am absolutely flabbergasted. The opposition has spent years saying: "Canberra Health Services, Calvary and the ACT public health system need to take action on culture. It is outrageous that action is not being taken on culture." That was not true—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr Cain: It's a very simple question—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Cain, the minister has been on her feet for 20 seconds.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Now, apparently, it is outrageous that Canberra Health Services is taking action on culture! Now, apparently, if our regular culture surveys identify a hotspot in culture, we should not be doing anything about it! If we identify a hotspot in culture, if we identify an area of the health services—

Ms Castley: Madam Speaker, I wish to raise a point of order. We are not saying that it is inappropriate to have a culture review. We are simply asking: what is the next cab off the rank?

MADAM SPEAKER: There is no point of order. Minister, you are on the floor.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The point is that when these culture surveys are undertaken, when something comes back and says "this part of the Canberra Health Services is in

a culture of blame, something is going wrong here”, more work will be done. There will be detailed work with staff to sit down and say, “Okay, what is driving this outcome from our culture surveys.” Then more work will be done with those teams.

Sport and recreation—Florey Oval

MS CLAY: In November 2021 the Assembly passed my motion calling on the government to continue to work with the Florey Primary School and the community on commitments to improve Florey Oval to provide more active open space for the school and local community. It is really great to see that that consultation has started, but I have heard from some concerned residents that the consultation was limited to only one-third of the oval. Minister, can you explain to me the decision that you took to only consult on one-third of the oval and how that is going to lead to an integrated and wholistic plan for the whole space?

MS BERRY: I would like to acknowledge and note the work that Tara Cheyne and I have been doing with the Florey community for some time now and Ms Clay’s interest in the Florey Oval more recently since the election. I think it is great that local members are engaged with their local communities to make sure that their amenities meet the needs and the aspirations of their communities.

I said from the start that, with the Florey Oval space, it was a priority for the school to engage around what could be happening in that space to provide the school with more open space and more exercise areas on a dryland oval that was no longer used or fit for purpose for formal sports use. We went to the Florey Primary School and had a conversation with the Florey Primary School about what is happening in their space, and then we engaged with the Florey community more broadly about that piece of the space.

There is more work happening across government within Minister Steele’s area, with TCCS, about dryland ovals and their future use. Sport and Recreation are also doing some work on dryland ovals and which ovals are suitable for future investment for formal sporting use and which of those dryland ovals might be better used for something like a community facility or other kinds of activities, which is what we are talking about with Florey.

At this stage, we are concentrating on the piece of the dryland oval that is directly adjacent to the Florey Primary School. But that will align with the future work that is occurring in the TCCS space as well as within the Sport and Recreation space.

MS CLAY: Minister, which of the directorates have been involved in the consultation so far?

MS BERRY: Education and TCCS primarily, but we are also consulting very closely with the local Aboriginal Ngunnawal community to make sure that any future designs for the space incorporate traditional plants and knowledge to ensure that it is culturally appropriate as well.

MR CAIN: Minister, what are the plans for the rest of that oval if it is not going to be developed for the school’s use?

MS BERRY: I refer the member to the first answer that I provided around the consultation on the use of that oval. That consultation will continue through the work that TCCS and Sport and Recreation are doing. Initially the focus will be on the first part adjacent to the school.

The Listening Report is almost complete and will soon be released to the community. I am looking forward to hearing feedback following that work and the consultation and conversations with the community so far. Preliminary designs will be drafted. The community will also get to have another say on that, as will the school, importantly, and we will then go ahead with starting the work on that first part of the restoration of that dryland oval.

Environment—pest and kangaroo management

MS LAWDER: My question is to the Minister for the Environment. Minister, you were elected on a policy platform that states that animals deserve our care and respect. Incidentally, the ACT has passed laws recognising animals as sentient beings. Minister, how can you explain the use of 1080 poison on wild dogs, which causes a horrible and painful death? How does that treat them with care and respect?

MS VASSAROTTI: Thank you, Ms Lawder, for the question. The issue of how we look after our biodiversity as a system is a really complex one, and it is one where we do need to look at a range of issues in how we support the different species that are using our local environment. Certainly, in relation to the management of particular pest species, we do need to look at different ways that we manage those species.

When we do this, we absolutely look at how we can address animal management, and look after the whole biodiversity, including all species, in a way that takes into account the impact on the environment, as well as how animal management can meet the highest animal welfare standards in respect of the tools that we have available.

In relation to the use of certain management things, such as the poison referenced by Ms Lawder, it is used in a way that minimises impacts and looks to animal welfare requirements, to ensure that we are managing the environment in a way that is most humane, with the tools that we have available in our bailiwick.

MS LAWDER: Minister, can you explain how clubbing joeys to death treats them with care and respect?

MS VASSAROTTI: Thank you, Ms Lawder, for the question. The issue of how we address our kangaroo management strategy is a significant issue that we have been discussing with members of the Assembly, including a significant discussion in estimates, and including a briefing to the Assembly environment committee. It talks about the really important things that we need to do, in terms of kangaroo management.

Again, as I referenced in my previous answer, the issue of how we manage our environment is important, and we absolutely have to do that. We need to deal with kangaroo management as part of that. That is done under a strategy that is evidence

based. Again, it looks at animal welfare requirements, and it is in line with animal welfare requirements, and particularly requirements that are referenced by welfare organisations such as the RSPCA that identify the most humane ways of managing kangaroos.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, can you be quiet? I am having trouble hearing the minister.

MS VASSAROTTI: In terms of the ACT's management of kangaroos, we have the highest standards in Australia. One of the key things that we do, when we do take action regarding a kangaroo at a particular time, is to minimise the impact particularly around joeys. We are very confident that the way that we do it meets the highest standards anywhere in Australia.

MR PARTON: Minister, can you please explain how restricting animal wildlife rescue groups from helping injured kangaroos treats them with care and respect?

MS VASSAROTTI: Thank you, Mr Parton, for the question. I suspect that the question is actually in relation to the fact that there is a restriction around joey licences, under the Nature Conservation Act. The question did not actually refer to that, but I assume that is what Mr Parton was referring to.

I note that ACT Parks and Conservation work with ACT Wildlife and Wildcare Queanbeyan to rehabilitate eastern grey kangaroo joeys via a licence issued under the Nature Conservation Act. In fact, the premise of your question is incorrect. The Nature Conservation Act restricts keeping joeys for longer than 48 hours in the ACT unless they are licensed. ACT Wildlife's current licence does not allow them to keep eastern grey kangaroo joeys beyond 48 hours. However, Wildcare Queanbeyan can keep eastern grey kangaroo joeys for longer than 48 hours under the licence. ACT Parks and Conservation—

Opposition members interjecting—

MS VASSAROTTI: If you want to hear the answer, I will continue to provide details. ACT Parks and Conservation and ACT Wildlife transfer these joeys that require rehabilitation for longer than 48 hours to Wildcare Queanbeyan. The current number of allowable transfers is 35 eastern grey kangaroo joeys per year.

Light rail—stage 2

DR PATERSON: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, how is the ACT government getting on with the job of delivering light rail for Canberra?

MR STEEL: I thank Dr Paterson for her question. I am very happy to say that light rail is coming south.

Members interjecting—

MR STEEL: Work is underway now on raising London Circuit. Construction has begun.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members!

MR STEEL: It is a significant milestone, a significant step forward in the delivery of light rail and delivering on our promise, getting on with what we promised to do at the election. Connecting London Circuit to Commonwealth Avenue is a key enabling piece of infrastructure in extending our light rail network. It also has the additional benefit of activating the southern part of the city, providing pedestrian and cycle-friendly intersections and movements throughout the city's east and through the city's west, improving active travel routes.

The project will see one of the biggest changes to Canberra's road network in the last 50 years and is expected to support hundreds of jobs and enable thousands more. We have also entered into a contract with Canberra Metro to order five new light rail vehicles for the extension of stage 2A of light rail and also to retrofit all of our existing light rail fleet, ready for expansion to Commonwealth Park and down to Woden, including through those wire-free segments. We are expanding the light rail depot as well to facilitate those extra vehicles needed.

Our next step will be to submit the works approval application through the National Capital Authority for stage 2A of light rail before the end of the year. We are looking forward to work then commencing after the raising London Circuit project is complete.

DR PATERSON: Minister, what are the benefits of building light rail to Woden?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her supplementary. We have seen many of those benefits in our first stage of light rail. We want to extend those benefits south so that more people in Canberra can get the benefit of mass transit, through a mass transit spine north to south that will connect with our new electric bus fleet, which is growing as well over time, with the first buses arriving before the end of the year.

In building light rail to Woden we will be creating thousands of jobs. We will be improving active travel connections across the city and creating high quality, attractive and functional public spaces. It is also a central pillar of our transport strategy, which outlines our government's vision for transport as delivering a world-class system that supports a compact, sustainable and vibrant city. Delivery of light rail to Woden will also help to create frequent, reliable transport services that better connect our major town centres and residential and employment hubs through additional stops that are not accessible on our current bus network.

The first stage of light rail has been incredibly successful, as I mentioned. More people are choosing to live and work near our light rail route. We want those same city-shaping benefits to apply on the south side as well. That is why we are getting on with the job of expanding this project down south, so that we can connect the rest of

Canberra with this form of transport that has been incredibly successful in encouraging more people to shift to using public transport.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, I am having trouble hearing people from the back either ask a question or answer.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, how is the ACT government keeping Canberrans informed about upcoming construction work and the associated traffic impacts of the light rail project?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Pettersson for his question. As can be expected with any major infrastructure project, construction work will result in some traffic impacts and disruptions. It is important that we get on and build these future-focused transport infrastructure investments, but they do come with some disruptions in the short to medium term. We have planned ahead. We have been undertaking significant preparation to help minimise disruption for Canberrans by improving our traffic monitoring capability to effectively respond to incidents on the traffic network that may cause congestion and also to provide real-time communication to road users.

We have expanded the e-scooter share scheme to provide more mobility options to Canberrans. We have installed a new park and ride at Mawson oval. We are undertaking a range of path improvements near the city, in preparation for this, as well as the interventions that we have made to install new traffic lights at Vernon Circle. Work is underway as well off Coranderrk Street, on Parkes Way.

Whilst every effort will be made to minimise disruption throughout construction, including maintaining traffic lanes where possible, there is no doubt that this project is going to change how Canberrans move around the city. We were up-front about that early, from the beginning. As such, we are encouraging the community to rethink their travel behaviour and consider how they travel into the city as construction work increases in various phases of the program.

Canberrans will be kept informed of upcoming construction work and associated travel impacts ahead of time, throughout construction, through a range of different channels. It will often be on a daily or multiple daily basis. This will include various message signs on our roads. It will include social media, live radio updates, information on the Built for CBR website and regular email updates. I encourage everyone in the broader Canberra community to log on to builtforcbr.act.gov.au.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Milligan, if your colleagues remained silent, you could have the call.

Gungahlin—community facilities

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. I have constituents and other community groups coming to me and asking when your

government will deliver on promises made a little over three years ago. Ms Orr put forward a motion in February of 2019 calling on her own government to conduct a feasibility study on a multicultural community facility in Gungahlin. The motion was amended to have money set aside in the 2019-20 budget, but in the last two budgets, 2021-22 and 2022-23, there has been no money for this study nor to build this facility. Minister, why, oh why, over the three years since the motion was brought and agreed to by the Assembly, has no feasibility study been conducted nor money put aside in the budget?

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Barr, as Treasurer are you responding?

MR BARR: If I correctly understand the project that Mr Milligan is referring to, it relates to Exhibition Park, and a major event facility, but I will just check that that is the project he is referring to, as opposed to the community centre in the Gungahlin town centre. Either way, both projects are proceeding. Allocations have been made. Provisions in the forward estimates have been made, and we will make further announcements. I am not allowed to make announcements on government policy in question time, but rest assured, Mr Milligan, the projects are proceeding.

MR MILLIGAN: Chief Minister, I am not sure if you will answer this, but why has there been no development of a community facility in Gungahlin or EPIC, to date?

MR BARR: As Mr Milligan would be aware, before construction can commence on major infrastructure projects there needs to be detailed design and planning work undertaken. When we are ready to make an announcement on the progress of those projects Mr Milligan will be amongst the first—if he is paying attention—

Mr Hanson: Is it a secret project?

MADAM SPEAKER: Ignore it, Mr Barr; do your best.

MR BARR: I have made a career of ignoring Mr Hanson, Madam Speaker!

MS ORR: Chief Minister, can you please update the Assembly on how the EPIC redevelopment is progressing, and how the inclusion of a multicultural function centre will be progressed as part of that project.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: As humorous as you find this, the Chief Minister is on the floor, and he has an answer.

MR BARR: As I have indicated in my response to the earlier questions, work is underway in relation to the location within Exhibition Park. Ms Orr is absolutely correct that the new facility will contain a capacity for large-scale multicultural events, but that will not be its only use case; there will be other uses for the facility. The government has undertaken work that is in the public arena in relation to the renewal of Exhibition Park. There have been multiple stories in the opposition's favourite source of information, the *Canberra Times*.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members!

MR BARR: I should retract that! I believe there is another publication in this city that is perhaps more favourable for the Canberra Liberals and those allied with themselves. It is like the monthly or weekly newsletter of the Liberal Party. In fact, I think the weekly news of the Liberal party might be more favourable towards the government than that that is published by that particular publisher. Nevertheless, in response to Ms Orr's question, work is progressing. The sites are being identified within the Exhibition Park precinct, and the scoping of the project is continuing. There have been public reports in relation to the options that the government is considering.

Transport—bus services

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, in relation to your government's secure local jobs code for ACT residents, can you explain why the ACT government is paying a New South Wales company to provide Floriade shuttle bus services and the light rail replacement services when they are needed? Should not this be core business for the ACT government?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his questions. Mr Gentleman may want to provide some further information in relation to the supplementary. Certainly we provide services for a range of different events but our focus is on delivering the programmed scheduled bus timetable. With the significant challenges we have had over the last few years with COVID, there have been workforce challenges that have affected our ability to support extra services above and beyond those that we provide under our scheduled services. As I have said throughout, our focus is on the reliability of our scheduled bus services and that will continue to be the case. Individual arrangements are made with event organisers. We are going through a process of updating our guidelines around events and how Transport Canberra provides support to events so there is further clarity around how that is achieved. We do draw on bus lines, including Qcity Transit buses that often have buses available that can take up extra services, when we are not able to deliver them. This benefits local jobs in our region as well.

MR PARTON: Minister, how can you possibly deliver a so-called full bus service but ultimately, as you said yesterday, a sham full bus service in early 2023, if—

MADAM SPEAKER: It is a preamble I think Mr Parton. I said, no preamble. Just to the question.

MR PARTON: If you are forced to pay a private NSW company to deliver ACT bus services this late in the year.

MR STEEL: We are recruiting more workers, Madam Speaker, up to 60 before the end of the year, to deliver reliable bus services. We have been planning for some time. There is a very long lead-in time for the development of an updated network and timetable. We are part-way through that process, ready for the implementation from term 1. We have announced that we are going to move to a full timetable in term 1

which will utilise the full number of buses that we have and the full workforce that we will have based on the number of drivers that we have recruited to deal with staff absences, which has been an issue that has been caused by the pandemic. We are very confident that we can deliver that network and our focus will be on delivering reliable services, as it has been over the past three years, Madam Speaker. That's why we are confident of delivering the network because of the extensive planning and preparation that has gone into delivering these services from term 1.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, why have you failed to secure sufficient staff to operate Canberra's bus network.

Mr Parton interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Parton, enough.

MR STEEL: Every bus provider around the country and overseas has been affected by COVID-19 in terms of workforce shortages. In other cities, as Mr Parton is well aware, thousands have services have been cut as a result of that workforce impact. We did not have that impact on ours because we made decisions to run an interim network over this period and to recruit more staff so that we can deliver the full timetable from term 1. We have been undertaking a significant amount of recruitment. We have been doing that now for a number of months, and years, in the lead up to managing the workforce issues that we are experiencing now, which I think will get better over time, we hope, with the progression of the pandemic. Certainly, in term 1 we are very confident we will be able to recruit the up-to-60 staff needed before the end of the year to make the delivery of that timetable possible.

Trees—urban canopy

MR BRADDOCK: My question is for the Minister for Transport and City Services. I am like many Canberrans who love their trees and want to see them thrive. How do you ensure that trees being planted by TCCS thrive in their locations?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Braddock for his question. We do want to grow a thriving and diverse urban forest. It is part of our Urban Forest Strategy. TCCS puts in place a number of different policies to ensure that these trees that we do plant, the new trees, grow to maturity so that we get the full benefits of those trees. There are significant environmental, social, economic, aesthetic and other benefits for the community, and for people and for biodiversity as well.

We undertake, through species selection, to plant particular types of species that can survive in changing climate conditions. Our species guide has been updated based on expert advice from the ANU's Fenner School, and our own environment directorate. We also have guidance in relation to our municipal infrastructure standards, and we are making sure we plant trees in the right location for that species to make sure they can thrive. Some trees have larger roots than others, so we need to make sure that those trees are planted in areas where there is a larger space for them to grow.

There are a range of different considerations. Watering is part of the care for new plantings as well, which is undertaken up to five years after a tree is planted. That is

part of the cost of planting a tree, something that the Liberals did not understand when they made their \$10 per tree announcement in the last election. That did not take into account the watering costs and the care and maintenance as required to make sure the trees can grow and mature so we get the benefits from them.

MR BRADDOCK: What can residents do if they feel that there might have been a plant that has failed to thrive or the incorrect species has been selected?

MR STEEL: A key part of the Urban Forest Strategy is trying to partner with community, because we know that when we partner with community we can make sure we get the support to grow our urban forest. Often those discussions are had, literally, at a street level about what species might be planted in a particular street, where that street, for example, does not already have a designated tree species.

We have been having that conversation with residents. When they are involved in the process and understand what we are trying to achieve in growing the canopy, and we get the support of them, those trees are much more likely to be supported and grow up to thrive in maturity, including with potentially some additional watering in the hotter, summer months. That is certainly a process we are going through at the moment.

It is unlikely that we will remove existing trees in the urban footprint, because we want to support as many trees as we can. Certainly, we will have conversations with the community on an ongoing basis. The big conversation that we had around the Urban Forest Strategy has given us a lot of information to use in the tree planting strategy going forward. We will continue to update our municipal infrastructure standards, the tree species list, going forward based on a range of information that we get from the community and experts.

Of course, we are asking the community to designate spaces in Canberra where they would like to see more trees planted as well. We have already been responding to thousands of those requests and planting trees, and we would like to get a lot more feedback in the future as well.

MS CLAY: Minister, whilst we are measuring survival rates, how do we measure whether a tree thrives or not?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. We will see that in the LiDAR data. When trees thrive, the canopy will be greater than if they are not doing well. We can always expect when we are planting new trees that under five per cent will perish when planted. We need to replace those trees if they have perished and make sure there is new plantings there. If the community can alert us to those, that is very helpful—to make sure that we can get in and plant those anew.

We are also engaging with the community on replacement programs. Some trees are coming to the end of their lives, and they are not providing the same benefits that they did earlier in their lives. We are having some of those quite difficult conversations with communities right now about removal of some pin oaks on what were beautiful streets. Unfortunately the trees have aged, they often have disease, and we need to renew the forest by replanting those trees with new plantings, often of the same species, to make sure that we get that renewal of our forest happening. It is an ageing

forest, and we need to make sure that we are not just planting new trees but renewing them as well.

We will track that over time using LiDAR data every five years, and that will enable us to track the growth. That will be different for each different species. We will need to, again, make sure we are choosing the right species for the right locations to maximise the benefit of our urban canopy growth.

Alexander Maconochie Centre—forensic psychology services

MRS KIKKERT: My question is to the Minister for Corrections. During estimates hearings, directorate officials indicated that a forensic psychologist does supervision with the therapeutic teams at the AMC but not the case management team. The AMC has also contracted a specialist sex offender psychologist. In the past, case workers had access to a forensic psychologist who would offer supervision and assistance once a fortnight and give group guidance on how to deal with difficult clients. Minister, why is there no longer a forensic psychologist offering assistance to the entire case management team?

MR GENTLEMAN: I think this might be a matter for Justice Health, but I will chase up that information and provide the detail for Mrs Kikkert.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, how has cutting this forensic psychologist affected case management?

MR GENTLEMAN: Again, I will take that on notice.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, is the specialist sex offender psychologist able to be accessed by the entire case management team for the purposes of dealing with sex offenders?

MR GENTLEMAN: I would imagine so, but, again, I will take the detail of that on notice and provide the answer back to the chamber.

Work health and safety—government measures

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety. Minister, what is the ACT government doing to ensure workers are safe in Canberra?

Mr Parton: That is just a great question!

MR GENTLEMAN: It is a great question, and I thank Mr Pettersson for his interest in workplace safety. Of course, October is National Safe Work Month, and we should all take some time this month to reflect on the importance of workplace safety. Every worker, regardless of whether they work in an office, on a construction site, in a shop or anywhere else, has the right to come home safely, each and every day. Everyone in this place has a duty to ensure that the laws apply equally to all workplaces, without fear or favour. All employers have a duty to ensure that their workplaces are free from physical and psychological harms.

Throughout October, WorkSafe ACT are running a number of events focusing on safety in four key areas: hazardous chemicals, mental health, tradies' health, and young workers. The role of WorkSafe as an independent work health and safety regulator is crucial to protecting our workers here in the territory. The Workplace Legislation Amendment Bill, which I introduced in this place in June, makes a number of changes that will improve workers' safety from both physical and psychosocial hazards. If passed, this bill will implement a number of the recommendations from the Marie Boland review of the national template work health and safety laws. It will also expand work safety incident notification laws to require employers to report sexual assault incidences occurring at their workplaces to the work safety regulator.

These are important reforms to ensure that employers do their bit to protect the health and safety of workers and the Canberra community. These enhancements will provide a more effective deterrence against poor workplace safety practices. They are just some of the measures that this government has enacted to protect workers. The safety of workers is, of course, a priority for this government.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, what protections has the government put in place to improve safety on construction sites in particular?

MR GENTLEMAN: Construction sites are some of the most dangerous workplaces in the city. The collapse of the retaining wall on the construction site in Dickson this week is a timely reminder of the risks that construction workers face on the job every day. Through the workplace safety portfolio, the government has strengthened protections for workers on construction sites. Our most recent measures are to deal with silica. The more that we learn about silicosis, the more evident it becomes that this is a devastating and debilitating disease. I am proud that the ACT is leading the nation by banning uncontrolled dry cutting and mandating training for those working with silica-containing materials.

Eliminating exposure to silica dust is the most effective control measure for controlling the risk of exposure. Where exposure cannot be eliminated, any exposure to silica dust must be minimised as far as reasonably practical. I am committed to acting in the best interests of our workers. Our actions will always be guided by science and evidence.

We also made the ACT tower crane code of practice. The code of practice was developed with the support of business groups, employers and unions to ensure the PCBU's understanding of how to comply with their legal obligations under the Work Health and Safety Act. WorkSafe ACT have also continued their enforcement activity, specifically targeting commercial and residential construction, to ensure that these worksites meet our tough safety standards.

I want to thank and recognise the many union members—in particular, the CFMEU—who have fought tirelessly for reforms to help protect construction workers. They understand that a healthy and safe worksite is the best thing for their sector and the territory's economy.

MS ORR: Minister, what is the government doing to protect the jobs and improve the working conditions of ACT public servants?

MR GENTLEMAN: The government has recognised that the casualisation and insecurity in our public service are detrimental to both workers and policy outcomes. We committed to providing secure and, where possible, ongoing employment, as we recognise the adverse social and financial effects that insecure work has on workers.

There are two major pieces of work that make up our secure employment package—the secure workforce conversion process and the insourcing framework. The secure workforce process is a joint union and government process to examine the use of insecure work in the ACT public service and review temporary and casual employment to assess whether the jobs should be made permanent. Where employees are identified for conversion, the enterprise agreement provisions allow for the Head of Service to appoint existing employees without further merit processes, provided that certain criteria are met. So far, over 650 employees have been successfully converted to secure and permanent employment.

The other piece of work is the insourcing framework, which is designed to assess whether outsourced work that could be performed by public servants should be insourced. This will help to ensure that, where possible, privatisation and outsourcing are not the default option.

The government's commitment to insourcing demonstrates the commitment we have to protect the jobs and the role of our public servants.

Mr Barr: Further questions can be placed on the notice paper.

Papers

Madam Speaker presented the following paper:

Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act, pursuant to section 15—Annual Report 2021-2022—ACT Audit Office—Report No 6/2022, dated 12 October 2022.

Mr Gentleman presented the following paper:

Plastic Reduction Act—Plastic Reduction (Single-use Plastic Products) Exemption 2022—Disallowable Instrument DI2022-67 (LR, 2 June 2022)—Revised explanatory statement.

Multicultural communities—swimming lessons

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.10): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) learning to swim is a vital life skill. Not being able to swim diminishes enjoyment of life and puts lives at risk;

- (b) inclusive access to swimming and learn to swim programs is important for the wellbeing of Canberrans, including physical and mental health, social connection, and sense of belonging;
 - (c) certain communities face barriers to access and participation in swimming because of cultural, social, or health reasons;
 - (d) the ACT Government conducted a successful trial of gender-specific swim sessions in 2019; and
 - (e) the ACT Government has funded two short-term programs through the annual Sport and Recreation Grants to support migrant and refugee swim programs, including women only programs at Gungahlin Leisure Centre and Aquatots at Gold Creek;
- (2) further notes:
- (a) diverse communities require privacy and additional features at pools to facilitate learning and swimming in safe and accessible spaces;
 - (b) current infrastructure and timetabling are not able to meet the ongoing needs of these communities; and
 - (c) inclusive swimming and learn to swim programs are a matter of equality. Every Canberran deserves to access safe swimming in an environment that is suitable for their needs; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) commit to providing gender-specific and gender-diverse swim times, through working with all relevant stakeholders;
 - (b) continue to work with operators to establish a further trial of gender-specific swim times at a suitable pool;
 - (c) ensure that public pools clearly communicate that all are welcome, and that their complaint and reporting mechanisms are clear, supportive and accessible should any issues arise;
 - (d) commit to ensuring that future ACT Government swimming infrastructure will be designed in an inclusive manner, such as an enclosed smaller pool for those requiring privacy or sensory-friendly facilities, and individual gender-neutral changing facilities; and
 - (e) report back to the Assembly by November 2023 on progress.

I wish to talk today about how Australia is a hot country, and climate change is making it even hotter. Spending time in the water is one of our time-honoured ways to keep cool. We have always been a nation of swimmers, whether we are talking about Olympic medallists such as Fanny Durack, Dawn Fraser and Ian Thorpe, or simply about the kids in the bush jumping into their local watering hole from a homemade tyre swing attached to a nearby tree.

There are more than a million swimming pools in Australia, and around 85 per cent of our population lives within 50 kilometres of a beach. Of course, swimming is not our only form of water-oriented recreation. There is also boating, surfing, fishing, waterskiing, parasailing and scuba diving—all of which are made safer if their participants know how to swim well and how to stay safe in and around the water. Very few people who were born in Australia or came here as young children grow up unable to swim, or unaware of the risks around water. This is due to the efforts of

governments and Royal Life Saving Australia in delivering school swimming lessons and community water safety messages, as well as the proximity of a beach, river or municipal or backyard pool where kids can learn and practise how to swim.

When I talk about summer swimming, the picture in your head is probably of a bunch of those active kids smeared in sunscreen and squinting against the bright sun, maybe with a few surfers or sunbathers in the background. But there are an awful lot of people left out of this picture—people who are not able to enjoy our water-orientated pastimes safely, or at all. I am talking about people with disabilities or body confidence issues; migrants and tourists who came to this country as adults from parts of the world where learning to swim was not an automatic thing; recent migrants who can swim but have not been here long enough to absorb the messaging about Australia's swimming hazards—messaging that is designed to keep them safe on our rock shelves or in our oceans, rivers or lakes; people from cultures where men and women will not swim at all if they have to swim together, due to cultural or religious beliefs; and people who are gender-diverse and have concerns about their safety and privacy at the pool.

It is a lot to miss out on for these people. Firstly, being able to swim makes you safer. Every six days a person who was born overseas dies by drowning in Australia. Deaths by drowning are preventable if people have access to appropriate swimming and water safety lessons. While swimming programs for children exist in the schools, Canberra has long been the only capital city in Australia without a specialist swimming program for adults from refugee and migrant backgrounds. I applaud the work of the Refugee and Migrant Swimming Project. Annie Gao, Clare McBride Kelly, Andrew Nolan and Liam McBride Kelly lost a mutual friend from the refugee community when he tragically drowned in 2020 at a freshwater site in Canberra. In honour of their friend, the group has created the Refugee and Migrant Swimming Project, a not-for-profit initiative to teach water safety and swimming skills to Canberra's growing refugee and migrant community.

Secondly, swimming provides many physical and mental health benefits. Physically, swimming builds endurance, strengthens muscles and improves cardiovascular fitness, while avoiding the impact and stresses to the body that arise from activities such as running. Swimming aids lung function for asthmatics, helps to counteract the ageing process and can reduce pain and improve recovery from injury. A 2012 study done in Spain found that a 20-week swimming program resulted in significant reduction of pain for people with multiple sclerosis, while hydrotherapy for the elderly has been found to improve balance, motor and cognitive tasks, coordination and aerobic capacity.

Ocean swimming has been shown to boost dopamine and serotonin, benefit skin health and relieve seasonal allergies. Whether you swim in an ocean, an Olympic swim centre or a backyard pool, swimming can lower stress, improve mood, enhance self-esteem, fight depression and improve sleep. A British study found that swimming helped reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression. There are also social benefits from group swimming. It may be playing a game of Marco Polo with the kids, heading out to the Cotter River with a group of friends, or having a family day down at the beach. All these activities help break down barriers and bring people together. They bring people out of isolation and build and maintain bonds with friends, loved ones and family.

The confidence gained by knowing how to swim opens a gateway to a huge number of water-based activities—for example, sailing, boating, kayaking, canoeing, scuba diving, snorkelling and even parasailing. The confidence and enjoyment in life that these activities can provide brings immense benefits to the individual. To adapt an old cliché, a rising tide floats all swimmers.

It is not right that there are whole groups of people excluded from experiencing the benefits of swimming that I have just talked through. As we see, over and over again across a whole variety of areas, helping more people in our community to achieve greater physical and mental wellbeing has benefits far beyond the individuals concerned. Having a city full of healthy, happy swimmers creates flow-on benefits to the budget bottom line in health and social services. The motion I am putting forward today is designed to ensure that all Canberrans can access the services that so many of us take for granted.

There are already some programs in place for swimmers with disability, and for adult beginner swimmers, such as the Y's SwimAbility sessions at Gungahlin, Stromlo and Civic pools, and the swimming lesson packages put together by the Refugee and Migrant Swimming Project. What I am calling for is a more coordinated approach with certainty of long-term funding, and to follow up the one-month trial of the gender-specific swim sessions that were undertaken in October 2019 at the Canberra Olympic Pool—now more than three years ago.

I will just detour into a bit of information about that trial, because there were some valuable lessons from it which I think we can apply to future efforts in the area. Firstly, the session times were not well chosen and conflicted with family responsibilities, which may well have impacted the participation rates. Daytime sessions are more likely to appeal to the people that we wish to encourage into this activity. Secondly, the Canberra Olympic Pool was not the best venue. Booking out an Olympic-sized venue—even with the good effort made to get advance word out about the trial—risks alienating too many regular swimmers, and this was seen in the pushback that was received from the community.

I recommend that we start examining a smaller pool. I am pleased by the example set by the Muslim Sisters to ACTion, who will be running a Saturday afternoon program targeting women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, to be hosted at the Aquatots pool in Gold Creek, in my electorate of Yerrabi. I note that there are many other similar sized pool complexes across Canberra, and I think these might be more suitably sized venues.

Thirdly, there was no continuation of the program following the trial. Partially, this was caused by COVID-19 restrictions, but if there had been a longer trial it would have been interesting to see how the numbers built and whether the pushback eased off as other pool patrons became accustomed to the timetable changes. I hope that the program at Gold Creek will be given time to build numbers via word of mouth as well as more organised forms of promotion.

All of this stresses the fact that we need to get this right. I believe that the way to do that is through a coordinated, targeted and focused policy that prioritises inclusivity and long-term outcomes. Today, I am calling on the government, firstly, to commit to

providing gender-specific and gender-diverse swim times, by working with all relevant stakeholders. It is through the provision of gender-specific and gender-diverse times that people can feel confident and safe in order to be able to learn or practise how to swim. We also need to work with the relevant stakeholder groups to ensure that whatever program is developed is suitable for those groups. We should continue to work with operators to establish a further trial of gender-specific swim times at a suitable pool. This may be within an ACT government pool or it may be via a private pool operator. We will need to work with them to be able to come up with a viable program that allows those who, for whatever reasons, are looking for a safe and secure place in which to swim.

I am also calling on the government to ensure that public pools clearly communicate that all are welcome and that their complaint and reporting mechanisms are clear, supportive and accessible, should any issues arise. This was drawn from feedback from stakeholders who wanted to make very clear that they do not wish to be excluded due to actions from other users of pool precincts, just because they may not fit into the definitions of what a gender should be.

Finally, I am calling on the government to commit to ensuring that future ACT government swimming infrastructure is designed in an inclusive manner. Most of the swimming pool complexes that we have here in the ACT are of a large, open nature that currently preclude the creation of private spaces. So I am calling on the government, as part of the design for any future pool complexes, to see if we can, within the ACT, have at least one facility that does provide a private area for use. I commend this motion to the Assembly.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (3.22): I wish to thank Mr Braddock for bringing this important motion to the Assembly. I am aware that many Canberra pools have a range of programs designed to cater for the needs of community members, particularly learn-to-swim programs. I expect that they would be approached to consider scheduling arrangements for specific groups if the demand is identified. I remember that several years ago a solution was found for Muslim women seeking segregated pool facilities, when a private school offered access to its pool facility.

We support the availability of facilities for all groups to encourage greater participation in sport and exercise programs, and we welcome the introduction of programs to achieve these outcomes. Other immediate concerns include the provision of more changing facilities for women and girls, to encourage greater participation and engagement; major capital works to provide a dive pool for the Canberra community; and the construction of one or more hydrotherapy pools to contribute to improved health and lifestyle outcomes for those community members requiring such facilities. Hydrotherapy pools play a vital part in assisting people with health and mobility issues and in improving the quality of their lives, as well as reducing the need for other health and medical services.

I believe that the scheduling issues raised in this motion should be addressed by consultation with the various pool facility operators. With respect to extensive capital works expenditures on new facilities, it tends to take many years for feasibility studies, preliminary designs and community consultations. At times there may be a moving feast in terms of budget allocations, but I think it is a good step, going forward, to

speak with current facility operators to see how they can accommodate community needs. Therefore, I look forward to hearing that those straightforward discussions with pool operators about scheduling and accessibility arrangements have resulted in the introduction of solutions for the community.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Early Childhood Development, Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women) (3.24): I, too, want to thank Mr Braddock for bringing this motion to the Assembly. It calls for the ACT government to support more gender-specific swimming programs and more inclusive swimming programs across the ACT. It is something that the government has been implementing for some time. In fact, I recall that when I was Minister for Multicultural Affairs, we had a women's swimming program at a private pool. Unfortunately, the pool ended up closing down, so the program could not continue; however, since then we have had the 2019 program, which is about providing access for migrant and refugee families to use these facilities. The program also accommodates practices that uphold their community values.

It is something that the Minister for Multicultural Affairs Tara Cheyne and I will be working very carefully on in engaging with the multicultural community, particularly women and girls, making sure that they have access to pools that meet with their community values but also provide opportunities for women and girls in multicultural communities who might not ordinarily get the chance to have same-gender swimming lessons. We provided that opportunity during October. Unfortunately, as has been noted, we could not continue that trial or any further activities as a result of the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, further consideration of this program in ACT government-owned schools is being considered, and we will work with the operators to conduct a further trial of gender-specific and inclusive swim times. Since the trial was conducted in 2019, there have been new options and models that can be considered. More analysis is needed of more sustainable options, such as holding sessions at a pool facility of a smaller size.

The ACT government has continued to support stakeholder groups, though, through ACT Sport and Recreation's funding of initiatives such as the Refugee and Migrant Swimming Project. It is a Royal Life Saving Society initiative which received \$5,500 to deliver a 10-week program at the Gungahlin Leisure Centre between February and May 2022, with 20 cultural and linguistically diverse participants attending. Two more programs are planned to be hosted in the latter half of this year, with another 20 CALD participants anticipated to attend both of these programs. In addition to the swimming program, Royal Life Saving is providing a one-day workshop at the Cotter River, educating participants about swimming and safety at the inland river, and providing CPR training to all participants.

Muslim Sisters to ACTion—MustACT—received \$10,000 to run a female spring swimming project. The program started in September 2022 and will run to December 2022. This program will target women from CALD backgrounds and will be hosted at Aquatots pool in Gold Creek, with women-only access times. The program is being delivered on a Saturday afternoon and the aim is to target between 70 and 100 participants. I look forward to seeing the success of that program.

The government has also supported all-abilities and inclusive swimming opportunities through providing funding to Abilities Unlimited Australia through this year's 2022-23 ACT budget. Abilities Unlimited Australia was allocated \$225,000 to expand their local existing programs, which include water and swim safety, and movement, skills and social development for young people with special needs. Water Abilities is a fantastic program and is designed to teach lifesaving skills to children with diverse abilities. This program helps participants embrace their natural affinity with water in a safe and beneficial way. Having been able to participate in this program with the young people and their families I have seen the positive impact that safe water access has for these young people and their families. It also provides time in a place that meets the needs of those individuals so that they can learn how to swim in an environment that meets their sensory requirements.

The ACT government has also committed \$8.5 million in the ACT budget to develop the new hydrotherapy pool in Tuggeranong. The ACT government is also committed to ensuring that access to pools is available and developed. This has been demonstrated by the recent upgrades to the Dickson Aquatic Centre. This has seen the inclusion of an accessibility ramp, which will allow for easier ingress and egress from the pool for those who may be mobility impaired or older Canberrans who need easier access in and out of the pool.

The ACT government believes that all Canberrans should be provided with the opportunity to participate in sport and active recreation, and this includes aquatic recreation across the venues to provide healthy lifestyles and to develop the necessary confidence and skills to be safe in and around the water. I thank Mr Braddock again for bringing forward this motion to the Assembly. As I said, I look forward to working with the multicultural communities, with our own government swimming pool facilities and with private pools, and to engaging with the Minister for Multicultural Affairs Tara Cheyne to make sure that we can provide the access that these communities have been calling for.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.30), in reply: I would like to thank all members who have contributed today, and I thank the Assembly for the fact that we have tri-partisan support on this motion. I think that it reflects well on us as a community that we would like to see all in Canberra have the opportunity to learn how to swim and enjoy the water. Thank you.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Canberra Hospital—paediatric emergency department

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (3.31): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the ACT Government opened a dedicated paediatric service for children attending the Emergency Department at Canberra Hospital on 9 May 2016 comprising six treatment beds, two consultation rooms and a private waiting area;

- (b) the Government said the paediatric emergency wing would provide a faster service for children and their families and enhance their experience. “ACT Labor wants to ensure sick children are treated and discharged, or admitted to a hospital ward, as quickly as possible.”; and
 - (c) Labor went to the 2012 election promising a dedicated \$5.8 million service for children attending the Emergency Department. Federal Labor had promised up to \$5 million with ACT Labor providing \$879,000 over four years for a Paediatric Clinical Nurse Consultant;
- (2) further notes:
- (a) in April this year the Government decided its paediatric emergency wing would no longer operate at full capacity and, between April and August, the paediatric emergency department only operated 50 percent of the time; and
 - (b) since August the paediatric emergency stream has been mothballed and not functioning about 20 percent of the time meaning children and families must go to the adult emergency department which is inappropriate for them; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) immediately reopen and fully staff and operate the paediatric emergency wing at Canberra Hospital; and
 - (b) commit to keep the paediatric emergency wing permanently open and operational to provide the best health care to sick children.

Labor went to the 2012 election with a promise to establish a dedicated service for sick kids attending the Canberra Hospital’s emergency department. In ACT Labor’s policy statement then leader Katy Gallagher said that about one in four emergency presentations involved children. At the time, Ms Gallagher said:

ACT Labor wants to deliver a faster service for children and their families presenting to the Canberra Hospital emergency department, and enhance their experience.

That was a laudable goal to improve paediatric health care in Canberra. It is an issue that the Canberra Liberals have been campaigning on because this government has failed to provide quality health care for sick, vulnerable children and their anxious families and carers. Sadly, the government have failed to deliver. as they have run down our health system, meaning that Canberrans are not getting the health care they need and deserve.

The then Chief Minister, Ms Katy Gallagher, announced that, if re-elected, the Labor government would provide \$5.8 million to establish a dedicated service for children in the Canberra Hospital emergency department—a paediatric stream. The federal Labor government had agreed to provide up to \$5 million in capital funding, while ACT Labor would allocate \$879,000 over four years to add a paediatric clinical nurse consultant. It is important to note that there was no footnote at the bottom of Labor’s election commitment that the new paediatric stream may or may not operate depending on circumstances—that it may be open or may not be open, based on a decision by the health executive or by the health minister.

No conditions were attached to the Labor government's much-trumpeted election promise to open, staff and operate a paediatric emergency stream. The most important part of Labor's election announcement came under the subheading, "Why is it important?" In words that I would impress upon our health minister today to read and understand, the policy document said:

ACT Labor recognises that having a sick child can be very distressing for parents, and coming to hospital can be a scary experience for some children. We want to ensure waiting, triage and treatment areas are the best they can be for sick children and their families, and that the process is as quick and easy as possible.

Those words are so important that I am going to read them again. The document said, "We want to ensure waiting, triage and treatment areas are the best they can be for sick children." Given that a paediatric ED stream offers the best for sick children, why ever would a government decide that that can operate and then not operate, or can be triaging and treating children and then be mothballed?

While the government at the time ruled out a standalone paediatric emergency department because of the ACT's small size, Ms Gallagher said that a dedicated paediatric wing would improve the quality of the service provided to Canberra families. What government goes to an election promising to invest in a new and important ED service to improve care for Canberra families and then takes that away? It is a government that has completely let down Canberrans when it comes to providing the best health care, quality health care, and a commitment to continuous improvement, as opposed to running down a system that should be the envy of the nation.

On 9 May 2016, more than three and a half years after it was promised by Labor, the government opened its dedicated treatment areas at the Canberra Hospital's emergency department. A *Canberra Times* article the following day carried the headline, "Canberra's kids finally have emergency department as well as six beds, two consultation rooms and a private waiting area". The newspaper report also revealed that the paediatric wing included a change room, an isolation room and more private treatment spaces. The *Canberra Times* reported:

Canberra Hospital deputy director-general Dr Ian Thompson said the unit provides a safe haven for children and their families while they are being treated.

"It provides an environment that's welcoming for children and will hopefully reduce their anxiety in what can be a very worrying time," Dr Thompson said.

"We've got a dedicated waiting area which means children can come straight through here and not have to wait in the main waiting area, so they don't have to see other patients who are presenting and some of the sick adults who are here."

Importantly, Dr Thompson also added:

On each shift we will roster people specifically to this area and we will always have staff available to care for the children.

Another article about the paediatric emergency department, from 2015, quoted then Clinical Director of Paediatrics Jeff Fletcher as saying:

Having children in an area that is safe and away from the vision of sick adults is probably the best model of care.

The best model of care is what this incompetent government is prepared to walk away from. In a media release to mark the paediatric ED opening on 9 May 2016, then Health Minister and Deputy Chief Minister Simon Corbell boasted of his government's achievement, saying:

I am proud to be delivering on this government's commitment to better access to health services for Canberra's families.

He went on to say:

Paediatric patients will now be seen in a private and family-friendly setting, where they can feel as comfortable as possible.

In April this year, the government, for reasons it will no doubt creatively spin, took the decision to reduce the operations of its much-lauded paediatric ED which, between April and August, was only open and operational about 50 per cent of the time. When the paediatric ED was not open and operating, its staff were transferred to the main emergency department, where all patients were seen. In other words, sick kids and their families and carers had no choice but to wait and be triaged with the sick adults. So much for this government providing the best model of care for Canberra's sick and vulnerable children! Since August, the paediatric ED has not been operating about 25 per cent of the time.

It is important to point out the demand for a paediatric emergency stream, although I feel that the case has already been strongly made by the Labor government, which shows how quick they are to walk away from their commitments and promises. Hospital data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reveals that the second highest emergency presentation rate is for patients aged four and under. The AIHW data for ED presentations in this age group also reveals that in the ACT in 2020-21 children aged under 14 comprised one in five of all ED presentations at the Canberra Hospital. These figures would be higher if we included children under 16.

Before concluding, may I draw the attention of the chamber to comments from the AMA at the end of last month that the effect of COVID on staff shortages in our health services was minimal. On Friday 30 September, in an interview on ABC radio, AMA ACT President Dr Walter Abhayaratna said:

We have been told by Canberra Health Services that the impact on the workforce from COVID was minimal.

But we know that the paediatric emergency stream is being mothballed and not operating on a permanent basis, as it should.

The Canberra Liberals have been campaigning for better hospital and health care for sick children, which is why the paediatric ED must always be open and operating at full capacity. That is why this motion calls on the government to immediately reopen

the hospital's paediatric stream and make a commitment that from now on it will remain permanently open, staffed and operating.

Grieving Canberra mum Katrina Spadafora recently called on the health minister to address the inadequacy of emergency paediatric care in the ACT. In an interview with *CityNews* last week, she said that Canberra needs a proper paediatric emergency department. On behalf of Ms Spadafora and all Canberra's parents, carers and sick children, I implore this government to immediately make open and operational our paediatric ED and honour its commitment to provide the best care for Canberra's sick and most vulnerable kids.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health) (3.41): I move:

Omit all text after "(2) further notes:", substitute:

- "(a) due to the impact of COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses among the health workforce, Canberra Hospital's Emergency Department has been required to operate on a consolidated footprint during periods of staffing pressure;
 - (b) in order to provide the safest possible care to paediatric patients, paediatric presentations were consolidated into adult acute emergency areas approximately 42 percent of the time between 1 April and 31 July 2022 and 25 percent of the time from 1 August to 8 October 2022;
 - (c) emergency paediatric care continues to be provided to children and adolescents who present to the Canberra Hospital Emergency Department in a way that recognises their different needs regardless of the area in which a child or adolescent is treated; and
 - (d) the new Critical Services Building Emergency Department has been designed with consumers and clinical user groups and includes an enhanced paediatric treatment area, expanded paediatric waiting area and courtyard to ensure children and families are comfortable while awaiting emergency treatment; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to continue to safely optimise use of the paediatric emergency department space at Canberra Hospital."

I draw to the attention of the Assembly that the health and wellbeing committee had a briefing at lunchtime today in which this issue was covered. I find it fascinating that Ms Castley was unable to change her speech in any way to reflect the facts that were presented at that briefing, which clearly indicate that her motion is not accurately representing the facts on either the way that the paediatric care space works in the emergency department or the work that Canberra Hospital is doing to ensure that it can be open as much as possible.

To be clear, Ms Castley has twice quoted, I think, from now Senator Gallagher about waiting, treatment and triage areas being the best they can be. We need to be very clear that we are talking about a physical space here that has been closed on occasion in order to ensure that children and young people presenting to the emergency department can be treated as safely as possible.

As health minister, my priority is to ensure that Canberra Hospital provides the safest and highest quality clinical care to children and young people. So I am absolutely not going to direct them to open a separate, segregated space to ensure a better waiting environment for children and young people and their families if that will compromise the quality of clinical care that those children and young people receive.

It was made very clear to Ms Castley in that briefing, that the number one priority is to ensure that the quality of clinical care for children and young people presenting to the emergency department is as good as it can be and that having the paediatric waiting area and treatment area closed on occasion does not compromise the quality of clinical care that is provided in the emergency department to children. We need to be absolutely crystal clear about that. In fact, the only reason that it is closed on occasion is to ensure that quality clinical care can be maintained and the safest possible care can be provided to paediatric patients. That is what my amendment today makes clear.

We also need to make clear that the emergency department is never closed and provides emergency services to the Canberra community 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It permanently operates an adult and paediatric emergency department on the same footprint. That means that adult and paediatric emergency patients are seen within the same ED. Ms Castley has made the point that, when this separate space was established, part of the discussion around that was the fact that the ACT is not large enough to have an entire separate paediatric or children's emergency department. We just do not have the population to support that safely. Treatment and care of paediatric patients is never closed and it is never mothballed. So I want to reassure the Canberra community that if your child needs emergency care you can always present to the emergency department for treatment by the ACT's highly skilled health workforce.

When we talk about children and adolescents between the ages of zero to 16 years, they do have their own needs as they age and grow. Ensuring the right care in the right place at the right time for these members of our community is essential. That is why we have of course opened this space. I do not know if Ms Castley has been in there; she probably has. It is a friendly space for children and young people and their families while they wait and while they are treated. That is its purpose: to be a friendly space, not to change clinical care. Ms Castley, I think, unfortunately, again is too busy attempting to scaremonger the Canberra community through cheap political tactics to pay attention to the real priority, which is providing quality clinical care. This is another example, I think, of Ms Castley's irresponsibility in putting the headline ahead of the interests of children, young people and families in our community.

Despite the fact that Ms Castley did not have an opportunity to update her talking points, I hope that today's briefing did provide Ms Castley with both some further information and some reassurance that Canberra Hospital takes the emergency treatment of children and young people very seriously and that the fact that the space itself was closed for 42 per cent of the time between 1 April and 31 July and for a quarter of the time between 1 August and 8 October did not compromise that clinical care and it was in fact done to provide the safest possible care.

Even that updated information in my amendment indicating that the amount of time that that space is not being used—the footprint of the emergency department is being

consolidated to provide safer care—has gone down over time and is continuing to go down is a clear indication that we have not walked away from this space, and that when it can safely be used it will safely be used to support children, young people and their families.

We do recognise that it is much better for children to be in a space that is friendly for them, that is family friendly. That is why, in the development and design of the critical services building, which will have a larger emergency department, new and specifically designed, the team has worked with consumers and clinical user groups to include an enhanced paediatric treatment area, an expanded paediatric waiting area and even a courtyard to ensure that children and families are comfortable while they are waiting for emergency treatment. This is something that we take very seriously, that we think is really important, but it is not more important than providing safe care.

In terms of the emergency department more broadly, in the 2021-22 budget we invested \$23 million in the Canberra Hospital emergency department to expand the capacity of the emergency department to better respond to service demand pressures and to support contemporary models of care. Funding through this initiative provided for expansion of the current emergency medical unit, additional medical and nursing workforce and development of an acute medical unit, as part of our continued service improvements in the emergency department, to which we remain committed.

So I thank Ms Castley for giving me the opportunity to highlight the improvements that ACT Labor continues to make in our emergency care. I again reassure her—and I need to continually repeat myself because Ms Castley seems to not hear when we say things—that the decision to reduce the ED footprint was to ensure the safest environment for patients and our health workforce.

This is a decision that is made by senior ED clinicians, nursing and medical, and their ED leadership. This is not a decision that is made by the health minister. It would be absolutely inappropriate for me, as health minister, to be second-guessing the emergency department leadership and the clinicians, nursing and medical, on the floor, when they are determining how to ensure that the safest care can be given to children and young people. These decisions are made on a shift-by-shift basis—that is, every eight hours—as to where patients need to be cared for to maintain that safe environment.

Over the winter period, when we know that our hospital, like every other hospital across the country, has been experiencing staffing pressures, paediatric patients have been seen in either fast-track or acute areas of the ED rather than in the paediatric space. These decisions are not made on the whim of an executive. They are not made by me. They are not made by the CEO. They are made by clinicians, because the health services take seriously their role in providing exceptional care to our community. These decisions are based on the current patients in the ED at the time, the demand across the various streams, the staffing skill mix and the predicted presentation for the upcoming shift.

These decisions always aim to minimise the time that these arrangements are in place, for all the reasons that Ms Castley has talked about regarding the value of that space. We absolutely recognise that. Of course we will get back to that operating 100 per

cent of the time as quickly as that is possible to do, but safety must be the priority. I think it is also important to make the point that the vast majority of paediatric patients have in fact been accessing that space this year. I recently heard from a parent who attended Canberra Hospital ED with their very unwell one-year-old less than two weeks ago, and they spoke about the care they received and the excellence of that care. They did attend the broader ED and, following triage with the nursing staff, they were then moved to the paediatric waiting and treatment area and treatment was provided in the paediatric space.

I have also received a number of compliments from members of the community who have received safe and exceptional care at the Canberra Hospital ED. I am grateful, of course, for the hard work that our staff do there to care for members of the community of all ages, just like those nurses in our walk-in centres, who care for members of our community of all ages, now down to one year old as the minimum presentation age. Our nurse-led walk-in centres have fantastic advanced practice nurses and nurse practitioners who are able to treat people of all ages, down to one year old.

The ACT government has ensured that our health services are continually improving the care that they provide to children and young people, as part of our commitment to improving those health outcomes through both of our emergency departments—but particularly Canberra Hospital, as the centre for children and young people—and through our walk-in centres.

We are also expanding the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children, with a \$50 million expansion, on top of the \$624 million Canberra Hospital expansion project. The Centenary Hospital expansion will further grow services for the ACT and surrounding regions for women, children and their families. The Centenary Hospital has a dedicated team of paediatricians and nurses providing services to children and adolescents. Its expansion has been planned to enable the growing demands for health services to be met. As I have said, the critical services building will include, in its new, larger emergency department, a specific paediatric treatment care space, a waiting space and courtyard. We are also planning for services beyond 2024 when that opens.

We launched the ACT Health Services Plan on 8 August to inform on how we will continue to develop and re-design our publicly funded health care over the next eight years. The development and implementation of a child and adolescent clinical services plan is a key action under that. I recently announced the establishment of a child and adolescent clinical services expert panel to really drive that work to completion and to ensure that there is independent clinical expertise brought to bear in the finalisation of that work. Some great work has already been done by our fantastic public servants, ensuring that the community can have confidence in the end result of that.

I think Ms Castley's assumption—and she said it again in the chamber today—that exposure to adults with a mental illness or alcohol or drug addiction who need to attend the emergency department for care is necessarily going to be detrimental is problematic and shows that the views of the Liberals and Ms Castley are fundamentally out of step with the views of broader Canberrans about recognising the needs of vulnerable people in our community. There is a reason that we have a separate paediatric space. It is important, but it is also important not to scaremonger

about these issues and not to discourage families from bringing their sick children and young people to the emergency department when they need emergency care, because they will get that clinical care. I commend my amendment to the Assembly.

MR DAVIS (Brindabella) (3.56): I will make a few remarks in my capacity as the chair of the Assembly's Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing before I turn to my substantive remarks. The minister referenced it in her speech but, for the Assembly's benefit, the committee facilitated a meeting today with the minister and her officials from ACT Health and Canberra Health Services to discuss paediatric screening and paediatric health care in the Canberra Hospital. Members of the committee, Dr Paterson and Mr Milligan, were there and, on invitation, the shadow health minister, Ms Castley, joined us. That is the end of comments in my capacity as chair, just to preface further comments around that issue.

Mr Assistant Speaker Pettersson, I would like you, for a moment, if you could, to imagine being a parent with a subscription to the *Canberra Times*, or perhaps you subscribe to the *CityNews* and you saw the earlier reporting this week flagging Ms Castley's motion, saying that the paediatric ward at the Canberra Hospital was closed. Imagine that your child was unwell in the days afterwards and imagine the judgements that you may have been forced to make, based on that available information. I find that very concerning because, as the minister highlighted in her remarks, no-one has been or will be turned away from Canberra health services when they need to access health care. No-one has been and no-one will be.

While we all love a robust debate about all manner of issues in this place, I think it would behove the opposition to be a little bit more creative in their commentary to make sure that, when they are trying to criticise what the government is doing, as oppositions rightly do, they do it in a way that does not undermine public confidence in our healthcare systems. I think headlines like that on press releases and the headlines written by a number of Canberra mastheads are very damaging for parents of young people who may have needed to, in the past couple of days, access health care.

Let me share with the Assembly some of the things that I have learnt by taking advantage of today's briefing. The first is that every single young person, indeed every single person, who presents to the Canberra Hospital requiring free, world-class public health care will be provided with free, world-class public health care. The paediatric wing in the hospital, which is separate to the emergency room, consists of six beds and two consultation spaces. I asked the question specifically to officials as to whether there was any difference in the provision of health care in those spaces to the provision of health care in the broader emergency room, and I was responded to with: "Other than decals on the windows or perhaps *Finding Nemo* playing on the TV, no difference, Mr Davis." So I hope any parents listening to this debate are assured by that—that there are beds available, that there are spaces available, and that their young person, if they require it, will receive care at the Canberra Hospital.

The reason that, for the second time today, I have had to implore the opposition to try and find some nuance in their bulldozer-style crash or crash-through political debate is particularly pertinent when it comes to talking about health care. There is no denying that I have probably ruffled a few feathers in my own government by my

advocacy in this space and the sponsorship of the ANMF petition calling on the government to work with the union to develop a workforce plan. I think Ms Castley has raised some very valid points relative to paediatric care at the hospital or, more broadly, about some structural pressures on staffing—nurses, midwives and AINs in particular. I share those concerns, and I have been pleased to work with her in advocating for some of the issues of those frontline healthcare workers. I am sure it has not won me much favour.

But this seems like an attempt at a political hit that is very below the belt and really risks undermining public confidence in our healthcare systems. So it would be very easy for me to fill my entire my 15 minutes of speaking remarks, but I do not intend to. I intend to make a few summary remarks.

First of all, I would like to thank Minister Stephen-Smith for making herself and her officials available to the Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing to brief us on this particular issue. I take this opportunity to encourage her ministerial colleagues to take advantage of the committees of the Assembly more frequently and perhaps offer, rather than always need to be asked, briefings on issues of interest to the Assembly as they arise, either on the notice paper or in the media. I think that is a really good way to run this place, and I think it really helps members, particularly those in the non-executive, to get a better idea of exactly what is going on and who is doing what. I think that is a good process.

Secondly, I want every single Canberra parent to know that, in spite of some structural challenges identified by everybody in this place, you will get great health care at the Canberra Hospital or at Calvary Hospital in Bruce, should your young person be unwell. Do you disagree, Ms Castley?

Ms Castley: Absolutely.

MR DAVIS: Absolutely?

Ms Castley: What am I disagreeing to?

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Pettersson): Ms Castley, this debate will be engaged in in a respectful manner. I would request that all members direct their remarks through the chair.

Mr Cain: Point of order, Mr Assistant Speaker.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Cain, on a point of order.

Mr Cain: Mr Davis addressed Ms Castley directly during his presentation, which is in breach of the standing orders.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Cain, I just dealt with that point. Mr Davis.

MR DAVIS: While I do not have an opportunity to speak again, Ms Castley does, as the mover of the motion. So perhaps she could clarify that in her closing remarks. My

question, through you, Mr Assistant Speaker, was that I would hope that we could all agree in this place that we would not just agree but actually encourage Canberra families and Canberra parents to take their children to the Canberra Hospital or to Calvary Public Hospital in Bruce when they are unwell. Media releases like we have seen issued this week, headlines like we have seen written this week and debates like we have seen in the chamber today from Ms Castley—who, granted, had the briefing during the lunch break and may not have had the opportunity to rewrite her speech—do risk undermining public confidence in that healthcare system.

I have been happy, on occasion, to join with Ms Castley, in spite of whatever political risk that presents to me, when I believe Ms Castley, as a fellow of the non-executive, makes criticism of the executive that I am inclined to agree with or share.

Mr Cain: Do you have confidence in the minister?

MR DAVIS: I will take that interjection. Mr Cain just asked me if I had confidence in the minister. That actually proves the political MO of this opposition. They will just jump straight to confidence. It is 100 or nothing with this lot. It is 100 or nothing with this lot because it is about getting a scalp and it is about getting a headline.

Mr Cain: Confidence is important to the community.

MR DAVIS: I have confidence in the health minister, Mr Cain. I try to bring nuance to my political debate—and I know my Greens colleagues on the crossbench try to bring nuance to the political debate—but I think we can have genuine criticisms of shortcomings without wanting to throw the baby out with the bathwater and put you lot in charge. I think that is possible. I would encourage members of the opposition, when they want to engage in policy debates, particularly policy debates that risk undermining confidence in public health services, like this, to find it in themselves to engage with a little bit of nuance.

As Minister Stephen-Smith referenced in her speech, the Canberra electorate are very switched on, very engaged people, who understand these debates, understand complexities and understand that the health system is still structurally, financially and operationally recovering from the effects of the pandemic, more than any part of the economy or society. If you think the pandemic is over, spend some time at the Canberra Hospital and you will know that it is not. I think Canberrans might actually take the opposition bit more seriously if they were prepared to engage with Canberrans on challenging policy issues with a little bit of nuance.

Ms Castley even said in her remarks: “The health system has completely let down Canberrans.” Say that to everybody who got free vaccines through the pandemic. Say that to the thousands of people currently at our two public hospitals receiving public health care. Say that to members of my own family who have received lifesaving care in the last few weeks because of our robust, well-resourced public healthcare system.

It is hyperbole, it is dramatisation, it is headline seeking and, by doing it, you risk undermining confidence in the public health system. So, please, Canberra Liberals opposition: when you have a point, I will back you. When I agree with you, I will say

it. I do not wish to be sycophantic. But, when you come in here with dramatisations and hyperbole in spite of having been provided information to the contrary as recently as just before this debate, it is infuriating. Canberra parents, in particular, who should trust that they can get world-class health care at TCH for their young people, should be particularly disturbed by these sorts of political machinations.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (4.06): As I mentioned in my opening speech, the Labor-Greens government promised Canberra 10 years ago that there would be a paediatric emergency wing—10 years ago. This is what was needed 10 years ago. We are 10 years down the track and it did not grow. It did not get bigger; it just got mothballed and is not operational 100 per cent of the time.

I turn to Mr Davis's comment on the media release title. I was not going to address any of that, but I have it here. I can email it to you, if you like. The title of the media release was—

Dr Paterson: Point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. Ms Castley is talking directly to Mr Davis, rather than through the chair.

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you, Dr Paterson. I would ask you to direct your comments through the chair, please, Ms Castley.

MS CASTLEY: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I appreciate Dr Paterson pulling me up on that—very important! Mr Davis commented on the title of my media release, saying that I was telling Canberrans that the emergency paediatric department was closed, when, in fact—and I can email it to all of the members of the Assembly, if they like—the title is, “Paediatric emergency wing at the Canberra Hospital must operate at full capacity”. Nothing at all in that title indicates that it is closed. That is not a scaremongering title; it is the truth. I go back to the election promise of 2012 that we still do not have fully functioning here. It is a disappointment and a concern to Canberran families that the government have said, “This level of care is a dedicated emergency department for kids,” and they have gone back on that and said that that does not happen.

As far as the committee briefing today goes, I did hear it. What I heard was that 10 years ago the government promised something and has been unable to adequately staff this, so now it is not running at full capacity. My concern is that the people who are let down today the most are our sick kids and our parents and carers who are going to ED who do not have that much-needed facility, that much-needed wing, that the Labor government said they needed and promised them that they would have. They just do not have that 100 per cent of the time.

These are not cheap political points; these are valid concerns of Canberra parents and carers. If it was important enough for Minister Katy Gallaher to set up this wing then it is important enough to keep it running today 100 per cent of the time. I too have spoken to clinicians, and they have expressed how important this is to them and to our kids. I refuse to believe that the amendment moved by this government is the best they can do. They must get the settings right. They must get the basics right, and that is not happening here today. So the Canberra Liberals will not support the amendment put forward by the minister. It is simply not good enough.

Question put:

That the amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 15		Noes 8
Ms Berry	Ms Orr	Mr Cain
Mr Braddock	Dr Paterson	Ms Castley
Ms Burch	Mr Pettersson	Mr Hanson
Ms Cheyne	Mr Rattenbury	Mrs Kikkert
Ms Clay	Mr Steel	Ms Lawder
Ms Davidson	Ms Stephen-Smith	Ms Lee
Mr Davis	Ms Vassarotti	Mr Milligan
Mr Gentleman		Mr Parton

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Roads—maintenance

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (4.16): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) during the recent Estimates hearings, it was revealed that the ACT Government has paid more than \$43,000 in claims for damage from potholes to motorists in 2022 alone;
- (b) at the time of the Estimates hearings, the average amount for a pothole claim was \$860;
- (c) it was revealed that there had already been a significant increase in the amount of pothole damage claims paid by the ACT government, already at 50 so far in 2022, compared to 40 in 2021 and 16 in 2020;
- (d) spending ratepayers' money on pothole damage claims is a complete waste of money and demonstrates the government's failure at the most basic level of municipal services;
- (e) community concern continues to grow about the amount and severity of potholes on ACT roads;
- (f) persistent rain has contributed to the number of potholes but so too has a lack of proactive road maintenance in warmer months;
- (g) delivering safe and accessible roads is a basic government responsibility that the Labor-Greens Government is failing at; and
- (h) Canberrans pay exorbitant levels of rates and it is not unreasonable of them to expect adequate roads in return; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) investigate what changes must be made to the road maintenance approach to improve the state of ACT roads;
- (b) provide residents with a plan to reduce the amount of ratepayer's money spent on pothole damage claims; and
- (c) publicly announce these findings and details of their implementation by 1 December 2022.

I am sure that, like me, many members of this place have received many representations from constituents about potholes—on the number of them, the size of them and the depth of them. My motion today calls on this Labor-Greens government to investigate what changes need to be made to the road maintenance approach to improve the state of our ACT roads. It calls on the government to provide residents with a plan to reduce the amount of ratepayers' money spent on vehicle damage claims caused by potholes. Finally, it calls on the Labor-Greens government to publicly announce these findings and details of their implementation by December.

There has been significant community concern about potholes on ACT roads. Mr Deputy Speaker, you would be hard-pressed to find a Canberran at the moment who has not hit a pothole or perhaps swerved around one. You would be hard-pressed to find someone who did not have a story about a particular pothole or have a so-called favourite pothole that they see occur over and over again.

Not only are they an eyesore; it has got to the point where it is downright dangerous, and a driving hazard for motorists. People are not just losing hubcaps anymore; they are losing tyres, they are breaking rims and they are getting other damage to their vehicles. Sometimes drivers swerve suddenly to dodge potholes, and this is dangerous. Sometimes drivers drive very slowly at night to try to see potholes, and this, too, can be dangerous—driving well below the speed limit.

On that note, I would urge everyone to drive very safely. Make sure that you leave a good distance between your car and the car in front, and do not swerve out into oncoming traffic or traffic in the lane next to you. Beneath that road safety message, I do not think it is a big ask for Canberrans to expect safe and accessible roads, given the rates that we pay. Providing safe and accessible roads is a basic municipal service that the ACT government, as a local council, should be providing. It is a basic municipal service and it is not being delivered.

I know that the minister will get up shortly and talk about the rain, the unprecedented rain, and how we on this side of the chamber do not understand that all of these potholes are caused by the rain we have been experiencing. Canberrans know, and we know, that rain exacerbates potholes, but the number and severity of potholes point to a lack of maintenance.

I would like to thank our road crews, who are out in difficult conditions. They are out there, day and night, in the rain. The other night, when I was coming home from Gungahlin—I think it was Friday night—it was raining at the time, and there were road crews out fixing a pothole. They are working under difficult conditions, but I do not believe that they are being resourced adequately.

While there has been a lot of rain lately—in fact, there has been a lot of rain for the last few years; we all know that—and it does affect the number of potholes on roads, this is not the only factor. The government has not been delivering the proactive road maintenance that is required in the warmer months to improve ACT roads. In a *Canberra Times* article back in September, the Chief Executive of the Australian Road Research Board shared his insights on the state of ACT roads. He said:

From my observation, the ACT road network is in a poor condition ...

The professional engineers in the roads department know that. They are very capable and competent people but the evidence is that the road system is deteriorating, and ordinary drivers are seeing that ...

So, colleagues, it is a failure to properly maintain, refresh and resurface our roads. We are seeing a bit of a bandaid solution, and we need to do better. I have written to the minister on a number of occasions about road repairs and potholes. These concerns have come from residents in the electorate of Brindabella, who have seen potholes that have been attended to worsen, recur and further damage the road, getting bigger and bigger. These concerns seem to get fobbed off by the minister.

We all know that you should not be out trying to fix the roof on a rainy day, but that is the approach that this Labor-Greens government is taking on our roads—out there trying to fix our roads on a rainy day, filling potholes on a rainy day, rather than taking a more proactive and longer lasting approach.

Earlier this year, we heard reports that the number of complaints about potholes had dramatically increased in recent years, with the government receiving 3,028 pothole complaints through Access Canberra from 1 January to 6 October 2021. That is 2.3 times more complaints compared to 2020, and over three times more than in 2019. During the recent estimates hearings it was revealed that the ACT government is paying out tens of thousands of dollars to motorists in claims for damage from potholes in 2022 alone.

The ACT government has already paid out 50 pothole-related claims so far in 2022, up from a total of 40 in the previous year and 16 in the year before that. This is a waste of taxpayers' money. This is money that could and should have been used earlier in road maintenance. I do not blame residents for claiming that damage. In fact, in a way, I encourage them to do that because it is indicative of the poor approach to road maintenance by this government.

Maintaining safe roads is exactly the sort of service for which people pay their rates, yet the government are failing to the point where they have to hand ratepayers' money back to them because their vehicles have been damaged due to government failure. It is a bit embarrassing that, here in Canberra, the nation's capital, this is the sort of activity for which we are getting known. Earlier this week, I heard that the social media page Canberra Potholes was the top item in the news in Perth. We are becoming a laughing stock around the nation. We are supposed to be the capital of Australia, yet we cannot get basic municipal services right.

Let us not forget that it was this minister who promised, during the 2020 election campaign, in October 2020, that ACT Labor would spend \$4 million on fixing every pothole on territory roads if re-elected. Four million dollars can fix a lot of potholes—every single pothole, they said, on territory roads. He must have been laughing when he came up with that one. Firstly, it demonstrates that potholes were an issue years ago, not just this year and last year. Potholes have been an ongoing issue for quite some time. The Labor-Greens government must give residents a plan for how they are going to reduce the amount of ratepayers' money being spent on pothole-related claims. Residents deserve a plan; they need to know that the government will stop wasting residents' money because of its failure to deliver these basic municipal services.

We have seen these social media pages, the memes and all sorts of things, where people are laughing about potholes. Quite frankly, Mr Deputy Speaker, if you are not laughing, you are probably crying. When you go over one of those giant holes in the road and hear the big thump, and you either fear or know that your tyre and your rim have been damaged and your hubcap is rolling off down the road, you feel pretty upset and angry. For most people, their car is their single most valuable asset after their home—perhaps not for everyone, although some of the Greens own a few homes. Your car is an important asset on which you have spent a lot of money. Let us face it, how many people have 400 or 800 bucks sitting around, just to hand over for the repair of their car? It is a big outlay for the average person, and they should not have to do that.

If the government admitted that the approach they have been taking to road maintenance is a bit lazy and reactive rather than proactive, Canberrans might feel a bit better about it. Instead, they are experiencing the consequences of years of negligence. The government must change their approach so that we can finally reduce the number of potholes on ACT roads and stop handing out ratepayers' money senselessly. But what I anticipate will happen is that, perhaps a week or two out from the next election, we may get another announcement of a few more million dollars to fix our potholes, rather than the longer term, better maintenance program that I have been talking about today. Starving the area of money and then announcing a blitz on it is the pattern of this government, and they expect us to be grateful for it when they come out with millions of dollars to fix something that should have been fixed long ago. I commend my motion to the Assembly.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Skills, Minister for Transport and City Services and Special Minister of State) (4.27): Let me start by acknowledging the hard work of ACT road crews in what are very difficult and unpredictable conditions at the moment. Our Roads ACT crews are working around the clock, every day of the week, to provide the ACT community with a safe and reliable road network.

It is no secret that there has been an increase in damage to our roads. Two years of heavy rainfall, directly caused by two successive La Niña weather patterns over multiple years, exacerbated by climate change, have led to an increase in the occurrence of potholes and other defects on our roads. Annual rainfall during 2020 and 2021 was 45 per cent above average. This weather is forecast to continue into 2023, based on forecasts from the Bureau of Meteorology.

Further, the risk of extreme rainfall and flooding from La Niña is only exacerbated by climate change. Climate change has increased the frequency and severity of extreme weather events, which are placing our infrastructure assets under considerable strain. Ms Lawder's motion blames a lack of road maintenance for potholes, but it is undeniable that extreme weather events are happening now and will continue into the future.

Damage caused by rain to the road network is not unique to the ACT. States and territories across the east coast of Australia are encountering significant increased rainfall and, consequently, similar damage to their road networks. You need only drive outside the ACT, down the Kings Highway to the coast or up the Hume to Sydney, to see the effect that the rain has had on New South Wales state roads and those managed by local government. The reality is that large amounts of water cause damage to road pavements.

When water gets under the road surface due to the heavy rainfall, as we have seen recently, it eats away at the road base, which means that the road surface can deteriorate and potholes can form. We see other road defects occurring as well. When potholes appear in the short term, road crews can apply a cold mix asphalt to fill in the pothole and improve safety quickly, until a longer term solution can be implemented.

To ensure good condition in the long term, Roads ACT will look at heavy patching in those areas, particularly where there are recurring potholes. This involves cutting up the road, removing the moisture and providing a new layer of hot-mix asphalt or repairing the road base. Using hot mix is a durable solution, but it is most effectively applied in the warmer months and it is dependent on clear weather. The high number of rain days during recent years, and over the last week in particular, has made this work very difficult.

In addition to repairing existing road defects, we are also focused on keeping our roads in good condition through the resurfacing and resealing program, with the program getting underway as we move into warmer weather. It is now just before that program gets underway. The reason that we have such an extensive annual road resurfacing program is to do what Ms Lawder is actually calling on us to do, which is to prevent damage. We already have a preventive program in place and, of course, we have a reactive program as well. We have to have both ends covered.

That preventive program extends the life of our roads. Resurfacing a road provides a longer term solution. It maintains the existing quality of the road by filling in cracks and avoiding the possibility of road defects appearing in the future. That is a big part of our program and we are about to get into that. Canberrans can expect that that will start occurring on roads throughout the ACT. There will be associated disruption with that, as we make road closures to allow those works to occur. I have just signed off on letters which will be sent out very soon, ahead of that occurring, so that residents can be informed about where that is occurring on their street, as well as on the arterial roads around the territory.

This week Ms Lawder announced the Liberals' policy on road maintenance. She said on record that, under the Liberal Party, if they were ever in government, they would prefer the most expensive resurfacing treatments to be applied in all circumstances on our

roads. What she does not realise is that, in effect, she has committed the Liberal Party to resurfacing fewer roads, resulting in worse conditions for our road network overall.

We will not take the Liberals' approach of resurfacing less surface area of our roads. We will continue to take an evidence-based approach, utilising the appropriate treatments that each part of our road network requires. That is different in different circumstances, particularly at intersections, where certain treatments are required because of the deformation that can come with heavy braking, turning and those sorts of movements. We will respond with appropriate resourcing, and we will resurface a greater area by efficiently deploying our resourcing.

To address the challenges that our road network is facing—challenges which are being faced by the whole east coast of Australia at the moment—the ACT government is responding by deploying more resources, working with experts and providing additional funding. Unlike the Liberals, who have no plan or strategy about how they would maintain roads, other than resurfacing less area, we are getting on with the job of maintaining our roads. This month the government is temporarily repairing potholes, with a focus on the most dangerous damage, while noting the difficulties that are affecting repairs, because the asphalt does not settle during rain and colder periods of the year.

We have delivered additional surge funding of \$4 million throughout the last two years towards road maintenance. In the last year Roads ACT repaired almost 8,000 potholes. This year, in August alone, over 1,100 potholes were patched. That compares to an average of 3,000 in a typical year. The government is providing all available resources to locate and repair potholes throughout the road network. We have extended contractor resources and redirected street-sweeping crews to assist in repairing road damage. We are putting in more resources because we know that this rain is likely to continue and that, inevitably, there will be more damage on our roads.

Last weekend all available internal resources, as well as extra contractor resources, were redirected to assist with the task of repairing potholes. Between Thursday, 6 October and Sunday, 9 October approximately 20 tonnes of cold mix was used to fill potholes. Under normal resourcing conditions, it would typically take two to three weeks to go through that quantity of cold mix.

As we move into warmer weather, more permanent patching and repair, resealing, and prevention and rehabilitation works will be undertaken as part of the annual road resurfacing program so that we can more permanently repair some of the issues that have arisen, as well as undertake that preventive work that is so crucial to making sure that we prevent issues from occurring in the first place. Roads ACT has recently extended the contract with the existing hot mix patching provider and it is in the process of engaging a second contractor to assist over the next couple of months. I note that this type of work is heavily reliant on having a break in the rain.

We are also deploying new state-of-the-art technology, where we can, to monitor and maintain our roads. A new road pavement condition testing contract commenced in early 2022, which will provide data on cracking, roughness, rutting and strength. A new method of pavement strength testing will be applied in the contract, called "multispeed deflectometer". This will improve the coverage of strength data and

allow Roads ACT to better recognise underlying issues and target solutions. Improvements in sensor technology have led to an upcoming expansion of sensor-collected road pavement condition data on municipal roads.

Finally, the ACT government is working with established experts, including the Australian Road Research Board, which Ms Lawder mentioned. We have been working with them for some time. It is not as a result of this motion; there has now been well over a year's worth of work undertaken on an updated road network evidence base to inform future strategic road maintenance and the development of a new, updated program.

Following the finalisation of the research that is underway, I am looking forward to providing the Assembly with an update on the ACT government's strategic road maintenance program, which has been in development for some time. We are keen to do that early in 2023. The ARRB have had some IT issues that they are working through at the moment. I am not sure whether that is rain related. These actions that we will be undertaking will lead to an improvement in the condition of our roads over some time.

In the short term we are asking Canberrans to be patient as works are underway, and the preventive road resurfacing program will be getting underway very shortly. Road maintenance activity may mean that some road and lane closures will occur, as our crews work to provide a safe and reliable network. We also remind road users to drive to the conditions, particularly the weather conditions, which are changing as that weather system moves through.

I encourage Canberrans, including Ms Lawder and her Liberal colleagues, to report potholes to Fix My Street. Such reports are really important for Roads ACT to identify where there are dangerous potholes, so that they can be responded to as quickly as possible. I do that myself. If I see one, I report it; they then get fixed. Those road defects are something that we need to address, and we encourage people to report those when they can so that we can deliver a safe and reliable road network.

I have circulated an amendment in my name which acknowledges the significant work underway, the strategic work that we are doing with the ARRB to develop the evidence base, going forward, and the additional resources that we are putting into maintaining a safe road network.

In relation to Ms Lawder's proposed amendment to my amendment, which she has also circulated, we will not be supporting that amendment. The reason is that there is clear information about how to make a claim, if someone sustains damage to their vehicle as a result of a pothole on the ACT road network, on the TCCS website. They need to do a search and make a claim to TCCS, and they will find that on the website. I am happy to provide the address as well, for members' interest. I move:

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

"(1) notes that:

- (a) two years of rainfall as a result of La Nina weather events and climate change has led to an increase in damage to ACT roads and this weather is forecast to continue into 2023;

- (b) damage caused by rain on the ACT road network is not unique, with states and territories across the east coast of Australia encountering similar damage due to increased rainfall;
 - (c) this month, the Government is temporarily repairing potholes with a focus on the most dangerous damage, noting the difficulties of effecting repairs during the rain and colder periods of the year;
 - (d) as we move into warmer weather, more permanent patching and repair, resealing and prevention and rehabilitation works will be undertaken as part of the Annual Road Resurfacing Program;
 - (e) roads crews are working around the clock in what are very difficult and unpredictable conditions to provide the ACT community with a safe and reliable road network;
 - (f) Roads ACT repaired almost 8,000 potholes in the last financial year, and over 1,100 in August 2022 alone, compared to an average of 3,000 in a typical year;
 - (g) Roads ACT has provided additional resources to locate and fill potholes throughout the road network, including extending contractor resources; and
 - (h) Roads ACT is working with established experts, including the Australian Road Research Board (ARRB), and has been undertaking an updated road network condition assessment, as part of the development of an evidence-base to inform the future strategic road maintenance program; and
- (2) calls on the Government to:
- (a) encourage Canberrans to report potholes via Fix My Street to help Roads ACT in quickly identifying and responding to road defects; and
 - (b) provide the Assembly with an update on the ACT Government's strategic roads maintenance program, which considers the research underway and changing climate conditions, in the first sitting week in 2023."

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (4.39): I want to speak briefly on Ms Lawder's motion and the amendments circulated by Minister Steel and Ms Lawder. I would like to thank Ms Lawder for bringing this motion forward. Canberra's potholes are a big concern for a lot of people at the moment and we all understand why. We have had a couple of years of really heavy rain from La Niña weather. Prior to that, Canberra had some of the best roads in the country.

I was recently at the South Coast. I pop down to Broulee quite a lot. I did notice that the regional roads on the way there and the way back were actually in an even worse state. We know this is happening everywhere and it is a real problem. We have had a lot of rain. It is sustained. It is over a much longer period than we are used to. This is part of climate change. We are getting different weather patterns. These weather patterns are going to get worse and we just have to adapt to those challenges.

Government is doing quite a lot to fix the roads. We have heard a lot from the minister about the ongoing program that is in place, about the strategy behind the

different choices that we are making. I would just like to echo his sentiments. I would really like to thank people for the hard work that they are doing to address these potholes.

Our roads do take a lot of work. They are expensive. They require a lot of maintenance. In the 2022-23 financial year the government is expecting to spend around \$286.8 million on road maintenance across the ACT. This is a really big, ongoing job. There are a lot of careful and expert decisions that we need to make along the way. We have got around 5,900 kilometres of road in the ACT, and in my office we worked out that that is about \$50 per metre of road per year in maintenance. Usually we have some of the best roads in the world. It is pretty uncommon to see potholes, which I think is why we are reacting so strongly to them at the moment. Our roads are maintained to a really high standard, and we are doing the best we can in the weather conditions at the moment.

I drive around a bit, but I ride around quite a lot and you are bit closer to the road. You see the conditions really, really easily when you are on a bike, I think. So I see firsthand the punishment that our roads are taking from heavy vehicles and high-volume traffic. I am really glad that we have the resources that we have for maintenance. It is incredibly important that we maintain our assets. I also would love to see more resources going into some of the measures that help to get more people off our roads, because that will actually also help with the maintenance, particularly as we move forward. We are likely to see more of these—I should not call them unusual—quite extreme weather patterns, and the less damage we can cause to those roads the better.

I would like to echo what has been said already. We have got some really hardworking staff. We have got some good strategies going to deal with this situation. I am pleased to see that happening and I would encourage it to keep going on. We know there are no magic solutions here. This is a big problem, and we are doing that work. I am pleased that we have information available on the website on how to make a claim. It is really, really good to know that that information is available. On the basis that that information is already readily available, I am not sure that we particularly need the second amendment. So the ACT Greens are happy to support Minister Steel's amendment in its original form.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (4.43): I want to thank Ms Lawder for bringing this important motion to the Assembly. There is a pothole plague amongst us, you could say.

Ms Castley: Potholes aplenty.

MR MILLIGAN: Potholes aplenty. They are at every turn. They are at every intersection. There are even potholes outside this building right now. They are inescapable. Some of them, I think, you could almost call sinkholes. It feels like I am playing a PlayStation game just dodging these potholes. There are plenty out in the streets. In August more than 200 potholes were reported, with an average of 52 days for those cases to be fixed. That is a lot of potholes and it is taking far too long to have them rectified. You see a lot of potholes reappear after the next bout of rain. It is just extending and extending, pothole after pothole.

Locally, in Yerrabi, Ms Castley and I have received numerous complaints about one road in particular, Jabanungga Avenue—no doubt she will cover this as well—from constituents who have faced years of issues with this one street. I repeat: years. It started off with a pothole and now that has extended to the ground actually being raised. Apparently there are issues with water running underneath that road. But it has been years. Nothing has been done. It has not been fixed and residents are really fed up with it.

I am currently running an electorate survey. Out of that survey, 66 per cent of responses have highlighted that urban maintenance is a major area of concern for them. Of those, 20 per cent have highlighted that potholes are the main area of their concern—20 per cent. This goes to show that over half of our region has complaints and concerns about our roads and also our urban areas.

This is our third La Niña summer in a row, which means that there is going to be more rain and wet weather. But we know that this is not new information for the government. For months they have known that there will be higher than usual rainfall, yet the current maintenance programs to ensure that our roads can withstand the oncoming weather are insufficient. You can expect that we will start seeing more potholes, no doubt, over the coming months and even over the next year.

ACT residents pay through the roof in rates. Not only does this go to show the government's negligence with taxpayers' money but it shows the lack of proper road maintenance, resulting in potholes and damaged roads, rendering some streets unsafe. There have been 40-odd cases reported of compensation for vehicles being damaged by roads. But I am sure that that figure is much, much higher because people are unaware of how they can make a claim when their vehicle has been damaged by potholes. So far, it is only sitting at \$43,000 in compensation, but that figure would be potentially much, much higher. To replace a wheel or tyres on a vehicle is not cheap. It is not cheap at all. Really, the government should get out there and repair these roads as best they can.

I see road maintenance and upkeep as a basic government responsibility. They continue to fail to provide this service. As community concerns continue to grow about the number and severity of potholes in the ACT, something needs to be done to ensure the community's safety on our roads. Motorists are apprehensive at times about travelling on our roads, due to the potholes. There is no attempt by this government to alert motorists to potentially damaging potholes on our roads. They have not even considered putting up signs to alert motorists to severe potholes on the roads that could cause significant damage to vehicles. Our taxes deserve far better street and road maintenance services. Unfortunately, the slow repair of potholes around Gungahlin is ramping up the list of issues that residents suffer from.

I support Ms Lawder's motion. I think that we do need to investigate what changes need to be made to road maintenance and our approach to the state of ACT roads. We need to provide residents with a plan to reduce the amount of ratepayers' money that is spent on claims for damage to vehicles. If only they knew exactly how to make a claim, I am sure that \$43,000 would probably be tenfold. Thank you, Ms Lawder, for bringing this important motion to the Assembly. I support it.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (4.48): I echo all of the words so far and I thank Ms Lawder for bringing this motion to the Assembly. I think the big word for me is neglect—overwhelmingly. Reports have hit my inbox from lots and lots of people, not just in Yerrabi but in all electorates. Canberrans believe that the government is ignoring the basics. It is just not getting it right. They are unhappy—wild—and have turned to humour, as Ms Lawder pointed out. I had a meme sent to me yesterday where someone was offering to take people on a trip to Tasmania. This pothole looked like a map of Tasmania, where you could go fishing and drop in a line. Things are bad.

Someone in Forde has measured a pothole there. It is 600 mm. That is a big one, right? That is going to interrupt even the biggest of tyres. And this is not in a spot where you can swerve. You literally have to scooch yourself up the footpath to avoid this pothole. It is just not good enough. We all shell out great money in rego. We deserve so much better than this neglect that we are seeing at the moment.

As Mr Milligan pointed out, the Jabanungga issue has been going on for years. It would have started as a pothole. I invite everyone for a Sunday drive, for everyone to pop out there and have a look. I have never seen anything like it. The asphalt nearly comes up to my thigh. The hole that was there—it has recently been filled, in the last few days—would have been big enough for a small car to pitch into and not be able to get out. These are the concerns that people in our electorate have, as Mr Milligan pointed out.

For those people who have contacted my office, this is our moment to shine. I am going to name every suburb that people has contacted me from. We have Harrison, Giralang, Kaleen, Mitchell, Nicholls, Forde, Ngunnawal, Casey and Amaroo. I am sure there are more. I could add more of the ones that I have simply driven around. We go with Bonner and Moncrieff, and nearly every other suburb. They are the ones that I have had numerous letters about.

It is a disgrace. That is why I support Ms Lawder’s motion. I do not really need to take any more time, other than just to comment that there was even a letter to the editor today from someone in Canberra saying:

It’s not as if the increase in rates comes with any increase in services. Quite the reverse in fact. Instead, potholes are not fixed, grasslands are overgrown to the extent they can’t be used (unless you are a horse or a kangaroo) and health services, the education budget and public housing have all declined.

That is just from today. So thank you, Ms Lawder. I applaud your efforts and fully support this motion.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.52): I would like to pass on a recommendation to the minister for a new hashtag for his department, for his approach to road maintenance: #potholesRus. I think it might take off. “Us” being Canberra, unfortunately. From having the best roads in the country a while back, surely we have amongst the worst. Given our place as the capital of this great country, it is a disgrace that the city of Canberra, the capital of Australia, is in such neglect. So I rise to support Ms Lawder’s motion and to support also the comments made by Mr Milligan and Ms Castley.

I am sad to report that my electorate of Ginninderra is also full of potholes, particularly as you wander west. Does Minister Steel know where west Belconnen is? With my local member hat on—and, of course, Mr Deputy Speaker, I do not have my hat on as my normal practice—I am appalled at what this minister has allowed our roads to deteriorate into. As we are aware, through the amendment that Mr Steel has distributed, he is going to tell us it is all about the weather. It is all about the weather.

But, from my perspective, a good government is not supposed to wait for problems to appear to fix them. They act so that the problems do not appear in the first place—or at least not to the degree that we are seeing. I have written more letters than I can remember to the Minister for Transport and City Services regarding potholes. Sometimes it is about the same pothole, which seems to re-emerge after being repaired. Thus far, I have written about 144 letters to the Minister for Transport and City Services regarding this phenomenon.

I am also very concerned about the cost that the government itself incurs—and ACT ratepayers—by having to pay for claims. This is not sound financial management. If we got the procurement and management of services right, this would not be an issue. We would be spending money effectively and proactively and assessing how the money is spent and why. Fortunately, it is not a massive total so far, but it is going to grow. Would that not have been better invested in road maintenance? The government needs to be more proactive. It needs to think ahead. It needs to think of maintaining things that are provided to the community, as opposed to waiting for a problem to appear and then acting.

As other members have done, I have done a bit of a survey of my electorate of Ginninderra, and there are two notable things that I have written about and used social media to highlight. One is the trench that appeared on Southern Cross Drive, just north of Ginninderra Drive. Sorry; I know we are talking about potholes here. But when you have some potholes that join together, I am going to call that a trench. Also, in Fraser recently, I did a spot of letterboxing where there is a large T-intersection. Near the bus depot and then further down the road, there are very, very significant and degrading potholes in the road. The neighbours just shake their heads and say, “Well, what more can we do about it?” I say, “I have written about this, and I am going to keep on the case of this government.”

I did mention, perhaps with a bit of levity, that Minister Steel might like to consider #potholesRus for his letterhead. But I perhaps need to give the minister some credit for some creative thinking here, because I do wonder whether, with hooning being such a problem in the territory, allowing the roads to be populated with potholes is the answer. I hope that is not where the thinking lies. I support Ms Lawder’s motion. I certainly reject Minister Steel’s amendment, which is a distraction from the root cause: that we need a thorough investigation of road maintenance and we need real investment in this in the territory.

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (4.57): I thank Ms Lawder for bringing this motion before the Assembly. My speech today is very simple, as it should be—a simple speech for a simple request. Fix my street. Fix my neighbour’s street. Fix Ginninderra’s streets. Fix Canberra’s streets. And then keep them in good repair

through regular maintenance and quality fixes. I will be straightforward. I have here a list of potholes around my electorate that need to be fixed. As I announce them, my staff will be live logging them on Fix My Street. Where measurements are quoted, they were taken by a tape measure but are approximate.

First, Lhotsky Street and Florey Drive has a pair of potholes quite close to each other, like a trench, as my colleague Mr Cain mentioned earlier. The one closest to Florey Drive is 65 by 57 centimetres and 2.5 centimetres deep. The one closest to Charnwood shops is 97 by 71 centimetres and three centimetres deep. Second, there is one at Lhotsky and Charnwood Place, likely sighted by the government some time ago, as evidenced by the faded yellow spray paint around it. Yet the hole remains. This one is 91 by 51 centimetres and is approximately seven centimetres at its deepest point.

Nearby is another, smaller pothole, outside the Emergency Services building, at Lhotsky and Cartwright Street, 35 centimetres by 53 centimetres and three centimetres in depth. At Lhotsky and Cartwright again, near bus stop 4208, it looks as if someone has already tried to fill it in with a light-coloured stone. This pothole also seems to have been sighted by the government some time ago, as evidenced by the faded yellow paint. This pothole is 120 by 72 centimetres and eight centimetres in depth.

Just north of the Lhotsky Street and Tillyard Drive intersection there are multiple potholes going southbound. Just west of Lhotsky and Donnison Place intersection this one is surrounded by gravel. It may have been sighted by the government recently, given the fresh white paint around it. This pothole is 177 by 75 centimetres and six centimetres in depth. That is just a few roads in Charnwood. There are surely more potholes in the area.

I will continuing with other areas of my electorate. Shakespeare Crescent and Woodhouse Place: a long strip of road damaged, approximately three metres in length and 150 centimetres in width. The intersection of Kerrigan Street and Shakespeare, closer to Fraser Primary School, has two potholes. One is 35 by 44 centimetres, with a two-centimetre depth, and the other is 73 by 50 centimetres, with a two-centimetre depth.

Hayden Drive, going north between Mary Potter Circuit and Purdie Street, has a deep but narrow pothole. At Mileham Street and Osburn Drive it looks as if an entire slab of road was replaced some time ago to fix the road, but it remains a serious hazard. This one is not just a pothole. A bump has also formed next to it. The entire affected area is approximately 10 metres in length, 240 centimetres wide and four centimetres deep at its deepest point.

At the intersection of Kingsford Smith Drive and Belconnen Way, southbound, there is one approximately 93 centimetres in length, 62 centimetres in width and seven centimetres deep. It was open as of 23 September, filled in the last fortnight and guess what? Now it is open again. At Luke Street in Holt, outside the community centre, a member of the community has measured one as over 100 centimetres long and eight centimetres in depth. Apparently, this is not the first time this has been filled, and most of the asphalt that was placed in there has come out again.

There is a large one just south of the Beaufort Crescent and Messenger Street intersection. East of the Belconnen Way and Bindubi Street intersection, going towards Calvary Hospital, there are multiple potholes, ranging from 90 centimetres to 40 centimetres in length. The Cohen Street and Lathlain Street intersection, going south, has a large pothole right at the lights, affecting both drivers and pedestrians. Additionally, Cohen Street has potholes at the Jolly Street and Nettlefold intersections.

Last but not least of the potholes in Canberra, there is a large one at the traffic lights at the intersection of Akuna Street and London Circuit. This one would likely be seen by members of the government every single day.

These potholes were found in only a handful of my electorate suburbs, in just a couple of hours of driving, two nights ago. They are by no means the extent of the potholes in my electorate. Minister, fix the streets in my electorate. I know that the government has been keen to get the ACT more involved in the growing space sector, but having our roads fall into such disrepair that they more closely resemble the surface of the moon than a modern city is not what Canberrans thought the government had in mind.

I warned the government five years ago that this was coming. I said five years ago that it would only be a matter of time before these roads began to fail. At that time, I said, “Numerous roads in the territory are pitted with potholes, and often the repairs to these potholes do not last.” The only difference between then and now is the location of the potholes. It is the same government, different potholes.

In closing, I would like to thank the Canberra community for letting me know about potholes in their area. I especially thank the Facebook group Canberra Potholes for raising awareness of the issue and pointing me towards a few potholes in my electorate that helped fill this speech. Thank you.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (5.04): I move an amendment to Mr Steel’s amendment:

Add new paragraph (2) (c):

“(c) add information to the *Our CBR* newsletter on how residents can claim compensation for pothole-inflicted damage to their vehicle.”.

My amendment adds a simple clause to Mr Steel’s amendment. Whilst I do not agree with everything in Mr Steel’s amendment, if we could add this clause, at 2(c), I could find Mr Steel’s amendment palatable. The amendment calls on the government to include in the *Our CBR* newsletter information about how to claim repairs for your vehicle when damaged by a pothole. This would make *Our CBR* newsletter much more useful for me than a headline saying that light rail is coming, when I live in Tuggeranong. I think that it would be much more useful to easily find out how to claim for tyre repairs—especially for older Canberrans, which was the rationale the government used recently for having the paper copy of the *Our CBR* newsletter.

Mr Steel has referred to the fact that the information is quite clear on the TCCS website, but, on the other hand, the government said that the reason for a paper-based *Our CBR* newsletter was that it is better suited to older Canberrans. So they have the

opportunity to put their money where their mouth is and put in useful information for older Canberrans—and other Canberrans as well, if they happen to read the paper copy of *Our CBR*.

I would really like to see this added to the amendment. It would make it much more useful. With my amendment to Mr Steel's amendment, I commend that amendment to the Assembly. I could add "amendment" a few more times to the sentence, but I will stop now!

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (5.07): I would like to speak to the amendment that we are debating at the moment. I have spoken to many constituents who have told me that the process of obtaining compensation from the government for pothole damage is difficult. Often they cannot even find where they should apply for compensation. Given that the government insisted that the *Our CBR* newsletter is essential for conveying important information to constituents, rather than its being a taxpayer-funded political flyer I strongly suggest that they put crystal clear and easy instructions on how to apply for pothole damage compensation in their next newsletter. Perhaps they could include the link to the online form that their website says will be available in the coming weeks.

In Minister Steel's speech he said that it is quite clear how to seek compensation on the government's website, but he is completely out of touch because that is not how a lot of constituents access information on how they should receive compensation for their damaged vehicles due to potholes. I will talk about one specific case. A constituent of mine tried to navigate through the government system to seek compensation on their vehicle, which had been damaged by potholes. He outlined in excruciating detail his experience of applying for pothole compensation. I say "excruciating" because it is dull to listen to and annoying, but I feel it is important to relate it so that everyone in the chamber can hear how frustrating it can be to claw compensation from the government. The constituent first went to the ACT government website and sifted through the tabs. No luck there. Then they googled "ACT government pothole compensation form" and found instructions on how to apply for compensation on the first hit. Not bad. They followed the instructions which told them to go to Fix My Street and click on "Roads, parking and vehicles". They did so, but could not go any further. There was no submit button or any tab that directed the user to a compensation form.

They realised they probably needed to login. Fortunately, they had made an ACT government digital account previously. After entering their user name and password, they hit "enter" and could not get in. The site said that either their user name or password was entered incorrectly. They tried again—same result. The user then clicked the "Having trouble logging-in" button, which sent them an email allowing them to reset their password. They entered the same password they had tried to enter the first time. The site said, "You cannot use an old password." So the password was right the first time, but the site did not seem to remember that.

Getting a little frustrated now, the user came up with a new password and reset it. Heading back to the site, they entered in the new password and were then sent an email with a verification pin. They entered that in and finally got access to the site. They then got a pop-up asking them to verify their mobile number by sending their

mobile a text. Exasperated, my constituent did so. Once that was done, they were free to explore Access Canberra's site once again. But not really. They got another pop-up, this time asking them to check two boxes, one giving their consent for their details to be shared and the other asking them to agree to the terms and conditions of the site. They checked both boxes. They located the Fix My Street tab and were faced with yet another unavoidable pop-up asking them to check the exact same boxes they had just checked. On doing so, they finally reached the Fix My Street tab.

Now logged in, they clicked on "Roads, parking and vehicles" as per the instructions, then "Roads and traffic". They then selected "Potholes", detailed what kind of pothole and where, and, then, finally expecting to find a form, they found a text box where they were supposed to put in all the information about the incident, including driver details, car details, type of claim, time, date and the exact words, "I want to make a claim." It was not a form at all, just a text box.

This, to me, does not sound like the easiest process, and certainly not the most intuitive. Fortunately, the government's website claims that an online form will be available in the coming weeks. I would expect this form to be much easier to use and submit than the current process, because, as of now, my constituent is almost certain that the process was designed to make them so frustrated that they would give up.

I commend the amendment from Ms Lawder to Mr Steel's amendment, seeking an inclusion in the next *Our CBR* newsletter on how residents could actually seek compensation for their damaged vehicle due to potholes and a really easy link for them to have access to the compensation form. I commend this amendment to the motion.

Question put:

That **Ms Lawder's** amendment to **Mr Steel's** proposed amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Mr Cain
Ms Castley
Mr Hanson
Mrs Kikkert
Ms Lawder
Ms Lee
Mr Milligan
Mr Parton

Noes 15

Ms Berry
Mr Braddock
Ms Burch
Ms Cheyne
Ms Clay
Ms Davidson
Mr Davis
Mr Gentleman
Ms Orr
Dr Paterson
Mr Pettersson
Mr Rattenbury
Mr Steel
Ms Stephen-Smith
Ms Vassarotti

Question resolved in the negative.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (5.18): In closing, I am reminded that back in September I went to a fantastic play at the Canberra Theatre by Julian Larnach called, *How to Vote*. I am not sure if anyone else here attended that. It was a sort of satirical study of university politics. One candidate stood and was elected on a very simple, single message: fill the hole. "Fill the hole," she said, over and over again. "Fill the

hole, fill the hole!” The play was about a pothole. It was about a pothole at her bus stop. All she said in answer to every question and every comment was, “Fill the hole.”

This is something that we could say to the minister over and over again. It is a simple message. I would like to thank Ms Clay for her comments about potholes because potholes affect not just cars and trucks—vehicles on the road—but motorcyclists, cyclists and pedestrians—our vulnerable road users. I was a little surprised that Ms Clay did not refer to that a bit more, because potholes make it is very unsafe for cyclists, especially in those areas where there are no separate bike paths and cyclists ride on the shoulder of the road. That is often where those potholes occur.

I was also surprised that no Labor MLAs spoke about potholes. I am surprised that not a single person has complained to a Labor MLA about potholes! That is kind of unbelievable, isn't it? Perhaps all the complaints come to the Liberal MLAs. It is very strange! I remind members that representing your constituents is a basic responsibility of being an MLA; that is what you are elected to do. If people come to you about potholes, it is your responsibility to represent them.

Moving on from that, I would like to refer to a few points in Mr Steel's amendment. In his amendment he mentioned two years of rainfall as a result of La Niña weather events, et cetera. Let us not forget that two years ago Mr Steel promised \$4 million to fill in every pothole. That was before these two years of La Niña. Obviously, potholes were already a big issue in the ACT. It was a great opportunity to make a big election commitment, rather than looking at this over the course of the previous term and fixing the roads in a better way.

Mr Steel's amendment talks about the damage caused by rain, and the fact that the ACT road network is not unique. No, it is not. La Niña is happening. There is rain everywhere and we have potholes everywhere. Does that make you feel any better? Does it make you feel any better, when you blow out your tyre and damage your rim, to hear, “Oh, it's okay; it's happening everywhere.” Really? I do not pay my rates in New South Wales or Western Australia; I pay my rates here, and I expect my rates to be put to good use for me, my constituents, my family and every ACT resident. Whether they are motorists, motorcyclists, cyclists or pedestrians, people deserve better service from this government.

It is gobsmacking, in a way, that we are having this discussion. We are told that Roads ACT is working with established experts, including the Australian Road Research Board. Really? At last! How long have the government been in for? How long have potholes been a problem? At last they are perhaps getting a bit of advice, according to Mr Steel's amendment. That is nice to know!

I would like to remind you that it can be very difficult, if not impossible, to report a pothole while you are driving. While you are driving you cannot go to Fix My Street and report a pothole. If you damage your tyre and your rim—your wheel—you are likely to be more concerned about that when you get home than reporting it on Fix My Street.

Some people have had trouble with Fix My Street. And sometimes you get home, and you get on with your life. You forget about reporting it. It is not the answer for

everything. Again, I remind members that the ability to report via Fix My Street does not take away the responsibility of every MLA in this place to represent their constituents. It is not up to us to say, “No, you can go online if you have a computer and you are okay using a computer; just go online and report it via Fix My Street.” It is my responsibility to take up that issue for my constituents. That is the way I view it, and that is why I write all these letters—mostly to Mr Steel, but also to other ministers in this place.

Whilst we have laughed a bit about the memes and the social media—Canberra Potholes, et cetera—it is not always a laughing matter. Some people are taking matters into their own hands. They are drawing pictures, sometimes a bit saucy, around potholes. And while we can laugh at that, it is actually quite dangerous to go out on the road with a bit of paint. I heard another story about someone who was driving around sticking posts into potholes to warn people they were there. That is dangerous for them and dangerous for other motorists, but this is the level that people are going to because they are so disturbed, upset and concerned that nothing is being done for them.

This amendment does not cover a blitz, like in an election year. This amendment does not give any faith to Canberra residents that things are going to get better, and quickly. In fact, Mr Steel confirmed in his speech that he wants to use—will use and has used—the cheapest possible road resurfacing treatment. When I was being brought up, my mum used to say, “You pay for what you get, and you get what you pay for.” When you take the cheapest possible approach, it usually lasts the shortest possible time. It is a basic rule that I think most of us were brought up on. When you take a cheap approach, and you have to do it over and over again, perhaps it is not cheap in the end; perhaps it does end up being a bit more expensive. Although Mr Steel likes to take the cheapest possible approach, that is offset at the other end by the claims that motorists are making. It is not a huge amount as yet, but I bet that it is building up every day, from those people who have enough IT knowledge, time and energy to try to pursue the online claim. This is something that we could do a lot better.

I spoke about my amendment first, and then separately to close, because I wanted to give Mr Steel time to think about adding that information into the *Our CBR* newsletter—the *Our CBR* newsletter that those on the other side of the chamber fought so hard for recently. They said that it was important for older Canberrans, for example. Older Canberrans are often the ones who have spoken to us about the damage to their vehicles and the difficulty in accessing the on-line claim form. It is a matter of them saying what they want in one case but the government not actually doing it in the end.

I hope that those on the other side of the chamber feel a little shame-faced about how they used that situation to justify something that was not the case whatsoever. If they truly believed what they have said about older Canberrans, for example, they would put this information in their *Our CBR* newsletter. But, no, once again it is all talk and no action—both on the *Our CBR* newsletter and on potholes generally. I am very disappointed in the response to this quite straightforward motion today.

Mr Steel's amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Appropriation Bill 2022-2023

[Cognate bill:

Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2022-2023]

Cognate papers:

Estimates 2022-2023—Select Committee report

Estimates 2022-2023—Select Committee report—government response]

Detail stage

Schedule 1—Appropriations—Proposed expenditure.

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate—Part 1.5.

Debate resumed.

MS LEE (Kurrajong—Leader of the Opposition) (5.28): Well, here we are—another budget from the Chief Minister and Treasurer and his Labor-Greens government, and another budget deficit.

If the worst happens and the Chief Minister is still in charge in 2025-26, and still running the territory's finances in the same way he has for the last decade, the ACT will have had its 14th consecutive budget deficit. Each year over the forward estimates, the territory's debt is forecast to grow, to the point where the ACT will be \$15 billion in debt by 2025-26!

By that stage, we will be repaying more than half a billion dollars a year in interest repayments alone. That is \$1,000 for every Canberran, each and every year, just to fund interest repayments because of the incompetence of the Treasurer and the Labor-Greens government. Our interest repayments alone will cost every single Canberran \$1,000 each year by 2025-26.

The Treasurer conveniently leaves that massive sum out of the pie charts on our rates notices. The Treasurer clearly has no plan to address this and no plan to restore the budget to surplus. One of the few things papering over the cracks is revenue from conveyance duty, which might be gone eventually, although of course some of the commentators are sceptical about that.

This is a Treasurer who inherited a balanced budget from his predecessors. As we have heard for years now, he likes to blame the territory's financial challenges on everything but his own mismanagement—the global financial crisis, Mr Fluffy, COVID—and he will say that all other states and territories are in a similar boat. None of that could be further from the truth.

The reality is that the Treasurer started taking on debt in 2012-13 and has not stopped since. The result is that the ACT budget is now in the worst position ever, because it was already shaky at the onset of the COVID pandemic in 2020. The result is gross fiscal mismanagement by the Treasurer, in contravention of the Financial Management Act.

The result is a half-a-billion-dollar annual interest payment. The result is broken promises and twisted truth, in an attempt to cover up his failures. As former Labor Chief Minister Jon Stanhope pointed out:

To put this in perspective we will be paying more on interest costs than the government has budgeted for environmental protection, police services and community mental health services combined.

In fact, funding for those services will actually decrease over the forward estimates. Canberrans are missing out on critical services and infrastructure because we, the Canberra community, will be paying half a billion dollars each year to service the Treasurer's debt.

The Treasurer has systematically underfunded our health system. Education funding is going backwards. The ACT has the lowest funding per capita for police. You cannot drive on a road in Canberra without hitting a pothole, as was discussed in great detail over the last hour. Land release has been strangled on purpose, and aspirational home owners are unable to secure a block of land to build on. We have the highest median rents in Australia. The Chief Minister sold off public housing to pay for the tram. One in 12 Canberrans, including 9,000 children, are living in poverty. Canberra businesses have struggled through COVID and confidence is low, with ACT boasting the lowest business survival rates in the country. The promised stadium in the city has been abandoned—and the list goes on.

The Treasurer has no plan—no will—to fix it. In fact, his blatant refusal to even acknowledge the issue means that our children and their children will pay the price. The way the Treasurer has managed the budget is in stark contrast to his aspirational and now clearly idealistic vision for Canberra that good government is about economic management:

There is no point being in government if you cannot make people's lives better. And you cannot do that if you are not paying attention to the economy. Good governments manage the economy responsibly, and that good management leads to benefits for all the community. It is what underpins the delivery of the services that Canberrans want and need.

He went on to say:

Running a surplus operating budget provides intergenerational equity. It means that each generation of the ACT community pays for the government services they are receiving. A surplus budget is vital to maintaining the territory's AAA credit rating. A surplus budget also provides the basis for managing the risks and uncertainties that will inevitably arise in the future. That is the reason why this government has delivered successive budget surpluses totalling \$250 million since coming to office.

That was in 2006. Oh, how the Chief Minister's attitude has changed since then! This failed budget, just another in a long line of failed budgets passed, is anything but what the Chief Minister deems to be good government. It goes directly against what he believes is the point of being in government. And long after he has left this place, it is our children and their children who will be left with this burden, left by this Chief Minister and the Labor-Greens government.

Finally, I will say a few words on the government response to the estimates committee report on the Appropriation Bill. I note that, in the government response tabled yesterday afternoon, out of 143 recommendations by the committee, the government acknowledged that the recommendation was “part of existing government policy” in response to 45 recommendations. Something is very wrong with how this government is implementing its policies if there are 45 recommendations that are allegedly part of existing government policy.

I am disappointed but not surprised that this government has not taken time to understand the recommendations or simply has sidestepped the substance of the recommendations entirely. There are many examples that my colleagues will no doubt address in greater detail. But, as an example, recommendation 74 of the committee states:

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government publish a timeline for the construction of the Reintegration Centre.

Madam Speaker, you would think that is a pretty straightforward recommendation. The government response is, “Noted.” It continues:

ACT Corrective Services is working to optimise the utilisation of the existing Transitional Release Centre. Work is also underway to assess the current and future infrastructure needs of the Alexander Maconochie Centre. Both of these will inform future budget outcomes regarding the Centre.

It is not very clear, from that response, whether the reintegration centre that was announced by the Attorney-General with much fanfare is actually going to be built at all, let alone when it is going to be built. The Treasurer, in his tabling statement, said:

I do note that many of the recommendations go to additional expenditure proposals across government. But the committee has not made any recommendations about how to raise additional revenue to fund these proposals, or indicated which areas of existing expenditure could be cut to fund them.

Wasn't that the Treasurer's job, Madam Speaker? He repeatedly spent a lot of time criticising the Canberra Liberals and accusing them of trying to outsource fiscal policy, in response to our call for an independent review of the budget, yet what do we have here? The Treasurer is retorting that the estimates committee should be telling the Treasurer how to raise additional revenue.

The role of the committee is to highlight areas of need, not to do the Treasurer's job for him. It is a tripartisan committee, as we know, with two of the three committee members being members of the government. After a belated start, hearings were held over 11 days and involved many community groups and government officials. The recommendations and observations of the committee should not be taken so lightly by the Treasurer.

Another popular line in the government response, which appears no less than 15 times, is:

The Government makes funding decisions as part of each Budget process, with consideration of the broader fiscal strategy and other budget priorities.

What are the government's "broader fiscal strategy and other budget priorities"? Clearly, the priorities are not right if the committee has identified so many areas of need. This is a government that cannot even say yes to good ideas from a tripartisan committee. But then what have we come to expect from this government?

Canberrans deserve better. Canberra has the potential to be so much more if it were not for this arrogant, out-of-touch Labor-Greens government. Canberra can and should be leading the nation on so many areas, and the Canberra Liberals will continue to stand up for those left behind. (*Time expired.*)

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Manager of Government Business, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (5.38): As the Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, I am proud to speak in support of this budget. This is a budget that once again shows that this government is leading Australia and the world in protecting workers. Healthy and safe workers are the backbone of business and the economy. Investing in worker safety helps everyone. Unashamedly, the government will always stand up for the rights of workers.

The budget provides funding for a number of the government's key priorities, establishing an office of industrial relations and workforce strategy, a new funding model for injury management, and our secure employment framework.

The new office will provide a unique opportunity to shape the culture and workforce practices in the ACT public service. It is being established to support the development of a more effective ACTPS, where industrial and employment policies are developed and delivered in a consistent and collaborative manner.

The need for strong and connected development and delivery of industrial relations and employment policies has never been more important for our public service. Our public service workforce arrangements are changing rapidly. This is in part due to the emerging skill shortages, community expectations and the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. I refer also to the growth in size and diversity of the public service workforce and the transition to hybrid and flexible working arrangements, which this government supports. These trends are expected to continue, meaning that further changes to workforce arrangements and workplaces may be necessary. We are investing in the Office of Industrial Relations and Workforce Strategy to lead this work.

Additionally, the budget has established a new funding model for whole-of-government injury management services. The government is making it easier for injured and ill ACT public servants to access rehabilitation and return to work support. We are doing so by directly funding this important function rather than funding it through the cost-recovery arrangements between directorates, as has historically been the case. The associated cost would be fully offset by the reduction in directorate charges. These

reforms will build on other major improvements in the way that we are supporting our injured and ill public servants, which have been enabled by the establishment of the public sector workers compensation self-insurer.

We have taken responsibility for end-to-end management of public servants' workers compensation claims and made a suite of improvements to the claim process. This means we are providing services more quickly, more efficiently and more effectively, and investing more heavily in injury prevention. These improvements have contributed to significant increases in user satisfaction and in a reduction in outstanding claim liabilities.

Finally, this budget invests in our commitment to secure employment in the ACT public service. The ACT government has recognised that casualisation and insecurity in our public service are detrimental to both workers and policy outcomes, and we are committed to providing secure and, where possible, ongoing employment.

In this budget the government has funded its commitment to secure employment and high-quality services for Canberrans through two distinct pieces of work which work together to establish the government's secure employment package.

The first piece of work is continuation of the secure workforce conversion process. It is a joint union and government process to examine the use of insecure work in the ACT public service. This process has been updated to incorporate the new requirements of the commonwealth Fair Work Act, where casual employees can request conversion to permanent employment in certain circumstances.

The second piece of work is the implementation of the insourcing framework which will evaluate the insourcing and outsourcing of government work. The government's commitment to insourcing demonstrates the value we place on protecting our public service and secure employment. The insourcing framework is being developed to have a sophisticated approach to analysing proposed government outsourcing of services and work. It will not simply be a matter of deciding on the lowest cost option. It is being designed to include considerations like economic costs and benefits, social costs and benefits, environmental costs and benefits, and the public interest. The framework will also operate to and align with the future direction and priorities of the government, as reflected in the work of the ACT public service. It will also incorporate the government's ground-breaking wellbeing indicators.

Our commitment to secure employment will see the government maximise our current and future workforce, catering for future change with broad skill sets. Workforce capability, flexibility and mobility are key considerations when building the ACT public service of the future. That is why the government is funding this secure employment package.

In closing, I want to acknowledge the work of UnionsACT and the union movement in keeping workers safe across the territory. The union movement has a proud legacy, and unions in the ACT are building on this. We are leading the world because of union members. I would encourage those listening to join their union, help to protect their colleagues and drive change for the betterment of all.

I also want to thank our hardworking public servants. You are the best in the country, and your work every day helps make our city a better place to live. As a collective, you are delivering for a city that is the envy of Australia and the world. Thank you. I commend the budget to the Assembly.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (5.44): I want to reinforce my concern that the ACT is falling behind in the provision of sporting and recreation facilities because the current government lacks the resolve to meet the expanding needs of the growing population and the demand for additional facilities to cater for changing lifestyles and choices.

Residents and visitors love the bush capital theme and the lifestyle opportunities of a mid-sized city, and take pride in living in the nation's capital. However, the sporting and recreation facilities are ageing and are not adequate to respond to the changing demands of users, as well as those seeking to participate in new sports and activities. Too many clubs are reporting their inability to match demand via new teams or suitable access to courts, ovals, gymnasiums and halls.

Despite constant calls for new indoor sports venues, particularly in growth areas, the government seems to be adopting the approach that the new refurbished school gyms or halls can provide the answers. I can assure you that they do not. The inadequacies are enormous. They include time restraints, being available only outside school hours, access and booking issues, and the suitability of individual school facilities.

Many facilities are developed and offered without proper consultation with the sporting groups or associations to discuss what their requirements are for court markings, essential infrastructure, such as poles and nets, and the need to schedule events for competitions that offer a different array of standards and age groups.

Starting with my first area of concern, there is a desperate need for a dive pool. This facility has been considered for several years but it was not included in the original construction of the Stromlo Leisure Centre. Now we hear that they may be looking at another feasibility study to consider a dive pool at this location. I would like to know the extent of the proposed feasibility study to determine the parameters for a new dive pool at the Stromlo complex. I would also like to know about the extent of consultations that have already taken place with key interest groups and the other groups that are interested in a dive pool. I sincerely hope that the prolonged delay in sorting out this new facility, if it actually eventuates, will result in an international standard, multipurpose pool suitable for a range of sporting activities, including not only diving but also water polo.

The next issue is the ice rink complex development. This proposal has been underway for several years, and it is time that the government indicated when the details of the confirmed site will be released. It is also appropriate that the government should indicate whether the facility will be a joint venture with external parties and sporting groups, the details of who will be responsible for the management and maintenance of the facility, and the time frame for when the budget allocations will be made.

I am also frustrated by the ongoing merry-go-round about the provision of new indoor sports facilities. There is growing evidence of the need for more indoor sports facilities in Canberra that cater for both population growth and increased interest in

competitions and social sporting events. I keep asking for the government to provide responses to the recommendations from several feasibility studies that have been undertaken over previous years and to provide time frames for any of the proposed actions on new indoor sporting facilities in several Canberra districts.

I note that, at long last, the government has acted on its 2012 election commitment to provide a community recreation park in Casey, but the details of the proposed project include many future projects, all subject to funding allocations, and thus are not necessarily guaranteed. Many of the original young residents of Casey that moved there 10 years ago have no doubt grown up and do not necessarily need the sporting infrastructure there, as they have moved on. The recent announcement of the final design is a form of enticement that will rapidly morph into disappointment if the proposed future facilities do not proceed within a reasonable time frame or suffer from lack of funding.

I mentioned earlier that there seems to be a perception that the new schools will have gym or hall facilities ideally suited to the needs of many sporting groups, yet the message is that the specific and multipurpose needs are not being met. It is vitally important that the government indicates to what degree the development of shared facilities in the new schools will impact on the provision of community indoor sporting facilities in growth areas of Canberra.

I now turn to the issue of renewal of funding for the Greater Western Sydney football team to play matches in Canberra. A long-term funding agreement between the ACT government and GWS is no doubt due to be announced soon. Why does the government offer a long-term lucrative deal to an out-of-town club for a limited number of matches played in Canberra on an annual basis? I note that ACT-based teams in other codes who play more matches locally and have far greater local development processes and local community exposure do not seem to receive similar favourable treatment from this government.

The debate over a replacement stadium is ongoing and without any apparent short-term solution. I recognise that the capital cost of construction is large and is increasing each year, but I note that other capital cities, and even country cities that are smaller than Canberra, have achieved either a new refurbished stadium facility or a new facility in recent years. These more modern facilities in other states are a bigger drawcard for major events than what Canberra can offer. This means the national capital's image is downgraded and the ACT economy is the loser.

The debate over the future of GIO Stadium at Bruce was given renewed interest following the recent National Press Club address by the CEO of the Australian Sports Commission, Kieren Perkins. It was made very clear that the plans for the future of the AIS in Canberra do not include the retention or ongoing maintenance of the stadium facility.

The stadium complex is close to 40 years old. I want to know what the predicted life span of the complex is before cost of maintenance, essential modifications and operation outweigh the benefits of using the facility. This suggests that the situation will arise where Canberra no longer has a stadium facility, in the event that the existing facility is closed before a replacement is ready to be used.

The lack of attention paid by the government to the sporting and recreation needs of residents of this town, the nation's capital, the bush capital of Australia, and supposedly a great place in which to live, is deplorable. There must be a renewed focus on providing services and facilities to the Canberra community that match the expectations of maintenance and high-quality lifestyle, and value for rates and fees paid to the government.

There was little evidence in the recent budget that suggests that the sporting and leisure pursuits of Canberra citizens are being recognised and thus adequately resourced.

MR DAVIS (Brindabella) (5.53): I rise to make a few observations about the budget, particularly in the areas of sport, infrastructure, tourism and business. Beforehand, I will make some observations about the budget more broadly from my perspective. Of course, while it is not ideal to be in deficit and it is not sustainable to be in deficit for a long time, I feel quite confident and positive about the general direction of the budget relative to other subnational governments, state and territory governments across the country, who are continuing to recover economically and socially from the pandemic. I think the government highlighting a more than \$800 million improvement in the budget bottom line over this period shows that there is some good economic leadership.

One of the reasons I wanted to make some remarks about the budget position more broadly is, in particular, the context of the contribution to the debate made by the Leader of the Opposition's "lower taxes, better services too, electric boogaloo" presentation—that we can have it all and we cannot pay anything more for it. I find it really galling at this point in the parliamentary term, two years in and into our third budget, given the mini budgets. We should all be preparing for what things are going to look like in a few years—what an alternative government might look like—and they are still running the same old, "Canberrans can have it all and not pay anything, or maybe even pay less to have it." It continues to blow my mind.

Sports infrastructure is a really good example. A new stadium would be great. I would love a new stadium. I think lots of Canberrans would love a new stadium. Has anyone seen the sticker price for a new stadium recently? Pricey. Those things cost a lot of money, and those things would have to be built by "boys and girls" in high-vis, who the government is currently putting to work to the nth degree to try and build more public housing, as one example, or the new schools for a growing population.

I think the budget shows not only the government's broader priorities and policy direction; I am proud to say it also shows a strong influence from my Greens colleagues in that budget preparation. The Chief Minister and I do not agree on everything when it comes to economic theory, but what I will say is that this budget has chosen to prioritise an increase to specialist homelessness services, as opposed to balancing the budget. This might be a controversial view, but I think that is a good thing.

This budget has prioritised building new schools, the Canberra Hospital expansion, and buying and building more public housing, rather than pursuing the mythical neoliberal desire for a budget surplus to say that you have one. I think that is a good

thing. I think the Canberra electorate more broadly, right across the political spectrum and at this point we are at in the national and global economic cycle, would rather that we are prioritising infrastructure and services for Canberrans over a budget surplus. It is a good thing. I would be surprised if that is a controversial statement, which is why it is so surprising that the leader of the alternative government came in here and made the bulk of her budget rebuttal the quest for a budget surplus at some point.

When we get into some of the specifics, though, I do have some sugar and I do have some medicine: I have got some parts that I like, and I have got some parts that I do not like. Let's take sports infrastructure as a good example. There is not a single thing that we are building in the sports and recreation portfolio that I am not enthusiastic about. It is all good. The home of football in Gungahlin and the ice-skating rink down in Tuggeranong are just two.

These are all really important, but, as the minister knows and as the government knows, I have had some reservations for some time that have been underlined in bold print by this budget. I am just not convinced that the long-term strategic planning work in this space is being done. So I still continue to have some reservations about whether we are spending money appropriately in line with community demand, with our community stakeholders as partners, and if we are finding some of the savings opportunities by co-locating facilities.

My colleague, Minister Davidson, speaks much more passionately than me about the virtues of a multiuse indoor sports stadium in Woden, and each budget that does not see money appropriated for something like that is something that will continue to disappoint me, though I understand the budget is about priorities. That is why I use the stadium as a good example, because, as much as it would be wonderful to have, I do think we have to prioritise our spending in the community sports space.

I want it on the record that I believe we should be prioritising that spending on sports facilities for Canberrans, not necessarily people that want to come here and watch a game, as nice as that is. I would like us focusing our attention on the half court at the end of the cul-de-sac in Kambah that TCCS mow around once a month. It does not seem to be recorded anywhere as a government asset or a community sport facility. I would rather us focusing on some of those things so that rate-paying Canberrans have great community facilities, and so we can provide the facilities needed for the next Patty Mills and the next Lauren Jackson growing up in Canberra to have great places to play sport.

In the business portfolio, there is one particular thing I wanted to reference as a tremendous initiative in this budget that everybody in the government should be proud of, and that is the partnership with Coolamon Advisors, under the direction of Katrina Fanning, for a new support agency for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses. The reason I like this is that it is a great example for all of us in this place, all the ministers in particular, to think about how our contribution to the story of reconciliation must penetrate all of the work that we do, in every area of policy that we touch and in every way that we implement government decision-making.

While I think that, for most Canberrans, business supports is not the first place their mind goes to when they think about reconciliation with First Nations people, this is a

really good program. It is one that I will be watching closely, and one that I hope delivers great social and economic benefit to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans growing businesses here in Canberra and striving to succeed socially and economically.

When it comes to some of the supports for the tourism industry, the Chief Minister and I—and my colleague Ms Clay, if I can throw her in it too—have had the occasional argy-bargy about the virtue of domestic travel over planes. Until we get a federal government with the chutzpah to give us high speed rail along our eastern seaboard, planes will unfortunately continue to be a mode of travel for domestic and international tourists. I still think that there is work for the government to do going forward to increase our tourism footprint, not just around the territory but around our more localised region.

A lot of the money that is being spent on tourism, as wonderful as it is, if you put it on a map would almost be in a two-kilometre radius of the CBD, which makes sense, and I get—it is where most of our things are, and that is why most of the people come here. I know the work I have been doing with the Minister for the Environment is a good example. They have carriage of taking care of our beautiful places like Tidbinbilla and Namadgi. There is so much tourism opportunity and economic opportunity in, can I say, our regions, in our postage stamp of a territory. I would like us to think creatively in forward budgets, when we think about our tourism spend, about how we can make sure that when people are coming to Canberra to visit Parliament House or the museum, they are also going down to Tuggeranong, checking out Tidbinbilla and having lunch at one of our good cafes.

Mr Cain spoke very passionately this morning about the virtues of some beautiful spots out in his electorate in west Belconnen. I am Canberra born and raised, and I have never been there before. Now I know; now I have to go.

Mr Cain: I will take you there.

MR DAVIS: Thank you, Mr Cain. Wouldn't it be great to think about highlighting some of those places so that tourists from around our country, in particular, do not think of Canberra as just Parliament House and museums. We are a city of nearly half a million people, with a lot of beautiful history, art, culture, small community events and thriving local businesses in our regional centres. It would be wonderful to make sure that some of those people are travelling here too.

The last thing I will say on the sports infrastructure spending is that, obviously, you will recall that I brought a motion to this Assembly in April 2021 asking for a raft of work—mainly policy work. It was not in the style of big-ribbon cutting, Styrofoam cheque infrastructure projects but a lot of policy work that I thought we were lacking in that portfolio. We were due to have a response in December 2021. We did not. We got an update in April of 2022, and it still seems that some of that work is ongoing.

One of the things I would have loved to have seen in the budget was a bit more money appropriated for staff. It would appear—benefit of the doubt, glass half full—that maybe this work is not happening with the speed the Assembly asked for, perhaps because there is a lot of pressure on staff. We heard that in our estimates. Maybe, just

maybe, in the next budget we need to look at expanding the sports ACT office. If we are going to get some of the community sport outcomes that we need, and the partnerships with TCCS to audit and reflect on some of those community sport infrastructure pieces, maybe we need a little bit more money next time to put a few bums on seats to help those people out, and to make sure that we are getting on top of some of the policy challenges in that space.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.03): The public service is capable of profound public good, but unfortunately this Labor-Greens government does not give the ACT Public Service the tools it needs to be the efficient, effective service that would benefit our capital. During hearings I went to the CMTEDD-related budget analysis and I was overwhelmed, quite frankly, by a sense of sadness. The minister did not seem to be inspired to do clever creative things for the good of the public nor to engage with ways to do things better or more effectively. That was my assessment.

I turn to the Special Minister of State's appropriation. The Special Minister of State, regarding FOI—freedom of information—seemed comprehensively unaware of the responsibilities he carries for an act like the Freedom of Information Act. He could not describe the operations of different agencies that administer this piece of legislation, even though he is responsible for it as Special Minister of State. The minister did not know how many FOI officers are trained for this capability in each department and could not see how things could be done differently. It seems that the old rule of “It has been done that way for a while” is enough. Very disappointing. I will commit, though, to both the community and the ACT public service, to ensuring that they are fully supported in doing their important role of scrutinising the spending habits of this minister.

Regarding Shared Services, the Special Minister of State seemed to have no understanding of the seemingly inordinate and very mysterious funds allocated to the human resources and information management solution, which was discussed during recent estimates. I am still at a loss to know where tens of millions of taxpayers' dollars has gone, with nothing to show for it. In this program there have been multiple extended completion dates, ranging back to pre COVID. The ACT public service deserves to have top standard ICT solutions that make it efficient, effective and transparent.

Unfortunately, this budget, for this appropriation, has filled me with little confidence that the Labor-Greens government have any understanding of how to run an effective and efficient public service. There is little imagination, in my opinion, on how to run a government and how to run it well for this community.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (6.06): I want to speak briefly about a couple of aspects of the budget in this section. The arts minister is not here, but I wanted to congratulate her on the delivery of the long-promised redistribution of arts organisation funding. That is really good to see. It reflects the changing landscape of the arts organisations that we now have in the ACT.

We also really welcome the 10 per cent increase for our arts organisations, although we note that our overall arts budget is still reasonably stagnant. It has not actually gone up that much. The total increase is around \$600,000. Out of \$20 million, that is

about a three per cent increase, which is not a huge rise. But it is good to see that we are maintaining that. It is really great to see the Creative Recovery and Resilience Program and Amp It Up!. We have seen some good program funding coming through and we have seen a good approach there. There is a lot of quite deep sector engagement, as well as just the dollar figures. I think that is partly why those programs are getting really good results and are being really well received.

It would be great, of course, to see more being spent on the arts. We have had a little look and the ACT is nowhere near the lowest. New South Wales and Western Australia are spending proportionally less than us on arts activities, as opposed to arts capital. That was set out in the ANA insight report. But we are not at the top of the game and we have quite bold ambitions here. We have a statement of ambition. So, if we want to be the arts capital of Australia, we probably need to up our funding game.

It is really important that we fund our ageing infrastructure and that we build more, where this helps our long-term vision. I am really pleased to see that we have got funds through for some of the old facilities that are in such dire need—literally falling through the floors in some places. It is great that that is being funded. But I am still hearing that, in some instances, the funding that is being provided maybe is not sufficient to meet the needs. We Greens have a fundamentally different way of looking at arts funding. Funding our institutions is massively important. Those are our assets and our heritage and part of the character of Canberra, but we do not really consider that necessarily part of our arts funding as such.

Arts advocacy is almost always framed in terms of wanting more funding, no matter who you are and where you are. It is almost always about trying to get more dollars. It is important to remember some of the fundamental ideas that are just basic rights in other sectors. The arts sector is so far behind on the notions of minimum wages, superannuation, sick leave, holiday leave, and earning an income that you can support yourself and your family on. It is really great to see calls coming in a lot of other poorly paid and gig economy areas of work. The arts sector has been there for a very, very long time and we are still living in a world of most professional artists needing to have other jobs, with short-term grants funding, and artists who are professional and trained and at the top of their game and Australian or world recognised still being unable to live on their income. That is always difficult to see.

It is great to see some of the big visions moving ahead. It is good to see progress at the Kingston Arts Precinct. I am actually hearing really quite positive things there. I think the changeover to the management has done good things. I think the SLA managing that is probably a great thing. It was really great to see a start to some clear, transparent funding in the statement of ambition for the arts. That was the first time that I had seen the dollars laid out so clearly. I am really looking forward to seeing that continued level of transparency. I think that actually will help everybody to see where the dollars are. We might need to have a look at how that fits in with the federal funding at some stage. I know it is not the job of this government, but I think it is still quite difficult for artists and arts organisations to understand the full funding picture, so that would be quite helpful.

I also just wanted to make a couple of comments about gender lens budgeting, which is about the totality of the ACT budget. We are strong believers in gender lens

budgeting in the ACT, and there have been some really good steps made in that direction. There is still a bit of dissatisfaction, I think, from various aspects of the community and from a lot of people who have worked quite deeply in this field, about the progress and also about how we measure the progress. There is iterative progress being made, and that is really great to see. It is really important that we do have measures, because if you do not have measures and if you do not set targets, you just do not know if what you are doing is working.

Some of the measures that I look at are not government measures; they are ABS measures. We noticed during estimates, and we covered it a little bit, that we actually got the lowest gender gap here in the ACT during COVID, which was fantastic to see. It got down to 8.6 per cent in November 2020. It unfortunately bounced back up to 14.5 per cent. That is for full-time work. If you factor in part-time work—and, of course, more women are in part-time work; part-time work figures disproportionately affect women—we are actually more up to 24 per cent, which is quite a big gender pay gap. It would be great to see ongoing progress there and also to continue to think about how we holistically do that with our wellbeing indicators, where that sits, who is doing that work, how they are trained and how we are measuring that progress year on year, to know that we are actually moving in the right direction.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (6.13): In its budget coverage in early August the *Canberra Times* had a section for losers, under which it listed local business. The *Canberra Times* concluded:

There's nothing in the budget directly benefiting businesses which are suffering from staff absences and labour shortages.

I rise to speak about the Appropriation Bill 2022-2023, as shadow minister for business. As the *Canberra Times* correctly assessed, “disappointing” is an understatement when you consider how little this budget helps our business sector. As far as line items go, it will not take me long to go through them.

The first new initiative comes under the title “Boosting business and the economy”, which encompasses two other line items: Knowledge Capital—Future Jobs Fund and Strengthening the tertiary education sector. It is unclear what effect these initiatives will have on small businesses or if they have any targets and what they might be.

As you go down the list, there are a few technical adjustments and transfers and that is it for business. Members, that is it; you have just been privileged to walk through all of the new business initiatives from this government in their 2022-23 budget, totalling \$16.6 million! By contrast, if you turn to the heading “Investing in public services” you will see an investment of more than \$44.5 million. This so-called business budget is a slap in the face for business and it is no wonder that business responded with disappointment and frustration. Business is suffering.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics figures for business entry and exit reveal that the ACT has the highest exit rate in the country. More than 4,300 businesses exited the ACT in 2021-22, and the survival rate for business in the ACT is the worst in the country. More than one-third of businesses did not survive between June 2018 and June 2022. Where is the government's support for these struggling businesses? Where

is our business minister, when businesses are clearly crying out for help and business survival rates in Canberra are the worst in the country? Consider how Minister Cheyne responded when asked about this during estimates:

I think it is easy to look at survival rates for business exits as a negative, but we are very aware in the ACT of trying new things and having a go. That does not necessarily mean that every business will survive and it may well be that a business ends and that same proprietor begins another business soon after.

Not surprisingly, the business minister's dismissive statement was rejected by Australian Hotels Association ACT General Manager Anthony Brierley and CEO of the Canberra Business Chamber Graham Catt and, I would also say, any business owner that has lost a business. How privileged must small business owners feel to hear the business minister saying that she does not expect businesses to survive—not every business—but that is okay because they can just start up another one the next day.

Graham Catt described the budget as underwhelming. Talking about the knowledge capital line item, he said that there was very little detail about how the initiatives would be delivered. Returning to my earlier point about the disproportionate investment in the public service, Mr Catt reminded the Canberra community that it is small business, not the public sector, that now provides 63 per cent of the territory's jobs. Remarkable!

Before concluding, can I point out how frustrating it is that the government, in this budget, is condensing output class 3 to a single table. Previously, you could easily see government spending for business programs. Now it will be part of a big output class, along with tourism and events, sport and rec, arts, skills, and venues. It is confusing and unclear why the government is condensing these outputs, and it will certainly make it harder for the Canberra business community to understand how much is being spent on programs to support them.

The budget ignores business and their struggles, which is hardly surprising, given some of the Chief Minister's comments about business during my time in the Assembly. The business minister is either complicit in this slap in the face for business or lacks the clout within cabinet to stand up for business owners and advocate for them. Either way, it is a grim budget for our courageous and hardworking business champions in the ACT.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (6.18): Can I, for the record—and I mean that pun absolutely—state how much I love those associated with managing our records! It is through such methodical, meticulous, industrious people that we know what we have done, what worked and what did not work and can learn and improve, going forward. All the glitz and glamour may go to those involved in delivering the latest program, but it is those who sift and sort through the voluminous corporate detritus who ensure that our corporate record or memory is retained. Without people like these, the ACT government would be doomed to repeat its mistakes again and again ad infinitum.

Digitising records is as laborious and boring as it gets, but the payoff for the territory is massive. The ability to electronically search documents, tag them, link them and

pass them on, having everything in one place, pays dividends many times over. I am concerned that not enough attention is paid in the budget to these unglamorous roles. When was the last time that there was a new policy proposal announced, with a budget for the archives area? I ask seriously, because I cannot find one and gave up after checking the last five budgets.

I wonder whether budget bids are knocked back or whether they have never been put in in the first place. Instead, the territory utilises a demand-driven model, where ACT residents have to ask for certain items to be digitised. There is no proactive plan to digitise our archives and I am worried about what may be lost—for example, in a filing cabinet sent to the tip, filled with old ACT maps.

The use of paper records in certain parts of the ACT government also concerns me. The potential for time savings from investing in digital systems would make the ACT government so much more efficient and effective, whilst improving outcomes for the community. It makes me wonder what instances there are within the ACT government reliant on antiquated, not-fit-for-purpose business systems. I exhort work areas to put forward bids for enabling digital systems for these functions and I exhort the Treasury to support these bids, for without these systems and records we are dooming the ACT government to slow, inefficient systems where we fail to learn from our mistakes.

I would like to move on to the public service. I note that the ACT Public Service Code of Conduct states:

A public employee must conduct themselves in an apolitical manner, act objectively and bring a neutral mind to their work regardless of their personal beliefs and preferences or personal relationships with other public employees or with the members of the community. They must serve the government of the day in an unbiased fashion, free from prejudice.

I am not suggesting that political behaviour has occurred, but during estimates questions were raised about website branding and recruitment to public service positions. Canberra is a public service town and has a sophisticated antennae for how certain outcomes may be achieved, even when rules have been followed. Simply relying on the fact that rules have been followed is not sufficient. The ACTPS not only needs to act in an apolitical manner at all times but also must be seen by the ACT community to be apolitical. The community perception of the ACTPS must be jealously guarded to maintain that trust, and I exhort the ACTPS to fiercely maintain its independence and, therefore, its integrity.

Moving on to another item from within the CMTEDD budget, the Treasurer, for very good reasons, would not disclose what levels of wage increases were factored into the budget, but it also meant that the estimates committee were unable to assess the risk of the impact of these wage increases to the budget position, which could be substantial, given that employee expenses make up over half of the ACT budget. This is something we will need to monitor, going forward.

I also note that the estimates committee provided a revenue proposal looking at a tiered payroll tax system. Given that the evidence for such a system is over a decade old, we recommended that the government re-examine the question. This was one of the items that was simply noted and no further action was proposed.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Skills, Minister for Transport and City Services and Special Minister of State) (6.23): I welcome the opportunity to speak to the appropriation for the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate, in my capacity as Minister for Skills and Special Minister of State. The 2022-23 budget continues to provide significant investment across the skills portfolio, as we build upon *Skilled to Succeed*, which is our skills and workforce agenda, released earlier this year.

Skilled to Succeed underlines the importance of a skilled workforce in strengthening our growing economy. We are delivering on it in four key priority areas: delivering skills inclusively to provide all Canberrans with a foundation for lifelong learning; building a more responsible, flexible and future-focused skills system; assisting employers to build, attract and retain the right workforce; and strengthening skills sector foundations. We will do this this year, as we expect to invest a record \$126.3 million in vocational education and training in the ACT budget. This will be done through our public training provider, CIT, our User Choice and JobTrainer programs and a range of other initiatives that support a range of RTOs and Canberrans to connect with training.

Continued investment in skills is a priority for the ACT government. We also welcome investment in this space from the commonwealth, including working with the new commonwealth government on delivering a five-year national skills agreement and a fee-free TAFE training initiative, which will provide additional support for Canberrans seeking to gain skills in a range of sectors.

Investment in our public training provider remains a key priority for our government. It is something that we promised to do at the election. The ACT government is committed to providing at least 75 per cent of total skills funding to CIT to support high quality and inclusive training. We are continuing to work to deliver the CIT Woden campus in the budget, which will deliver high quality, world-class facilities for our public training provider as well.

We will continue to invest and promote vocational education and training through the budget and future budgets because we believe in investing in the future for all Canberrans. This is a great pathway into jobs and we have many areas of our economy at the moment that are in need of that workforce. There was a suggestion from Ms Castley that we have not done things for business in this budget. We have been investing in skills, the workforce that is driving businesses forward in the territory, and the registered training organisations and our public provider that are supporting them—significant investment.

The government continues its important investment in community facilities across the territory as well. That includes \$7.2 million for the ongoing refurbishment of community and government buildings to undertake important maintenance upgrade works across a number of buildings that house government agencies and community organisations. This range of works will include important roof repairs, lift replacements, electric upgrades, and heating and cooling system improvements.

We are also providing important funding for community facilities across Canberra, including new fencing and the installation of solar panels at Grant Cameron and Flynn community centres and undertaking walkway and roofing works at Pearce Community Centre. In 2022-23 we will be undertaking a range of works across a range of buildings, including Ginninderra Childcare, Holt Community Centre, as well as Erindale Business Centre. Facilities like these are important to the community, and the government is committed to funding for regular upgrades and maintenance to them.

I am very pleased that the budget delivers \$1.2 million to replace the turf at GIO Stadium and Manuka Oval and a further \$1 million for safety maintenance and rectification works at both facilities. Canberrans care about their sport and these important turf replacements are part of our investment in our sporting facilities. Works will also take place to improve lighting systems and audiovisual systems for major sporting events.

The government continues to support the recreational activities in the ACT. We are delivering further works and improvements to the National Arboretum and at Stromlo Forest Park through the budget. The Arboretum enjoys strong visitor rates from Canberrans and tourists, with numbers expected to continue to grow over coming years. To support this, we are making investments in forest signage, customer engagement, the Village Centre and refurbishing the much-loved POD Playground slide. We are also continuing to make improvements to trails and signage at Stromlo Forest Park.

The government continues to work in moving more government facilities off gas. Through the budget it has funded the replacement of the gas-fired assets at 255 Canberra Avenue, which houses the Heritage Library and a variety of government agencies. We are working hard to deliver on our commitment to transition government facilities off gas, and this project builds on what is happening across the ACT government's property portfolio.

We are continuing to make progress as well in getting more government services online—this was mentioned before in the debate—and giving more options for how Canberrans can interact with the ACT government online. The budget provides funding to strengthen the digital account platform, which now supports over 200,000 account holders. We will continue to support more services to be delivered online. New funding will support the design of new school enrolment systems and parent permission systems, in collaboration with the Education Directorate. We will also begin work to enhance the vehicle registration system.

In response to Mr Cain's comments in relation to FOI, we have demonstrated in successive budgets that we have been putting the resources into agencies to manage FOI requests when they are made to various agencies. We are continuing to look at the resourcing required, going forward. We have been undertaking a significant amount of policy and legislative work, which, as I told Mr Cain in estimates, is my role. In fact, I have introduced a freedom of information amendment bill into this place for the Assembly to consider. It will make a range of practical improvements to

ensure that people can get access to the information they need and that we continue to make sure the system works efficiently for the Canberra community.

This budget provides important investments across our city, from ongoing skills funding to new initiatives to support our community facilities, and I am very pleased to support this part of the budget today.

At 6.30 pm, in accordance with standing order 34, the debate was interrupted and the resumption of the debate was made an order of the day for the next sitting. The motion for the adjournment was put.

Adjournment

Environment—citizen scientists

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong—Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services and Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction) (6.31): I rise to quickly speak about the fact that one of the ways Canberra is great, and is getting even better, is the opportunity people have to get involved in citizen science, because our bushlands are so accessible across the whole city. If any of you know any nature enthusiasts, I encourage you to let them know about some of our programs so that they can get involved. It is a good, shared activity for families or a valuable way for retired people to stay active and contribute to the ACT's environmental health at the same time.

As environment minister, I have been able to see firsthand what some of these programs are working on. August was Platypus Month and I was able to go out with my colleague Jo Clay on a platypus survey. Sadly, we did not see any, but during one of the arranged events on Queanbeyan River during the week I did have a sighting. They are delightful to watch in Tidbinbilla too, nosing around in the water.

Tomorrow night I will be doing a frog survey at Dickson Wetlands. It is great fun to try to zero in on all the different frog calls. I am probably not the only one who especially loves the call of the Banjo frog, that lovely resonant bonk sound. Next month is Aussie Bird Count, which I am told is one of Australia's biggest events for citizen scientists. All it involves is spending 20 minutes outdoors, counting and hopefully identifying birds that you see, and sending in the results. Almost anyone could do this, no matter their level of mobility or experience.

Also in the birding world, the ACT government is supporting the ANU's Difficult Bird Research Group. They are asking for the community to look for gang-gang feathers which can be contributed to their genetic analysis of the species. Honestly, I do not think the gang-gang should be classed as a difficult bird. I actually think it is the rock star of the bird world. But maybe it is a teenager going through a phase.

On a more serious note, the more scientists know about endangered species like the gang-gang, the more helpful it is to our efforts to conserve them and build their numbers. I suspect getting involved in citizen science could become quite addictive. It gives people new ways of looking at our beautiful bushland and nature parks around the capital. It gets them out in the fresh air and helps them build community and connection with the precious natural systems that we live within.

For anyone who has wanted to do something science-y but never had the opportunity or the training, there are several different groups that they can join, or activities like the ones that I have just mentioned. They do not require membership, just enthusiasm and a bit of free time. Citizen science makes a valuable contribution to our city and I only hope that it continues to grow and diversify.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.34 pm.