



# Debates

WEEKLY HANSARD

Legislative Assembly for the ACT

**TENTH ASSEMBLY**

**30 AUGUST 2023**

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**Wednesday, 30 August 2023**

**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.

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

**Mr Graeme Neate AM**  
**Motion of condolence**

**MR RATTENBURY** (Kurrajong—Attorney-General, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Gaming and Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction):  
I move:

That this Assembly expresses its deep regret at the death of Mr Graeme Neate AM, President of the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal, and tenders its profound sympathy to his family, friends and colleagues in their bereavement.

Members of the Assembly, today we mourn the loss of Mr Graeme Neate AM, President of the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal, an exceptional human being, an esteemed member of the Australian legal community, and a dedicated and kind leader.

We are joined in the Assembly today by his wife, Jenny, and colleagues from the ACAT. Watching online are Graeme's daughter, Lara, his son, Lachlan, and his sisters, Margie and Yvonne. Graeme commenced his legal journey here in Canberra, where he studied at the Australian National University and served as an associate for the Honourable Justice McGregor of the ACT Supreme Court.

Graeme would go on to have an illustrious career, which spanned decades of work in advocating for native title rights and making contributions to the interests of Australia's traditional owners, a passion ignited from the time he began working with Justice John Toohey, the then inaugural Aboriginal Land Commissioner. Graeme would go on to become the president of the National Native Title Tribunal, serving on that tribunal for 17 years, including spending 14 years of those as its president.

Indeed, Graeme was awarded a Centenary Medal for service in 2003 for his presidency of the National Native Title Tribunal. Graeme's significant contribution to

advancing the rights of Australia's traditional owners did not go unnoticed. In 2015 he was appointed as a Member of the Order of Australia in the Queen's Birthday honours for his significant service to the law, as a leading contributor to Indigenous land rights and to legal education.

When Graeme began his tenure as president of the ACAT in 2017, he brought with him a wealth of legal experience, including also having served as industrial commissioner of the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission. Across his tenure as president of the ACAT he played an integral role in upholding the ACT's justice system, while providing the highest-quality services to the ACT community.

Graeme led the ACAT through several significant expansions to its jurisdiction, including the introduction of the new motor accident insurance scheme, and large-scale reforms to the Residential Tenancies Act. Graeme also steered the tribunal through the impacts of COVID-19, particularly ensuring the continued operations of the ACAT through early lockdowns, all whilst supporting the tribunal staff through the unprecedented and stressful times brought on by the pandemic.

Temporary President Geoffrey McCarthy noted in his speech at Graeme's memorial service that Graeme, through sheer example, made ACAT a fantastic place to work. Those who had the pleasure of working with Graeme will remember him for his kindness, his empathy and the intellectual rigour with which he approached his role. Madam Speaker, many of us who were lucky enough to know Graeme knew that Graeme was a leader that cared about and invested in people. He was always eager to meet and get to know all staff and people around him, regardless of their position or level, and he made it a point to know them as individuals, and their families. Many who worked with Graeme remember him as a friend, not just as a colleague.

His focus on people shone through in his working style as well. Graeme had an enduring skill at working collaboratively. His open-mindedness allowed him to understand and empathise with others, which made him all the more respected as a leader, as he understood how the work of the ACAT impacted on the lives of so many Canberrans. It was his focus on people that saw him assume the position of mentor to many. He provided guidance to many, including myself, with his insights, wisdom and experience. He was always ready to help those in need, regardless of whether that need was about work or life. His kindness to others will likely influence them to show the same kindness in the world.

Graeme advocated for positive change wherever he went, and this is clear in the culture that he fostered at the ACAT. He influenced many with his kindness, meticulous attention to detail and gracious spirit, and I know that many at the ACAT, as well as many at ACT Courts, would agree that Graeme was an impressive and wonderful president who left a positive mark not only on ACAT's history but also on each and every one who worked with him.

In his personal life, Graeme led a creative and artistic life. Graeme's interest in art had been evident since his early childhood years and subsequently developed into another one of his passions. He was a prolific painter, often painting landscapes, with his works being requested to be shown at exhibitions and on ABC programs. Like a true

artist, Graeme also enjoyed visiting countless art galleries, including with his daughter Lara. Graeme was also an avid bushwalker and photographer. He had been on countless adventures with his wife, Jenny, and their friends. Sharing in his enjoyment with his family, Graeme would go on many hikes with his son Lachlan.

It is here in Canberra where Graeme ended his legal career, as president of the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal. Graeme passed away on 17 June 2023 surrounded by his loving family. He was a colleague and friend to many here in the territory, and across the legal profession in Australia and New Zealand, and his legacy will, without a doubt, inspire many more.

We will remember Graeme for his leadership, integrity, compassion and collegiate spirit. We are deeply thankful for Graeme's service, and his significant contributions to our community and beyond. It has been a privilege to work with Graeme during my time as Attorney-General, and I will personally miss him. On behalf of the Assembly, I extend our sincere condolences to Graeme's family, his friends and his many colleagues at the ACAT, ACT Courts, and across Australia.

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism): I thank the Attorney-General for bringing forward this condolence motion today to mark the passing of Graeme Neate AM, and I rise to offer my condolences, both on behalf of the territory government and ACT Labor.

From his study at the ANU to serving as the president of the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal, it is an honour for Canberra to have been part of such an exceptional lawyer's career. As president of the ACAT, Graeme shouldered a difficult role, but he did so with ease and humility, despite undertaking the hard, exhausting and challenging work that the tribunal undertakes for our community. Through his tireless efforts, he contributed to upholding the integrity of the justice system in the territory by ensuring fair outcomes for all Canberrans who came through the doors of the tribunal.

No matter the difficulty, Graeme never faltered. He continuously fought for fairness and equity. He knew that the work of ACAT impacts many, many lives in the territory, and he understood the importance of impartiality. Even so, he always tried to understand and empathise with others, which made him all the more respected as a decision-maker and a leader.

Graeme made a significant contribution to the legal community and the justice system here in the ACT, yet his legacy goes beyond that of ACAT and the territory. He worked extensively for the rights of Australia's traditional owners during his tenure at the National Native Title Tribunal, and under Graeme's leadership the first 12 native title determinations were made in Cape York, empowering Indigenous communities to reclaim their rightful place as custodians of the land.

He wrote extensively on Aboriginal land rights, native title and cultural heritage issues. He helped establish the Indigenous law program and the Indigenous Law Centre at the University of New South Wales. He was ready to share his knowledge and clarify and provide guidance on the native title system and the legal challenges.

He dedicated his life to provide justice for those who needed it the most. He gave his voice to those without and was a beacon of hope for those that he fought for. But today I extend my sincere condolences to Graeme's wife, Jenny, his children, Lachlan and Lara, and his two grandchildren, Connor and Toby.

His legacy stands as the epitome of a legal practitioner, and his story will continue to inspire many more. We are thankful for Graeme's contribution and commitment to public service and for how he challenged and influenced change and the culture of the public service, and at the ACAT. He will be remembered as a mentor, a colleague and a friend.

**MS LEE** (Kurrajong—Leader of the Opposition): On behalf of the Canberra Liberals I pay tribute to Graeme Neate AM, who passed away in June this year. I acknowledge the presence in the chamber of Graeme's family, including his wife, Jennifer, and many members of the legal profession, and I acknowledge his children Lachlan and Lara who are watching online.

Graeme was an exceptional and highly regarded lawyer who began his legal career in Canberra when he completed a Bachelor of Arts in political science and sociology from the ANU in 1977, followed by a Bachelor of Laws (Honours) in 1979. Graeme was a champion of reconciliation and worked tirelessly throughout his career to bridge the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australians.

In 1992 he was appointed the inaugural chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Land Tribunals and held memberships in the Land Court of Queensland, the Land Appeal Court of Queensland and the advisory committee to the Australian Law Reform Commission. In 1993 he presided over the landmark Cape Melville and Flinders Island land claim. He served as a member of the Native Title Tribunal from 1995 to 1999 and was president from 1999 to 2013, when he oversaw the first 12 native title determinations made in Cape York.

In 2014, Graeme was appointed as commissioner with the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission, where he served for three years. Graeme was a tireless advocate for the protection of First Nations cultural heritage and was renowned for his work in the Indigenous academic space through his publication in numerous journals, books and conference papers.

He worked to establish the Indigenous law program and the Indigenous Law Centre, research and study facilities at the University of New South Wales. In 2015, Graeme was appointed as a Member of the Order of Australia in the Queen's Birthday honours for his significant service to the law as a leading contributor to Indigenous land rights and to legal education. In 2017, Graeme was appointed president of the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal and served as president for six years.

Whilst I did not have the opportunity to work personally with Graeme, those that had that pleasure have always spoken about his brilliant legal mind, his kindness and his dedication to ensuring that everyone in our community had access to justice. Graeme leaves a legacy that will be long remembered, and not just within the legal progression.

On behalf of the Canberra Liberals, our sincerest condolences to his wife, Jennifer; his children, Lachlan and Lara; his grandchildren, Conor and Toby, and to his loved ones; and his colleagues in the legal profession.

**MS VASSAROTTI** (Kurrajong): I rise to acknowledge the passing of Graeme Neate AM, to provide my condolences on behalf of the ACT Greens and to add my voice of thanks to the contribution that he has made to this city and the legal fraternity across Australia.

I met Graeme when he took on the role of president of the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal in 2017. At the time, I was a community member of the tribunal and had the privilege of serving with him in a number of tribunal jurisdictions, particularly guardianship and mental health. I am extremely grateful that I had the opportunity to work with him closely through this time. In this, I was able to learn from him and learn with him. Being involved in panels that involve legal and medical professionals when you are a community member can be intimidating, and it can be daunting; however, with Graeme chairing these panels, I always felt like a respected member of the team, where my complementary skills and experiences were useful and valued.

Tribunal work can be very challenging. You are often required to work with individuals at a point of acute illness, or with family members coming to terms with very challenging, changing circumstances of a loved one. Engagement in the process is often accompanied with anger, with grief, with stress, with sorrow and with uncertainty. As a tribunal we can be asked to consider big issues: like whether or not a person has decision-making capacity. We can be asked to contemplate decisions that will have a profound impact on people's lives. These decisions are complex and challenging. While there is a need for sharp legal minds and an understanding and commitment to the law, this is not a time for stuffy lawmaking and not a time for pretences or ceremony. Graeme's ability to preside over a tribunal in a way that ensured legal obligations were met and that people were treated with care, dignity, respect and empathy was one of the reasons it was not just a privilege but a delight to be part of his panels. He always respectfully carved out space for me as a community member, honoured my experience in the local community and made my contribution feel as valued as the other professionally based members.

This was not a new attribute for Graeme. It was not surprising to note the comments of the Cape York Partnership when they marked his passing. They noted that Graeme Neate was not just a lawyer or an advocate; he was a man of profound empathy, deep understanding and unwavering commitment. He recognised the inherent rights of Indigenous people and dedicated his life to ensuring that those rights were recognised and protected under the law.

As well as a great legal mind and a professional and caring president, Graeme was also kind, and he was fun. After I left ACAT, when I would run into him on his regular visits with the Attorney-General, he always took the time to catch up with me, to share notes about the work of the tribunal and to share the stories of our day-to-day lives.

I really cherish my memory of the last time I spent with Graeme at lunch at a cafe in Ginninderry last summer. We were gathered there to celebrate the retirement of other long-serving ACAT community members. A group of us spent time around a table sharing food and sharing stories. He was late—I think he had got lost—and he regaled us with stories of eccentric New York-based art collectors. It was a fun and relaxed encounter, where we were all enjoying spending and sharing time together. I did not know it was the last time that we would get to spend time, and I am really grateful I go to share it with him.

My deepest condolences go to Jenny, as well as to Lara, Lachlan, Margie and Yvonne, who are watching online, who have lost a partner in life, a father and a brother. I stand in solidarity and sadness with members and staff in ACAT who have lost a leader and a friend. Our local community is poorer for the loss of Graeme. While we have lost a great contributor, a partner, a parent and a friend, his commitment to fairness and equality has made us better—our community better—and will be a lasting legacy. I trust that this will be a comfort for all of us that grieve his passing.

*Question resolved in the affirmative, members standing in their places.*

## **Petition**

*The following petition was lodged for presentation:*

### **Roads—Gribble and Hibberson Streets intersection—petition 11-23**

*By Mr Braddock, from 68 residents:*

#### **To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly**

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly to the intersection at Gribble and Hibberson Streets in the Gungahlin Town Centre.

This petition is to request a pedestrian crossing and traffic calming measures to make this intersection safe for pedestrians.

This intersection is near a school, a library and forms part of the connection between retail areas of the Gungahlin Town Centre. With an increasing number of people living in or close to the Gungahlin Town Centre, improving the safety and walkability of the town centre is of crucial importance.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly call upon the government to install a pedestrian crossing and other traffic calming measures at the intersection of Gribble and Hibberson Streets in Gungahlin.

*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.

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (10.20): I am excited for this petition to be tabled today and to support the introduction of a pedestrian crossing at this intersection of Gribble and Hibberson Street in the Gungahlin town centre. Yerrabi residents have been active in calling for the introduction of this pedestrianisation.

Despite being an area of high traffic, and interconnectivity between the key spaces—that is, the Gungahlin College, the Gungahlin library, nearby retail and the club—there is no pedestrian crossing here. In fact, the size of the intersection is so large you need to pack a lunch before attempting to cross its vast stretches of bitumen, with no pedestrian refuge in sight!

Our city should be designed to maximise accessibility by all those who walk, ride a mobility scooter or push a pram. Residents have shown they are in support of the addition of this pedestrian crossing. I am confident such a crossing will provide greater safety, and traffic calming measures will ensure that this area can be made accessible for all those who use it.

The Greens strongly support greater emphasis for the walkability and active transport options in our cities. This is also what I want to see for Gungahlin town centre: a town centre where, in particular, people can walk or ride their way between a school, library and retail sections of the Gungahlin town centre in a safe and accessible manner for all.

I hope this petition will be considered by this Assembly and the government. Furthermore, I hope that the concerns and advocacy of residents who have highlighted this issue results in a small but meaningful improvement to the accessibility of the Gungahlin town centre.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Public housing—renewal program Ministerial statement**

**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) (10.22): Today, I am updating the Assembly on the tenant relocation process within the Growing and Renewing Public Housing program.

Housing ACT's communication and engagement with tenants required to relocate as part of the program was not nearly as good as it should have been, as highlighted in

the Ombudsman's report released on 31 July. Further, the public housing properties selected for sale or redevelopment as part of the program were chosen before considering the circumstances of the tenants living in these properties.

Public housing tenants were hurt by these mistakes, and for that I did not hesitate to apologise. I am more driven than ever to improve how this government delivers on its public housing mission. That mission has always been to improve the quality of public housing homes for current tenants and to get more public housing available to those on the waitlist.

Earlier this month, I met with the ombudsman to hear firsthand his concerns with the process. I am grateful for his work and the frankness of his advice about what needs to change. The ombudsman said in his report that the growing and renewing program is clearly well intentioned and is based on legitimate public policy goals. The ACT government needs to keep improving the quality of public housing and to grow the number of public housing homes in our city.

Together, Housing ACT and community service partners will work on a new process to determine which tenants and properties will be included in the growing and renewing program going forward. Mandatory relocations have been paused until this work is complete.

This work is happening with ACTCOSS, ADACAS, Canberra Community Law, the Human Rights Commission and others who are committed, like me, to better outcomes for public housing tenants and those on the waitlist. I want to thank all of those organisations for working with me so constructively and cooperatively. It is appreciated.

I am committed to finding a new way to carry out the relocations that are necessary for the expansion and improvement of our public housing portfolio. The bottom line is that the territory's population is growing. Household composition is changing. Cost-of-living pressures are increasing. We must not lose sight of the need to increase the number of public and social houses in the ACT or the need to upgrade properties that are no longer delivering an acceptable standard of living to our tenants.

This is what the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program is about. There is much more to do, but a lot has been achieved already: 218 dwellings have been demolished for redevelopment; 515 end-of-use public housing properties have been sold, resulting in \$386.9 million reinvested into public housing; 114 land sites have been purchased; 402 dwellings have been constructed and are now complete; and 131 dwellings have been purchased from the market. This is a complex program, and it is not easy, but I am determined to make sure vulnerable and disadvantaged Canberrans have a safe and comfortable place to call home today, tomorrow, five, 10 and 20 years from now.

I present the following paper:

Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program—Tenant relocation process redesign update—Ministerial statement, 30 August 2023.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

*(Quorum formed.)*

## **Vietnam War—50th anniversary 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) (10.28): I rise today to recognise and commemorate the 50th anniversary of the end of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War.

Australia's experience in the Vietnam War was unique in many ways. It was the longest war Australia participated in during the 20th century. It was 61 years ago this year that the Australian Army arrived in South Vietnam and 50 years ago that Australia withdrew troops. More than 60,000 Australians from the Army, Navy or Air Force served in Vietnam between 1962 and 1973. Among this cohort were 15,000 national servicemen.

While the choice to serve in the military is an extraordinary one, the resilience and contributions of those who were deployed to war without their choice merits special recognition. Nor was participation in the Vietnam War a solely military experience. Hundreds of civilians were also deployed through the Royal Australian Air Force Nursing Service and the Royal Australian Army Nursing Corps to support military operations.

I would like to acknowledge the great sacrifices made by all Australians who served in the Vietnam War, and the sacrifices made by their families. Across nearly 11 years, 523 Australians died as a result of the war, and a further 2,400 were wounded. It is important to recognise that the sacrifices made by Australians at the time were only a part of those made during the Vietnam War. The greatest losses of life were both military and civilian casualties in South Vietnam and North Vietnam, with civilian deaths alone estimated above 400,000.

Australia's losses were part of US and allied military deaths of 282,000 people, and North Vietnam military deaths alone are estimated as upwards of 444,000. Altogether, an estimated 1,353,000 people were killed during the Vietnam War, with many more suffering physical and mental injuries due to the conflict.

The war left its scars on many Australians at the time, as well as people and their families who have since made their home here. For Australians, the casualties of the war include those injured or killed during the Battle of Long Tan, which has become a significant event of remembrance for Vietnam veterans, their families and Australians as a whole.

During the battle, the 108 soldiers of D Company, 6th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, held off an enemy force estimated at over 2,000. The battle lasted for four hours and took place in the middle of a tropical downpour. Eighteen Australians were killed and 25 wounded during the battle. D Company were supported by RAAF helicopter resupply and close fire support from Australian artillery. Reinforcements in armoured personnel carriers arrived as night fell, having to swim across a flooded creek and fight through enemy forces. In the words of military historian Ashley Ekins, “their valiant stand became a defining action of the war.” D Company’s resilience in these incredibly difficult conditions earned the United States Presidential Distinguished Unit Citation. The anniversary of the Battle of Long Tan on 18 August is now commemorated each year as Vietnam Veterans’ Day. It is a day to pause and reflect on the sacrifices made by tens of thousands of Australians who served in the Vietnam War.

The effects of the Vietnam war on veterans, their families and for all Australians did not end with their deployments, nor with the war itself. Experience in the war left permanent physical and psychological scars for many veterans. Almost 75 per cent of the estimated 35,400 surviving Australian Vietnam Veterans experience some form of health impact resulting from their service. Even 50 years later, our Vietnam veterans have a greater likelihood of experiencing a range of health issues.

In addition to the physical impact of their service, many Vietnam veterans have been affected by mental health issues resulting from their participation in the war. The prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, among our Vietnam veterans is reported to be as high as 20 to 30 per cent. Nor are the sacrifices made in the name of service in the Vietnam War confined to the veterans themselves. Research from the Australian Institute of Family Studies shows that the families of veterans made sacrifices themselves and also felt the impacts of service. This includes intergenerational and persistent effects, with higher rates of anxiety, depression and PTSD among children of Vietnam veterans.

As the ACT Minister for Veterans, and also as Minister for Disability and Minister for Mental Health, I would like to acknowledge the solemn responsibility I have in ensuring we listen to the 900 surviving Vietnam veterans who live in the ACT and their families, and to support them in managing the impacts of their service. I would like to thank all of those veterans and their loved ones who have contributed to the critical work of ensuring support is available for all veterans who need it.

The legacy of Australia’s Vietnam veterans is informed not only by their experiences on the battlefield, but in the circumstances of their homecoming following their service. Having served with integrity, honour and courage, and having in many cases lost mates to the war or suffered physical or psychological injury in the name of service themselves, many veterans returned to an Australia that was hostile to the war, and to veterans themselves for their involvement in the conflict. We all want peace and an end to war. But any anger over the decision to go to war should have been directed to the political decision-makers at the time, not to veterans whose responsibility it is to carry out the decisions of others, in accordance with the rules of engagement.

Sir Peter Cosgrove, who served in Vietnam himself and was awarded the Military Cross, has remarked that Vietnam veterans felt unloved and fragile after being, as he

put it, “pitchforked back into a largely unknowing and often uncaring society.” There is no doubt that the sidelining of Australia’s Vietnam veterans contributed to challenges in returning to life at home. It is a stain on our national consciousness that in the place of a warm welcome, many veterans endured a cold shoulder.

As damaging as these attitudes were, they did not last. Time has gifted the nation much-needed reflection and awareness on this chapter of our history. By 1987, the tide of public opinion had turned and the first Welcome Home parade was held on 3 October 1987 after a dawn service in Sydney. Over 22,000 Vietnam veterans participated, including around 500 ACT-based veterans. After a long period of division, the nation united in recognising and acknowledging the service and sacrifice of Australia’s Vietnam veterans.

Five years later, the Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial was unveiled on Canberra’s Anzac Parade. The memorial is dedicated to all Australians who served in the Vietnam War, and prominently overlooks the nation’s major ceremonial avenue. It is a testament to the resilience, courage and perseverance of Australia’s extraordinary veterans of the Vietnam War that they have built many of the critical services that support Australia’s veterans today.

Their legacy to veterans and their families is a better system of support and understanding that to this day provides the help veterans and their families need to manage life in uniform and beyond. Having survived the horrors of war, sacrificed their health and wellbeing and returned home to a hostile environment, Australia’s Vietnam veterans chose to use their lived experience to ensure that generations of veterans following in their footsteps would do so with better support.

One example is the foundation of Open Arms - Veterans & Family Counselling. It is Australia’s leading source of mental health assessment and clinical counselling services for all Australian veterans and their families. This vital service was founded as the Vietnam Veterans’ Counselling Service and was the direct result of tireless lobbying by Vietnam veterans for better support. The Vietnam Veterans’ Federation of Australia was another result of efforts by veterans themselves to work together to support one another, and to look after their mates and their families. For over 40 years the federation has helped veterans to claim just and fair compensation and entitlements through military compensation schemes.

I would like to particularly acknowledge the ACT’s local branch, now named the Veterans Support Centre. Founded by a handful of local Vietnam veterans in the early 1990s, this organisation is a true friend to many of Canberra’s veterans. My thanks to President Ward Gainey, who also serves as Deputy Co-Chair on the Ministerial Advisory Council for Veterans and their Families. We are privileged to have his extensive expertise and experience contributing to the ACT government’s work with, and for, Canberra’s veterans and their families.

Vietnam veterans have also shown their ability to fight to have their contributions recognised and their sacrifices honoured through advocacy and support. The Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia has played a vital role in raising awareness of the ongoing impacts of exposure to chemicals on the health of Vietnam veterans.

I also want to recognise the work of the Veterans Motorcycle Club. Originally formed as the Vietnam Veterans Motorcycle Club in Victoria in 1989, today the Motorcycle Club has chapters around Australia and welcomes veterans from all conflicts, including Afghanistan and Iraq. The club is uniquely important for veterans who felt left behind by other parts of the community as a result of their service duty. Like the broader Canberra community, our veterans community includes people with diverse ways of looking at the world. For some, a poker run to a small town in New South Wales, or a coffee catch-up at the bunker on Saturday morning, is the best way to maintain connection with people who understand their experience.

This legacy is the gift of veterans to current and future generations of those who serve Australia through the military. It is a testimony to their ability and willingness to contribute to Australia that the Department of Veterans' Affairs veteran-centric reforms have been based on research into the lived experience of Vietnam veterans and their advocacy for the needs of veterans and their families. Vietnam veterans have done so much to ensure we better understand the impacts of war and military service and to respond to veterans' unique needs for the right supports to help with their recovery.

They have been instrumental in our collective and scientific understanding of mental health and trauma. The willingness and courage of Vietnam veterans to share their experience and struggles has been critical to building better diagnosis and treatment of PTSD. In his research on their contribution to recognising, diagnosing and understanding PTSD, Alexander McFarlane has concluded that:

The Vietnam veterans' battle to gain recognition for their psychological injuries fostered an acceptance of the diagnosis of PTSD and the development of the field of traumatic stress studies ...

As the ACT Minister for Mental Health, I recognise the immense value of this contribution every day and I thank every veteran who has spoken up and contributed to our ability to recognise, diagnose and understand PTSD.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the end of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War. It was an honour to attend a national service at the Australian Vietnam Forces National Memorial here in Canberra; to join veterans, their families, and the Australian public in reflecting on the sacrifices and contributions of Vietnam veterans and to commemorate those killed or wounded in the war.

While the event was held in Canberra, this is an anniversary of national significance throughout Australia. As well as the service being broadcast live nationally by the ABC and streamed online, vigils were held with the RSL's support at every grave and commemorative plaque site across the nation and overseas on 3 August 2023.

The DVA has also recognised the service of Vietnam veterans by offering a commemorative medallion and certificate of commemoration to every living Vietnam veteran, widow of a veteran and other family members.

I was also honoured to be invited to attend an afternoon tea at the National Arboretum alongside Canberra's own Vietnam veterans. I consider it a privilege to have the

opportunity to spend time with veterans in our community and to learn from their experiences what more can be done to support all veterans and their families.

I would like to take the opportunity of the anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War, half a century ago, to honour all of those who served in the war and their families. This is an occasion to recognise their sacrifices and honour their legacy, especially those who have served in later conflicts.

Propelled into one of the most significant, protracted and historic military operations of the 20th century, and on the receiving end of a problematic homecoming, Vietnam veterans loom large as figures of resilience and camaraderie. There are lessons we are still learning, as a community, about how to recognise that those who serve in conflicts do not have choices about why they are at war. Yet they still do their best to honour their training, their team and their nation in how they discharge their duty. In so doing, there is a lot we can learn from veterans in our community about teamwork, leadership and facing challenges with grace and with integrity. Lest we forget.

I present the following paper:

50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War—  
Ministerial statement, 30 August 2023.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **ACT Health—health infrastructure plan Ministerial statement**

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health) (10.42): I rise to provide the Assembly with an update on the ACT government's ongoing work to deliver on our comprehensive health infrastructure plan. The government is committed to building and maintaining a public health system that puts individuals and their families first, providing the right care in the right place at the right time.

Over the past decade the government has invested \$1.7 billion in health infrastructure. As our population continues to grow, and as demand for our health services increases, we know that our health system must continue to meet community needs. On 4 July, the Chief Minister and I released an update to the ACT government's health infrastructure plan. The health infrastructure plan outlines how the government will deliver new and improved health infrastructure across the city over the next five years and beyond. The plan outlines two areas of focus, hospital and community infrastructure, which reflects the ACT government's commitment to improving acute services infrastructure and delivering more health services closer to home.

Canberrans will have access to new and upgraded infrastructure with consumer-led designs that prioritise community-focused care, improve patient outcomes and encourage greater alignment of health service delivery across the ACT. Over the coming years, facilities will be progressively upgraded, expanded and replaced to cater for our growing population and to ensure they can keep delivering high quality care. This builds on the investments we have been making in health services closer to home that help keep Canberrans healthy and out of hospital.

The ACT government will roll out four new health centres to deliver community-based services for all Canberrans, no matter where they live. The new health centres will provide a good geographical spread of services in areas of future growth and strong links with other health and community services in each region.

For those living in South Tuggeranong, the Inner South, North Gungahlin and West Belconnen, these new health centres will provide accessible public health care closer to home. The centres will provide integrated multidisciplinary care with a focus on preventive care and advice, early intervention and the management of chronic illness. Importantly, these services will work closely with primary care, including general practitioners, to deliver truly integrated care.

This is where health reform is headed, and the ACT government is pleased to be working with the commonwealth to support a primary care pilot to deliver better and more cost-effective care for those health consumers who are currently heavy users of our acute services. Through the 2023-24 ACT budget, the government has committed \$16.6 million in funding to design and construct the South Tuggeranong Health Centre and to begin planning and design work for North Gungahlin and the Inner South. This commitment builds on feasibility study work used to inform the locations proposed for these new centres.

Planning and design work is also underway for the three new facilities in the Watson Health Precinct. The Watson Health Precinct has been providing both specialist mental health care and alcohol and other drug rehabilitation for almost 20 years. The upgrades include three new facilities to replace the current infrastructure and double the capacity for the alcohol and other drug rehabilitation services for young people, operated by the Ted Noffs Foundation; replace the current infrastructure and double the capacity for the residential care facility for young people with mental health conditions, operated by CatholicCare Marymead; and establish a new alcohol and other drug residential rehabilitation facility to provide care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, operated by Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services.

The ACT government is providing \$49 million over three years in the 2023-24 budget to support the delivery of this project, building on our previous investment for the design work and site preparation. Construction on this key election commitment project is expected to start in late 2023 and take approximately 12 months to complete.

The ACT government will also undertake a strategic review of community health assets and develop a long-term program for the upgrade, renewal and construction of these facilities across Canberra. The government will consult key stakeholders, including



community health providers and non-government organisations, in the development of this program to ensure that community health facilities are in the right location, functional for clinicians, welcoming for patients and environmentally sustainable.

Through this work, the ACT government will produce an overarching pathway for the upgrade and renewal of existing facilities and the construction of new facilities. The ACT government continues building other key infrastructure projects across Canberra, including the ACT's first purpose-built eating disorder residential treatment centre, which is expected to be completed next year, as well as the south-side hydrotherapy pool, with construction to commence later this year.

Madam Speaker, at the heart of the government's health infrastructure plan is our ongoing commitment to invest in our public hospitals. Public hospitals are and will continue to be our most significant health infrastructure assets. Now that our public hospitals have been consolidated into a single network, we can better coordinate our health services and plan for the future. It means we can distribute resources effectively, strengthen the capacity of our workforce, plan infrastructure on a territory-wide basis and improve health outcomes for all Canberrans.

In 2024 the government will complete the expansion of the Canberra Hospital and we have started planning and design for the new more than \$1 billion public acute hospital in Canberra's north. We will also improve the diversity of specialised services co-located on our hospital campuses.

Through the implementation of the Canberra Hospital Master Plan, the government will continue to invest in infrastructure across the Canberra Hospital campus. The Canberra Hospital Master Plan provides a long-term framework to guide the redevelopment of the campus over the next 20 years. At the centre of the master plan is the Critical Services Building, which will provide Canberrans with access to a bigger emergency department, more treatment spaces and more operating theatres.

Ongoing investments at Canberra Hospital continue. This year's budget included almost \$15.5 million to deliver on a key commitment and establish a new palliative care ward to improve the quality of life for patients with an active progressive disease who have little or no prospect of cure. We are also investing more than \$8.5 million to expand and upgrade the endoscopy services to deliver greater capacity and a better experience for public patients, and to support the ongoing increased investment in more services that the government has made over the past two budgets.

The government continues to plan for a new north-side hospital to meet the demands of our growing and ageing north-side population over the next 50 years. The hospital will replace the ageing infrastructure at the existing public hospital in Bruce and increase the capacity of the territory-wide health system. It will also bring together a range of contemporary hospital services, holistic consumer-centred care and flexible models of care to meet the growing and changing needs of the community.

As the Assembly would be aware, the operations of the public hospital in Bruce transitioned to Canberra Health Services on 3 July 2023. More than 2,000 workers at North Canberra Hospital, including visiting medical officers, have transitioned their

employment from Calvary to Canberra Health Services. This was really important, and I would like to thank the Transition Team, the North Canberra Hospital executive and the Canberra Health Services executive for their incredibly hard work to support all of those staff each day during the transition.

This provides a path forward for the ACT government to build a new, more than \$1 billion hospital in Canberra's north side and deliver a public hospital network under one operator. As I have discussed in this place on a number of occasions, a single operator will deliver efficiencies and improve the effectiveness of our public health services. As we heard during the transition, teams are talking about how their services can come together in the future, with a number of teams now meeting to talk about territory-wide approaches.

This will offer better mobility of services and opportunities for staff across the Canberra Hospital, North Canberra Hospital, University of Canberra Hospital, community settings and Clare Holland House. It will also enable clearer clinical governance across the territory's health services and reduced variations in care between the acute services.

With construction of the new north-side hospital set to begin in the coming years, the ACT government has allocated \$64.2 million in the 2023-24 budget to progress the north-side hospital through to detailed design. The budget also includes a provision for a construction amount for future years. The Health Directorate will be engaging with clinicians at North Canberra Hospital, starting this week, to inform the next phase of detailed design for the new north-side Hospital. This engagement will be both in-person and online, so that all team members have a chance to provide their expertise and inform this critical project.

It is vital that the government hears from clinicians currently working in the north-side acute hospital. Their voices will be crucial as we embark on the next steps to building an integrated public health system and investing in a new hospital. The ACT government will also consult with the community and key stakeholders during the design process, which will keep the broader community informed with up-to-date, accessible information about the project throughout all stages of design and development. When planning for health infrastructure, the government takes a holistic view of health services available across the region, including considering opportunities for collaboration with health services in the ACT.

As the population continues to grow and age, demand for hospital and health services will increase. Health services will need to respond to the changing health profile and increasing complexity of care. To ensure the healthcare needs of Canberrans are met today and into the future, significant planning is underway so that every part of our health system, including our infrastructure, can support the growing community.

The government's new consumer reference group, co-chaired by the Health Care Consumers Association, will play an important role in supporting all health infrastructure projects across the territory, including the new north-side hospital. The consumer reference group will ensure that Canberra's health facilities are safe, welcoming and accessible for patients, carers and visitors. Expressions of interest are now open for the Health Infrastructure Consumer Reference Group and I encourage

anyone interested to look on the HCCA website for more information. The expression of interest process will be open until 24 September, with the first meeting of the reference group to be held in November.

The development of the Critical Services Building at Canberra Hospital has established a new benchmark for consumer co-design. The consumer-led design initiatives embedded in this project have been presented to the Australasian Health Infrastructure Alliance, or AHIA, which is the lead body for the Australasian Health Facility Guidelines. The AHIA strategy team have indicated that they will look to incorporate most, if not all, consumer-led design components in the Health Facility Guidelines, which is a reflection of the value of co-design and ensures that future projects will benefit from the work of the CSB project.

The new consumer reference group will complement strong engagements of clinical and other staff, ensuring that we reflect the experiences of all who use our healthcare facilities and build on lessons learned as we continue to deliver significant health infrastructure projects across the territory. Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to provide an update to the Assembly. I present the following papers:

Health infrastructure plan and North Canberra Hospital—Update—Ministerial statement, 30 August 2023.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

**MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (10.53):** Well, another day, another con job on health from this government, whose track record on infrastructure is one of overpromising and under-delivery.

The new Critical Services Building at the Canberra Hospital is a case in point. It is a scaled-down proposal from the \$800 million expansion of the Canberra Hospital promised back in 2012. The first stage of rebuilding Canberra Hospital was costed at \$375 million. After the 2012 election, the hospital rebuild was cancelled and this exact amount was allocated for the first down payment on the tram.

Then the next proposal for the Woden campus of the Canberra Hospital was the SPIRE centre—a 2016 election commitment that Labor pledged would open in 2022-23. Work finally started on the current Critical Services Building in November 2021, with completion now expected in 2024. In fact, in the ACT the recycling of health infrastructure announcements occurs on an industrial scale and Canberrans are wise to this.

We see it again in the minister's statement today. Lots of new announcements while health infrastructure remains chronically underfunded. So we have a fairly constant stream of announceables, but where is the minister's apology for abandoning plans for an elective surgery centre at the University of Canberra Hospital precinct, which was promised at the last territory election and expected to be finished by 2025? Where is her apology for failing to upgrade and expand endoscopy services in this term of government? Another broken election commitment.

The recent ACT budget showed at least 19 projects are delayed from the last budget to this. When this government does finally manage to deliver projects years late, it sometimes even tries to re-announce them. We recently had a ministerial press release about a “new” MRI that was actually announced five years ago in the 2018-19 budget.

If you thought there was a resemblance to the television series *Utopia*, you would not be wrong. Instead of a stream of photo ops and puff pieces, Canberrans just want their hospitals to be safe, waitlists to be short and promised infrastructure to be delivered in full and on schedule.

With this Barr-Rattenbury government’s track record of overpromising and under-delivery, one has to be sceptical about whether it has any hope of building a new north-side hospital, which it optimistically claims will commence construction in 2025-26 and be operational by 2030-31. It is certainly miles off being, in the words of *Utopia*’s Jim Gibson, “Shovel ready.”

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **ACT Health—health workforce—update Ministerial statement**

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health) (10.56): I rise to provide an update on the significant work and investment that the ACT government continues to make to support our health workforce to be safer, healthier and sustainable into the future. In the 2023-24 ACT budget we are investing more than \$28 million over four years to increase supports and improve working conditions for our public health workforce.

This investment includes an additional \$2.2 million to further support workforce planning and implement early actions from the ACT Health Workforce Strategy 2023-2032, and builds on the \$6 million investment in the 2022-23 budget to: improve attraction and retention strategies; establish ongoing data analytic capability to perform health workforce data modelling across the territory, in partnership with the ANU’s National Centre for Health Workforce Studies and the Capital Health Network; engage the future health workforce to promote careers in the ACT health system; implement a targeted program to build the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce; and expand the health workforce planning team in the ACT Health Directorate to implement the remaining early actions.

The ACT Health Workforce Strategy 2023-2032 was developed in collaboration with the ACT health workforce and key partners. The territory-wide approach to building a sustainable health workforce will support health services in the ACT and surrounding regions to predict and respond to workforce challenges. The ACT health workforce 2024-26 action plan currently being developed will support this strategy. A facilitated workshop to progress the plan was held on 25 July. The workshop was attended by stakeholders and frontline staff from across the ACT’s health system, including cross-directorate, non-government provider, professional association and industrial representatives.

The workforce strategy workshop included a keynote presentation by the National Centre for Health Workforce Studies, outlining the program of work being undertaken to consider baseline health workforce supply, policy settings and scenario modelling for the future. This work will provide meaningful information about the supply and demand issues in the health workforce that are being seen locally, nationally and internationally. This work will also contribute to health workforce data analytics that can be scalable to other jurisdictions and nationally to support insights across Australia.

A territory-wide health workforce planning group is being established and will be a key governance mechanism to oversee the implementation of the strategy and action plan. The health workforce planning group will include key partners from across the health system. To further support the implementation of the strategy and the health workforce more broadly, the 2023-24 budget also includes key investments across a range of areas for specific work groups. These investments build on previous significant budget initiatives in allied health and nursing to support the health workforce now and to continue to improve health outcomes for our community.

In this budget we have invested in more than 80 additional medical, nursing, midwifery and allied health positions. This means an additional 570 health professional positions have been funded since the 2021 budget, far exceeding the additional 400 full-time equivalent positions we committed to over this term of government. And there will be more before we reach the next election, because we are delivering on our commitments and investing in the vital public health workforce that our growing community needs.

As part of the 2023-24 budget, the ACT government has funded improvements for the wellbeing of junior medical officers. These changes include longer contracts to improve job security for graduating doctors; creating additional positions for these extended contracts; and increasing pastoral care and training and development coordination across Canberra Hospital. An assessment tool will be adopted from new models that are in use in a small number of innovative health services. Progress in wellbeing will be measured and will commence within the next 12 months, with a report on progress against this initiative then being provided in the Canberra Health Services annual report.

Other health workforce investments in this budget include \$1.25 million for the continuation of the Indigenous Allied Health Australia ACT Health Academy and \$3 million to provide study support payments for health professional students, to continue strengthening the pipeline of students that choose to study and work in the ACT. We have also funded a significant wages boost for Canberra Hospital cleaners, a low-paid workforce that has all too often been the invisible backbone of our health system. We are investing in our health workforce now, we are growing those investments and we are planning for the future, and we are building our health workforce numbers in the ACT as a result. From previous investments and programs of work we are seeing a number of key areas make substantial progress, which will also improve the attraction, recruitment and retention of our health workforce in the ACT.

The 2022-23 health workforce budget initiative included an investment in continually improving clinical governance to strengthen the safety of the ACT health system, alongside workforce support. Clinical system governance arrangements established to date include the formation of the ACT Quality and Safety Leaders Network, which held its first meeting on 23 March 2023, and the ACT Clinical System Governance Committee meeting held on 27 July. The ACT Clinical System Governance Committee includes 22 clinicians and five consumers, who will work in partnership to lead system improvement across the ACT health system.

As we progress toward the opening of the Critical Services Building in 2024, CHS is undertaking a recruitment campaign to further supplement talent acquisition activities. The recruitment campaign will run in two phases. A pilot phase commenced in July, and phase 2 will commence in early 2024. As part of the budget, the government is investing more than \$122 million over four years to increase staffing and resources to operate the new Critical Services Building. This investment includes more frontline health professionals and more support staff for the new emergency department, operating theatres, intensive care and inpatient areas.

The CHS Nursing and Midwifery Workforce Plan 2022-23 is ensuring that we develop a nursing and midwifery workforce that is future-ready and prepared for changing pressures in healthcare delivery. This plan is achieving key outcomes, such as the reinvigoration of the orientation and onboarding processes, and establishment of a centralised nursing and midwifery workforce unit.

The ACT government continues to strengthen career pathways for nurses and midwives from high school to assistant roles, and from undergraduate positions through to advanced practice nurses and nurse practitioners. In order to grow our own nurses, cross-directorate collaboration occurred to develop the ACT Secondary Schools Articulation Program for students aspiring to join the nursing workforce. The first cohort of 20 ACT year 11 students commenced in May 2023.

Review and development of the assistant in nursing core duties and qualifications is underway, with the aim of having assistants in nursing working in acute care areas during the second half of 2023. This will provide a greater supplementary workforce to support care delivery. The new undergraduate student nurse/midwife role is being piloted in CHS. It is anticipated that 20 to 25 students will participate in the pilot and commence their careers at CHS as part of a career pathway that supports them while they study and brings their skills to our frontline services sooner.

The Novice Nurse Consolidation Program is a workplace-based program designed to consolidate knowledge, skills and competence and transition early career nurses to practice as safe, confident and accountable professionals. Seventy-six nurses have enrolled in the program, with 44 graduating after the six months of placements.

The ACT government is committed to advancing nursing practice and the scope of practice for nurse practitioners. The final report of the Nurse Practitioner Professional Practice Project has been endorsed and will be implemented alongside national and ACT strategy and policy work. As part of our commitment, two paediatric advance practice nurse positions have been established. The paediatric clinical care coordinator and after-hours clinical nurse consultant will provide high level clinical leadership,

support and professional advice. These positions will work collaboratively with the after-hours hospital manager and locally with the interdisciplinary team. The ACT government is continuing to bring in more nurse practitioners to the ACT's public health system and further recruitment is occurring. To support future nurse practitioner recruitment, there are six advance practice nurses in the ACT's excellent nurse-led walk-in centres who are currently being supported to complete their nurse practitioner training.

The government is continuing to work with all states and the Northern Territory to engage the commonwealth government in meaningful discussions about health system sustainability in every jurisdiction. We are currently working with the commonwealth government on several national workforce strategies. The ACT is leading a project with Queensland and the Northern Territory to develop the national maternity workforce strategy, which is in an early stage of development. We are also supporting the development of the national nursing workforce strategy, which is being led by the commonwealth and Victoria and is currently in a national consultation phase.

The ACT government is also continuing an extensive program of training and professional development to enhance clinical practice, support career progression and build capacity. This includes scholarships, with an additional investment in midwifery scholarships in the 2022-23 budget; leadership programs across the health workforce and in individual work groups; research and innovation funding; and a range of professional development opportunities.

The health, safety and wellbeing of our health workforce in the workplace is continuing to be strengthened by the \$8.75 million over four years in the wellbeing and recovery fund. Both the ACT Health Directorate and Canberra Health Services have launched their renewed wellbeing strategies, increased employee assistance resourcing and commenced actions across the health workforce to support wellbeing. This includes the Mayo Clinic Well-Being Index application, wellbeing peer support officers, new wellbeing spaces and a compassionate collaboration project in the directorate. CHS is currently appointing paid wellbeing leads across each professional cohort, with a portion of their current positions funded to undertake dedicated wellbeing work.

In the 2022-23 budget \$6.5 million was invested in embedding a positive safety culture in the ACT public health system, building on the success of the Towards a Safer Culture: First Step Strategy. The second phase of the project has commenced, with the recruitment of a project team and a planning day with key stakeholders held on 18 July. Themes and collaborative actions have been identified from the planning day to support the implementation, monitoring and evaluation aspects of Next Steps, which includes rolling out the Safewards model in more wards across both acute hospitals.

The First Step Strategy included a highly successful public communication campaign, called "Be Kind to Nurses and Midwives". This initiative will be refreshed and integrated with the whole-of-government occupational violence campaign that was launched by the Chief Minister on 14 July 2023. This government campaign is a general community awareness campaign utilising radio, TV, digital advertisement and campaign material displayed in public-facing workplaces.

On 28 June the Assembly passed a resolution calling on the ACT government to continue engaging in good faith with the inquiry into a recovery plan for nursing and midwifery workers and to update the Assembly on the election commitment to implement mandated minimum nurse-to-patient and midwife-to-patient ratios. Phase 1 of ratios implementation is now implemented and has resulted in the employment of an additional 90 full-time equivalent nursing staff across the acute hospitals. High levels of compliance with elements of ratios are being reported on the new public reporting platform, which went live on 14 June 2023.

There are three nation-leading compliance measures for each shift: a supernumerary team leader, a skill mix with no more than 25 per cent of enrolled nurses across a shift, and the nursing and midwifery ratio itself. The supernumerary team leader element is being reported at 90 to 100 per cent compliance over a roster period. Compliance with the skill mix element remains challenging. This is being actively discussed with the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation ACT to ensure that enrolled nurses are not being disadvantaged with the introduction of ratios and that their skills are being recognised and used where appropriate.

In July 2023 CHS reported a 75 per cent overall compliance with ratios and North Canberra Hospital reported an 86 per cent overall compliance. As we continue to negotiate and implement phase 2 of ratios, we will continue to strengthen compliance with the three elements of team leaders, skill mix and patient ratio. I note that the ACT is the only jurisdiction to measure compliance across all three elements, with Queensland only reporting on the ratio across services.

The ACT government is currently negotiating the next nursing and midwifery enterprise agreement. Once this has been finalised, phase 2 of the ratios project will be implemented, in partnership with the ANMF ACT, across speciality areas, including maternity services. All proposed areas for phase 2 have worked diligently to articulate models of care that have been provided to the ANMF ACT for feedback. Business, project management and change management plans have been drafted in readiness for phase 2.

I reiterate that the ACT government are fully committed to our health workforce in the ACT. We are continuing to make investments, implement key programs and plan for the future, to support our skilled and dedicated clinical and support staff to do what they do best. We know it can be tough in health care and there are some areas right now that need more support than others, but the ACT government is ensuring that health workers in the ACT do have great places to work in Australia's best city.

I present the following paper:

Health workforce update—Healthcare services—Assembly resolution of 7 October 2021—ACT Health workforce—Support for nursing and midwifery workers—Assembly resolution of 28 June 2023—Government response—Ministerial statement, 30 August 2023.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.



**MR DAVIS** (Brindabella) (11.10): Thank you to the Minister for Health for updating the Assembly on the work that the ACT government is undertaking to support our frontline healthcare workers, in particular our nurses and our midwives. We know that nurses and midwives have experienced huge challenges in recent years, not least during the pandemic, which has put a huge strain on these workers in their support of our communities. Nurses and midwives are frontline essential workers, and our city and our country could not have made it through the pandemic without them.

We know that our nurses and midwives are exhausted. They are burnt out and they need even more support from us. That is why I sponsored a petition earlier this year calling for a recovery plan for nursing and midwifery workers, with a particular focus on health and wellbeing. That petition received 2,697 signatures and was tabled in this Assembly on 3 August 2022. Subsequently, on 9 August, the Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing resolved to inquire into this petition, in particular the recovery plan for nursing and midwifery workers. I am pleased that this work continues and that the government has engaged in good faith with the work.

The inquiry's terms of reference include workforce planning; staffing issues; work hours; staff to patient ratios; skills and professional development; workplace culture and safety; and, most importantly, the impact of all these things on patients. The inquiry so far has received 15 submissions and held public hearings on 14 June this year. I am grateful for the minister's instructive engagement with this inquiry, alongside other key stakeholders like our friends at the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation.

I welcome the minister's update on the implementation of staff-to-patient ratios, and I am pleased to hear of high rates of compliance for the July reporting period. I, along with all of my ACT Greens colleagues and ACT Labor colleagues, was proud to sign the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Commitment prior to the last election, committing to nurse-to-patient ratios. I will continue to support nurses and midwives in every way I can through the implementation of phase 2 of the ratios.

I also welcome the new programs that go towards growing and developing our workforce. Initiatives that demonstrate the value of our existing workforce and our ability to attract and retain new people to these crucial industries, like the undergraduate program in Canberra Health Services and the student support payments announced in the most recent budget, will be instrumental to the future sustainability and prosperity of our health system.

Importantly, the most recent budget and the minister's statement make no mention of delivering the freestanding birth centre that my Greens colleague Ms Jo Clay has been championing. That is despite the commitment in the early design phase for a midwife-led model. A freestanding birth centre will be critical to providing a space where low risk women and birthing people can give birth outside of hospital to ease pressure on the higher risk medical facilities. Importantly, this model of care is supported by our midwives. They want to work in these types of facilities. When we build these types of facilities, we will add to our toolkit and our ability to recruit and retain this important workforce.

The committee will continue its ongoing work, through the active inquiry, of assessing and assisting the government's existing initiatives and identifying gaps in the supports provided to these essential workers. I think it reflects well on the government and the Assembly more broadly that so many of us are working with a combined effort to make Canberra the very best place to work if you are a nurse or a midwife.

**MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (11.13):** As great as the ACT Health Workforce Strategy sounds, let us not forget that it is simply a plan to have a plan. The minister talks about \$28 million over four years to improve working conditions for frontline staff. This is not new. The government have allocated lots of money which they claim has improved working conditions, but their track record has not matched these claims.

We saw this following the damning review into workplace culture in the ACT public health services; \$12 million was allocated to implement its recommendations. The minister handed in the final review this year, despite the ANMF telling the inquiry into the recovery of nurses and midwives that there had been a minute improvement in culture. That is where \$12 million gets us: a minute improvement.

Last year's budget initiative that the minister mentioned in her speech was to "embed a positive safety culture in the ACT public health system". This project has already been delayed, from June 2023 to 2024. You would think that this would be the number one priority for the government workforce, since our culture is in such a dire situation.

Another example is the debacle of training accreditation in the Obstetrics and Gynaecology Unit. In 2010, 13 registrars resigned after complaints. In 2014 the Obstetrics and Gynaecology Unit was placed on provisional training accreditation, and staff from the unit spoke about the horrendous conditions they had to endure. Almost 10 years later, here we are again, with RANZCOG handing down a report that shows the Canberra Hospital failed to meet five out of the six standards that the college set. This government cannot pull the wool over the eyes of Canberrans or frontline staff any longer.

Whilst the Barr-Rattenbury government have been in power, they have claimed that they are improving staffing culture at the hospital, yet 10 years later the same issues in the same unit still exist. The ANMF tell us there are minute improvements to culture, and at the same time work health and safety incidents continue to rise. The last two annual reports showed that the separation rate of staff is increasing, and recent answers in estimates tell us that 1,337 permanent employees have left Canberra Hospital, UC and the mental health community.

The minister talks about student nurses and midwives, but, again, we heard from the ANMF that initiatives that they included in the enterprise agreement in 2022 are still waiting to be rolled out. The branch secretary of the ANMF described initiatives by the government as being too little too late. The minister can try to claim that the government are committed to our great health workforce and that they are making investments, but the stats simply do not show that this is the case. Our frontline staff deserve better, our trainees deserve better, our students deserve better, and this government is providing these answers too little too late.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health) (11.16), in reply: Mr Assistant Speaker Davis, I rise to respond, just very quickly, to your own remarks and to reassure you that the planning for the freestanding or alongside birth centre is continuing in the context of the north-side hospital, as was committed to.

In fact, only a couple of weeks ago, I was in Townsville visiting the hospital alongside birth centre to better understand the models of care and the collaboration that has enabled that to be a successful model for Townsville University Hospital. On that visit I was accompanied by, among others, the head of the maternity area in North Canberra Hospital, Michelle Thinius. It was a very useful visit and we continue to be committed to that initiative.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

### **Stromlo Forest Park—mountain biking—update Ministerial statement**

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Skills, Minister for Transport and City Services and Special Minister of State) (11.17): I am pleased today to provide an update to the Assembly about mountain biking in the ACT, including progress being made on the implementation of the Stromlo Forest Park Master Plan, in response to the Assembly resolution on 20 October 2022.

The University of Canberra Stromlo Forest Park is a 1,200-hectare, multipurpose sporting facility attracting over 500,000 visitors annually. University of Canberra Stromlo Forest Park has multiple community user groups utilising the facilities, each with differing requirements and priorities. Cyclists are, anecdotally, the predominant user group. The government is committed to ensuring that University of Canberra Stromlo Forest Park is a premier mountain biking destination and has been working to ensure that the park has a steady flow of investment to support more and improved trails, better facilities and developing master plans that identify opportunities for further growth of the park.

On 17 June this year the ACT government announced a new sponsorship agreement with the University of Canberra for the park, which includes the naming and branding rights to the park. This signed, five-year agreement is supported by a \$1 million investment that will support and supplement funding for future projects to enhance the park. The partnership with UC provides an opportunity to collaborate extensively with the university on joint sporting and academic ventures.

Alongside partnerships like those with the UC, the ACT government continues to make direct capital investment in mountain biking in the territory, supporting the implementation of the Stromlo Forest Park Master Plan, and also the tracks and trails master plan and the *Canberra mountain bike report*.

Chief amongst these investments is the \$1.8 million in funding provided in the 2023-24 territory budget for the design and construction of the Stromlo to Cotter flow

trail. In June Minister Gentleman announced funding for the 15-kilometre flow trail, which will connect the Cotter Nature Reserve with the park, giving mountain bikers the opportunity to experience the unique landscape of the ACT. This flow trail is one of the priorities from the *Canberra mountain bike report* recommendations and is being delivered by the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate.

As I indicated to the Assembly when debating the Assembly resolution of 20 October 2022, the ACT government has been working to develop a tracks and trails master plan. I can inform the Assembly that World Trail have been engaged to develop the master plan, following a competitive process. The first phase of the master plan development has involved significant public consultation with all park users, including mountain bikers, runners, equestrians, walkers and the general public.

Stakeholders have been engaged through various face-to-face and online stakeholder meetings and a public YourSay survey, which received a strong response. This public feedback is being assessed and compiled into a consultation report and will inform the first iteration of the tracks and trails master plan. The final master plan is expected to be completed in late spring 2023, and presentations will be made to relevant stakeholders on the key outcomes. The tracks and trails master plan will inform where future investments, including the use of self-generated revenue from sponsorship and parking revenue, will be used to improve the park.

The ACT government has been working to make sure that the park is constantly and regularly engaging with stakeholders, nearby residents and all users of the park. As I indicated when I spoke to the Assembly resolution, I encourage all Canberrans with feedback about how we can make sure that the park remains the premier mountain biking destination that it is, to get in touch at [stromloforestpark@act.gov.au](mailto:stromloforestpark@act.gov.au).

We have heard from the mountain biking community that they want more regular engagement and to work with us to foster and support mountain biking in the ACT. The ACT government are committed to making sure that we undertake as wide a range of consultation as possible. That is why the government will undertake full public consultation on all future master plan projects. It has received positive comments regarding its recent methods to source feedback as part of the tracks and trails master plan development.

At UC Stromlo Forest Park, work is underway to explore the expansion of the Stromlo Stakeholder Consultative Committee. The committee has also granted associate membership to the Molonglo Valley and Weston Creek community councils and forums, in discussions with the Molonglo Valley Community Forum and the Weston Creek Community Council. They will attend relevant meetings to discuss issues that might have an impact on local residents and their interests.

Work is continuing on implementing the broader 2016 UC Stromlo Forest Park Master Plan, with opportunities in tourism, the construction of key infrastructure, and increasing the capacity to host national and international events. Part of this has been the delivery of a range of key items, including the Stromlo Leisure Centre, a new sealed car park, which is currently under construction, and the recent completion of the criterium track extension. The ACT government has also invested \$1.2 million in

the budget to fund the detailed design of district playing fields at the park, which is the next stage ahead of construction.

The master plan has a range of additional projects for which the ACT government will continue to investigate and explore options for design and delivery. The park continues to be a key tourist attraction for the territory. It serves as a key aspect of the ACT government's CBR Cycle Tourism Strategy. VisitCanberra intends to review this strategy, which will include further tourism opportunities relating to mountain biking in the ACT.

UC Stromlo Forest Park is an important recreational facility for so many Canberrans, from equestrians to trail runners and mountain bikers. The ACT government will continue to make sure that the park is not only a premier mountain biking facility but also a fantastic, multipurpose recreation facility for a range of different users.

This means we will also work to bring more people into the park for new and exciting activities. One example of this is the new BMX freestyle facility, which will be constructed at UC Stromlo Forest Park to give the community of BMX users a new place to meet and to enable the hosting of BMX freestyle events. The ACT government will consult with Freestyle ACT BMX and seek external contractors to design and construct the new facility, which will cater to the needs of beginners entering the sport, right through to the elite level riders.

The new facility will be a great addition to the park and is another step towards realising the vision in the Stromlo Forest Park Master Plan. This is all part of our plan to ensure that UC Stromlo Forest Park continues to be a world-class facility that attracts riders from around Australia, across all sports, including BMX. Investing in a purpose-built BMX freestyle facility will give riders a place to call their own, which we hope will be ready in time for the ACT Jam, sponsored by Boost Mobile, in November 2023. The BMX facility was always planned at this location under the Stromlo Forest Park Master Plan, and the government will continue to work with stakeholders to progress the rest of the vision with all the users.

I look forward to overseeing the progression of UC Stromlo Forest Park as a key destination in the ACT for mountain biking and other uses. The ACT government is committed to keeping UC Stromlo a premier recreation facility that not only supports our community but also grows with it.

I present the following paper:

Stromlo Forest Park masterplan—Mountain biking—Assembly resolution of 20 October 2022—Government response—Ministerial statement, 30 August 2023.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Circular Economy Bill 2023**

**Mr Steel**, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, its explanatory statement and a Human Rights Act compatibility statement.

Title read by Clerk.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Skills, Minister for Transport and City Services and Special Minister of State) (11.26): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to introduce the Circular Economy Bill 2023 in the Assembly today. The ACT government is committed to creating new jobs, and fostering innovation, sustainable businesses and building a circular city by introducing this bill that supports a more sustainable future.

The term “circular economy” refers to a cyclical, regenerative system that minimises resource inputs, waste, emissions and energy. It aims to replace the dominant “take-make-dispose” economic system with one that is resource efficient and regenerative by keeping resources in continuous use at their highest possible value.

The circular economy is focused around three principles. Firstly, it is about designing out waste and pollution through the purposeful design of products, which enables materials to re-enter the economy and retain their value. Secondly, it is about keeping products and materials in use by extending the life of products and resources and reducing the draw on raw materials. Lastly, it is about avoiding negative impacts to the environment and regenerating natural systems by preventing the depletion of natural resources through the efficient use of renewable, reusable, non-toxic resources and energy.

Earlier this week I released the ACT Circular Economy Strategy and Action Plan 2023-30 in support of the government’s commitment to innovation and sustainability. The strategy and action plan set out the government’s high-level ambitions, with actions to drive the initial steps towards a more circular economy in the ACT.

The strategy and action plan were a result of extensive community and industry consultation, engagement and collaboration. The strategy is underpinned by three strategic objectives to support the transition to a circular economy, representing areas where the ACT government would like to see action. The first is growing extended producer responsibility; the second is growing markets for recovered materials and goods, and circular business models; and the third is creating high-value jobs and attracting innovative new enterprises.

The strategy and action plan focus on six key focus areas that provide a significant opportunity to advance circularity in the ACT. Focus areas are: procurement, skills, innovation and governance; food and organics; built environment; consumer goods; emerging and problematic waste streams; and creating space to showcase our commitment to the circular economy.

The bill implements a number of key actions in the focus areas of food and organics and consumer goods. The bill also fulfils the government's commitment in the parliamentary and governing agreement to create circular economy legislation and to undertake specific actions.

The bill seeks to establish a flexible legislative framework to support the transition to a circular economy in the ACT. The objects of the bill reflect the three circular economy principles by capturing waste reduction and recovery and removing barriers and harmful practices for a cleaner environment.

In summary, the objects of the bill are to minimise waste generation and the amount of waste to landfill; maximise the reuse and recovery of resources; reduce the harm of plastic and other waste on the natural and built environment and on public health; and encourage improvements in manufacturing practices to rely more heavily on renewable, reusable and non-toxic resources to develop more durable, repairable, reusable, recyclable or compostable products.

The bill will repeal and replace the Plastic Reduction Act 2021 and its subordinate legislation, incorporating and building on the existing provisions that ban single-use plastic products. Single-use plastic products that are banned under the current act will continue to be banned under the new act. Significantly, the bill extends the power to ban products to other problematic non-plastic products.

Under the bill, products could be banned on the basis that they are harmful to the natural or built environment or human health, or where there is a reasonably affordable and available alternative that better promotes the circular economy. This may include non-plastic items that are single-use or that lack sufficient end-of-life recycling or reuse potential. This recognises that, while single-use plastic represents a particular problem, non-plastic products and non single-use products can also be harmful to the natural or built environment and human health.

As with the existing power with respect to prohibited plastic products, the bill ensures that the government must give public notice of the proposed regulation and must invite public submissions. It also provides that, when making a regulation to prohibit a product, consideration of public submissions and the availability and suitability of any alternatives must be considered.

The bill seeks to reduce waste to landfill by addressing waste streams that have higher value pathways through the introduction of new waste requirements for businesses. The bill introduces a new power to make a regulation to require a business to reduce the amount of waste by the business. This is known as a waste reduction requirement. A waste reduction requirement may be used to require a business to prepare a plan to reduce the amount of waste that it produces. The details of what must be in such a plan, and the businesses to which it applies, will be contained in a regulation. The initial intention is to use this power to create a requirement for certain businesses to have food waste reduction plans, but this power also could be used in future in relation to other types of waste.

The bill also creates a new power to require that businesses do certain things in relation to the sorting and disposal of waste produced by a business, which is referred

to as a waste processing requirement. The details of these waste processing requirements, including the businesses and types of waste it applies to and how waste must be sorted and disposed of, will be made via regulation. The initial intention is to use this power to require businesses that produce recyclable material to separate co-mingled recycling, and in the future for food businesses to separate food waste.

The bill's waste requirements for business mean that government will work with industry to gradually reshape unsustainable practices and move the ACT towards a more circular economy over time. The regulation-making power in the bill gives flexibility for the legislative framework to evolve in line with industry needs, new technologies and community expectations.

As with the power in relation to prohibited products, before a new waste processing or waste reduction requirement is introduced, there are certain notice and consultation requirements that must be met before a regulation can be made. The bill requires the government to invite public submissions. Before making a regulation, any public submissions received must be considered, as well as the financial and operational impact of the requirement.

While the consultation on the ACT's Circular Economy Strategy indicated that there are high levels of community and industry support for the introduction of circular economy initiatives, the government understands that the new requirements introduced by this bill will have impacts on the businesses that they apply to. That is why a consultation draft regulation and a comprehensive consultation regulatory impact statement have been prepared, to enable consultation with those impacted stakeholders so that they fully understand the impacts, particularly for the implementation of the changes. The government will invite impacted stakeholders to participate in targeted surveys and workshops. The feedback that we receive through this process will be taken into consideration when preparing the final regulation.

The government's Circular Economy Strategy seeks to achieve lasting change by setting the vision and strategic objectives that will move Canberra towards becoming a more circular city. This bill will serve as a foundation to support the implementation of the strategy. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Lawder**) adjourned to the next sitting.

## **Building (Swimming Pool Safety) Legislation Amendment Bill 2023**

**Ms Vassarotti**, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, its explanatory statement and a Human Rights Act compatibility statement.

Title read by Clerk.

**MS VASSAROTTI** (Kurrajong—Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services and Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction) (11.36): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.



I am pleased to present the Building (Swimming Pool Safety) Legislation Amendment Bill 2023 to the Assembly. In the ACT the home swimming pool is the most common location for a drowning death and serious injury for children under the age of five. It is estimated conservatively that, for every child that is fatally drowned in an Australian pool, between four and seven are resuscitated, suffering life-long disability from brain, lung and other organ damage. It is not only children that live in houses with swimming pools that drown or suffer serious injury from a near-drowning incident. Children and relatives that may be visiting or children from neighbouring properties are also at risk.

This bill establishes a regulatory framework that requires home swimming pools and spas in the ACT to have a barrier that is compliant with prescribed safety standards, after a specified transition period. It imposes requirements for the compliance status of a swimming pool or spa to be disclosed on sale of a property. It provides an exemption pathway from compliance with the prescribed safety standard, in specified circumstances. And it imposes requirements to maintain swimming pool and spa barriers and prevent access to swimming pools and spas when not in use by making sure that barriers are closed.

I would now like to take the opportunity to talk about the key elements of the bill. The regulatory framework established by this bill will apply to all ACT swimming pools and spas that are capable of containing water in a depth greater than 300 millimetres and that are associated with a residential building such as a house, a unit, a townhouse or a block of apartments. This includes in-ground and above-ground pools, temporary and permanent pools, wading pools, demountable pools, portable pools, kids' pools and spas. Any building that has both a residential and a commercial element will be covered.

It will not apply to swimming pools in tourist and visitor accommodation, such as hotels, motels and caravan parks. Swimming pools in these types of accommodation generally have more secure fencing and access restrictions, such as requiring access through secure doors with a pass, code or key. Extending the framework to these pools may be considered in the future. The framework will also not apply to public swimming pools, which are already subject to specific regulatory requirements in the ACT under the Public Pools Act 2015.

The bill introduces a specific exclusion from the framework and from aspects of the Building Act for inflatable pools, which are defined as a pool that can be deflated and inflated, filled with water to a depth of no more than 300 millimetres and does not have a filtration system. At the point that such a pool has a filtration system, it will become a demountable swimming pool and therefore covered by the scheme.

The bill sets out different requirements based on when a pool was built or substantially altered. This is because swimming pools and spas built before 1 May 2013 were not ever legally required to comply with the newly prescribed safety standard. All swimming pools and spas built since 1 May 2013 have been legally required to comply with the prescribed safety standard.

Child-resistant pool barriers are vital safety measures that are designed to help restrict access by children to a pool or a spa and are considered to be the best injury

prevention initiatives for preventing drowning or near-drowning incidents when combined with supervision.

This bill makes it a requirement that safety barriers of existing swimming pools and spas are brought up to modern standards—the prescribed safety standard. The prescribed safety standard for swimming pools and spas built or altered before 1 May 2023 is the current version of the Building Code of Australia and the two Australian standards, which are part 1 and part 2 of the Australian Standards for Swimming Pool Safety.

Part 1 relates to safety barriers for swimming pools and part 2 is about the location of safety barriers. The Building Code and these two Australian standards form the series of standards dealing with barriers and the location of barriers that restrict access by young people to swimming pools and swimming pool areas that present a drowning risk.

The safety standards in place in the ACT from 1 May 2013 were chosen as the prescribed safety standards under the scheme, following consultation with industry stakeholders and experts. These safety standards are currently the best practice safety standards in Australia.

Additionally, there are only minor differences in requirements between the safety standards in place in the ACT between 1 May 2010 and 1 May 2013, which means pools and spas installed during this time period will likely need to make only minor upgrades to meet the prescribed safety standard.

For swimming pools and spas built or altered on or after 1 May 2023, the bill prescribes the safety standard to be the Building Code of Australia and the Australian standards called up by the Building Code at the time the swimming pool or spa is built or altered. This maintains the current regulatory settings for swimming pools and spas and means that new swimming pools and spas will continue to have to comply with the standards as they develop over time.

The bill establishes limited specified circumstances when a swimming pool is not required to comply with the prescribed safety standard. In some circumstances, an application will need to be made to the government seeking a formal exemption from the requirement to comply with the prescribed safety standard. For example, the bill establishes a specific exemption pathway for premises with a regulated swimming pool where a person with a disability is, or is to become, an occupier of the premises, and it would be physically impracticable for the person, because of the person's disability, to access the pool if it had barriers complying with the prescribed safety standard.

In submitting an application for exemption on these grounds, the property owner or owners corporation must propose an alternative safety measure as part of their exemption application. Where there is no viable alternative safety measure, an application may still be considered. A condition of this exemption is that it ends when the premises cease to be occupied by a person with a disability.

The community will have four years from commencement of the bill on 1 May 2024 to have a barrier that is compliant with the prescribed safety standards or have

obtained an exemption. I am conscious that in some circumstances owners may incur costs in needing to make their current barrier comply with the requirements; therefore, the government has provided for a transition period to allow people to plan for this financial commitment. Also, the transition period will allow for the spreading out of upgrade work across the period so as to not unduly impact on the supply of materials or the available workforce.

The bill introduces requirements for the compliance status of a swimming pool or spa to be disclosed on sale of a property. These disclosure requirements are intended to support sufficient information being provided to prospective buyers and tenants so that they can make an informed decision about the implications of buying or renting a property with a pool. Similar disclosure requirements will also be established for leasing a property through a future regulation under the Residential Tenancies Act 1997 and will be established as a minimum housing standard.

These disclosure requirements and the enforcement of the obligations created by this bill are supported through a compliance certificate framework. Compliance certificates will be issued by authorised persons. Authorised persons will determine the compliance status of a swimming pool or spa against the prescribed safety standard and identify any remedial work required to make the swimming pool or spa compliant.

Where remedial work is required, the authorised person will issue a pool rectification notice. The property owner will have a maximum of six months to undertake the remedial work identified in the pool rectification notice. Where noncompliance creates a serious and immediate safety risk, the authorised person must issue a noncompliant compliance certificate immediately and lodge that certificate with the Construction Occupations Registrar within seven days of issue.

Compliance certificates will generally be valid for five years. Compliance certificates issued during the transition period will be valid for four years from the end of the transition period; that is, those certificates will not expire until 30 April 2032 unless the certificate ceases to otherwise be valid. We have included this important transitional measure to make sure that early movers are not disadvantaged and that compliance with the new requirements is encouraged at the earliest possible time in the transition period. Compliance certificates will cease to be valid during the transition period if the swimming pool or safety barrier is substantially altered.

Compliance certificates for swimming pools and spas built before 1 May 2013 will be required to be lodged with the Construction Occupations Registrar by 1 June 2028 and within 30 days of being issued. The requirement to lodge compliance certificates is limited to this group of swimming pools and spas that were not ever legally required to comply with the new prescribed safety standard. All swimming pools and spas built since 1 May 2013 have been legally required to comply with the prescribed safety standard.

Over time, safety barriers, which include pool fences, gates and locks, can deteriorate, leading to the pool barrier no longer operating as it was designed—to be a child-resistant barrier. Additionally, keeping a pool gate propped open undermines the purpose of the safety barrier as a child-resistant barrier. This bill attempts to mitigate

these safety risks through introducing offences for failing to maintain a swimming pool and spa safety barrier and preventing access to swimming pools and spas when not in use.

These requirements are intended to combat the safety issues that arise from the deterioration of barriers over time. Regular maintenance ensures that a swimming pool barrier continues to remain an effective and safe child-resistant barrier. Similarly, swimming pool barriers no longer restrict child access if a pool gate is left open, allowing easy access into the pool or spa area. These requirements will commence on 1 May 2024.

The bill establishes a compliance and enforcement framework and includes provisions to support action being taken against home owners, tenants and owners corporations who fail to comply with the requirements of the framework.

Offence provisions are included to deter conduct that does not support the prevention of drownings or near drownings in regulated swimming pools. A robust regulatory framework is essential to establish community responsibility and safe behaviours around regulated swimming pools. Offences established by the bill are similar to those in place for similar schemes in other jurisdictions and align with existing offences under the Building Act 2004. Enforcement activities will be undertaken on an “educate first” basis and will be supported by an extensive public education and awareness campaign leading up to and during the transition period.

The ACT government’s approach contained in this bill is intended to be responsive to potential risks and associated harms to individuals and the community from death and serious injuries from drownings or near drownings in home swimming pools. It is in line with what has been introduced in other jurisdictions to address the same issues.

This bill was developed in consultation with industry and the community. We had a strong response to the public consultation process, and I thank those members of the community for providing their feedback, which has been used to inform the final positions in the bill. Industry bodies and key stakeholders have been extensively involved in the development of the bill and will play a role in its successful implementation. I thank those stakeholders for their contributions to date and their ongoing involvement.

In summary, this bill establishes a home swimming pool safety scheme that requires home swimming pools and spas to have a barrier compliant with modern safety standards. It imposes requirements for the compliance status of a swimming pool or spa to be disclosed on sale of a property, and imposes requirements to maintain swimming pool and spa barriers and prevent access to swimming pools and spas when not in use.

Before I close, I would like to reflect briefly on why we are undertaking these reforms. Our current pool fencing standards are focused on protecting some of our most precious community members—infants and children. While fencing will never replace supervision, it will ensure that private residences that have pools are fenced in a way that is functional and of an agreed standard. It is a sensible and modest reform that is focused on ensuring our collective responsibility to keep infants and children

protected and safe in private homes and residences. This reform will bring us in line with other jurisdictions across the Australian mainland.

As I have progressed these reforms, I have often had River Parry and his family in my thoughts and in my heart. The tragic death of River, who was just 21 months old, in late 2015 led to coroner recommendations to overhaul our pool fencing laws in 2017—recommendations that the ACT government accepted at the time.

These reforms are also the result of ongoing advocacy of groups, including the Royal Life Saving Society ACT, and individuals, including Senior Detective Paul Reynolds, who have long called for changes to be made. I would like particularly to recognise Senior Detective Reynolds, who was the investigating officer charged with the responsibility of understanding the circumstances of River's death and was awarded a Churchill Fellowship in 2018 to help reduce drownings in Australia.

This bill introduced today is the long overdue response to the coroner's recommendations and this advocacy work. These reforms are a legacy for River and a testament to the perseverance of people who care about the safety of our most vulnerable community members. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

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

**Sitting suspended from 11.54 am to 2 pm.**

## **Questions without notice**

### **Taxation—general practice clinics**

**MS LEE:** My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, the federal Labor health minister, the Hon Mark Butler, back in April this year, when asked specifically about the issue of state and territory governments imposing payroll tax on GP clinics, said, and I quote:

Obviously any new, additional cost to general practice is going to be a concern for them, and for me, I'm very worried about the viability of general practice.

Treasurer, being one of those territories that is imposing the additional costs on GPs, do you agree with the federal Labor minister's comments?

**MR BARR:** I certainly agree that primary health care needs additional funding, so I am very supportive of the initiatives contained within this year's federal budget, particularly the tripling of the bulk-billing incentive. But what I would like to see is that—

**Mr Hanson:** Madam Speaker, on relevance. The opposition leader's question is very clear as to whether the Chief Minister agrees with Mr Butler's comments about additional costs, not about other issues. I ask that he be directly relevant. He is clearly not going there, is he?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** He is within order. It is 28 seconds. You were on your feet within 30 seconds, Mr Hanson. Mr Barr?

**MR BARR:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. If the federal minister is concerned in relation to taxation arrangements for GPs, then perhaps the commonwealth might like to consider either injecting more funding into general practice, or perhaps creating a special corporate tax rate for GPs, or perhaps taxing their income differently. But I do note that GPs would be amongst the biggest beneficiaries of the stage 3 tax cuts that are coming, so most GPs could get up to \$9,000 per annum as part of the stage 3 tax cuts—

**Ms Lee:** Do you agree with him or not?

**MR BARR:** What I do not agree with is the suggestion that this level of government—states and territories—should be waiving all of our taxation arrangements to get no benefit, no guarantee that fees would not rise and no guarantee of an increase in bulk-billing. The proposition that is being put by those opposite is: just waive away a revenue line for the territory for no guarantee of any increase in bulk-billing. *(Time expired.)*

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Members!

**MS LEE:** Treasurer, do you hold concerns about the viability of general practice clinics in the ACT following your decision to charge them payroll tax?

**MR BARR:** No. What I hoped for is an increase in bulk-billing in the ACT as a result of the commonwealth tripling their incentive for bulk-billing. What I want to see from GPs in the ACT is that they do what every other GP elsewhere in Australia manages to do, and that is to get the bulk-billing rate above where it is now and back to where it was previously. They have been given a very strong incentive by the commonwealth, and now by the territory government: get bulk-billing above 65 per cent.

**MS CASTLEY:** Treasurer, why are you the only one not concerned, given the issues raised by GPs, the AMA, the RACGP and the federal health minister?

**MR BARR:** I think those of us who look holistically at the issues, rather than through the lens of seeking to minimise their tax, and who look more holistically at the suite of reforms that are on the table for primary health care—that is what we should be focused on. What we need to do is take the millions of unnecessary GP consultations out of the system by allowing longer prescription periods and allowing pharmacists to do more, which we have a trial underway for here in the ACT, and expanding the scope of practice for nurse practitioners and moving away from fee—

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

**MR BARR:** Oh, Jeremy! Can you shut up ever?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Barr, I agree with your sentiment, but please do not use that language—

**MR BARR:** Sorry, Madam Speaker, but when you cannot even hear yourself speak over the top of the deputy leader, and he is on a warning every day in this place—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Members! Can we bring some respect and regard back into this debate. It is not a free for all; it is question time.

**Ms Lawder:** On a point of order, Madam Speaker. Asking someone to shut up doesn't show respect either. It should go both ways.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I am going to come to Mr Barr.

Can you—

**MR BARR:** I withdraw, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Members, can we please have some level of quiet through question time.

**MR BARR:** As I was endeavouring to say, we need to move away from the fee-for-service model in primary health care. That is what national cabinet is focused on, and that is needed in this system: to move away from that. And it should not be on the states and territories to waive their revenue base to achieve it.

### **Board of Inquiry—Criminal Justice System—litigation**

**MS LEE:** My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney-General, I refer to the ministerial statement given by the Chief Minister yesterday and media reporting that the former DPP, Mr Shane Drumgold, has commenced legal action in relation to the Sofronoff report. Attorney-General, the Sofronoff report was commissioned by the ACT government. Is Mr Drumgold taking action against the territory or Mr Sofronoff?

**MR RATTENBURY:** Yes, Mr Drumgold has launched an action in the ACT Supreme Court for judicial review. He has named three parties: the board of inquiry, the Attorney-General and the territory.

**MS LEE:** Attorney-General, who is paying Mr Drumgold's legal fees? Is it the ACT government?

**MR RATTENBURY:** The ACT government will not be covering the legal costs of this action by Mr Drumgold.

**MR CAIN:** Attorney, did Mr Drumgold resign, as you have previously indicated, or was he terminated?

**MR RATTENBURY:** Mr Drumgold offered his resignation to the ACT government on Friday—was it 3 August? Whatever the first Friday was—4 August 2023. On that Friday, Mr Drumgold wrote to me offering his resignation.

**Board of Inquiry—Criminal Justice System—funding**

**MS LEE:** Madam Speaker, my question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney-General, how much did the ACT government budget for the Board of Inquiry into the Criminal Justice System in the Australian Capital Territory, and how much did you end up spending?

**MR RATTENBURY:** In the midyear budget review the ACT government allocated \$4.5 million. I will check the exact figure, but it was certainly that order of magnitude. If I have to change it, I will come back to the chamber. At this point I do not have a final tally. The costs are still being settled around that matter, the reason for that is that various parties had their legal bills covered in the course of the inquiry, as is normal practice through a board of inquiry, as well as the costs of Mr Sofronoff and his team. Those salaries were paid for by the ACT government as well, and a range of other costs. They have not been fully acquitted at this point in time. I will have to provide those to the Assembly at a later point.

**MS LEE:** Attorney-General, how much are the likely legal challenges in relation to the report going to cost ACT taxpayers?

**MR RATTENBURY:** I think Ms Lee will appreciate that that is both a hypothetical question and one that I am not able to answer at this point. If one reads the press, there are a number of mooted legal possibilities arising out of this matter. It is impossible at this point in time to gauge what they may cost.

**MR CAIN:** Attorney, how many other legal actions is the territory currently defending?

**MR RATTENBURY:** I might seek clarity. Does Mr Cain mean in relation to the board of inquiry or generally in the ACT?

**MR CAIN:** Other.

**Ms Lee:** Generally.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Generally? I will have to take that one on notice.

**Schools—language programs**

**MR DAVIS:** My question is to the minister for education. Minister, on 14 August the ABC reported that 13 ACT public schools that are required to teach a language have dropped language classes because of insufficient staffing numbers, and that those schools are disproportionately in my electorate of Brindabella. What is the ACT government doing to address teacher shortages specifically for language teaching?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Mr Davis for his question. As members will be aware, there is a teaching workforce shortage not only in the ACT but across the country. Unfortunately, one of the areas that is most impacted is the specialised area of language teaching. The ACT government is working with the Australian Education



Union and their members about how we attract language teachers and specific languages into our school systems. We are continuously recruiting and working through the teacher workforce shortage task force and with the Australian Education Union to understand what we can do.

This is not an easy problem to resolve overnight. It requires a national approach to encourage more people to teach languages across our school systems here in the ACT and across the country. Language-teacher-specific recruitment also occurs across the year. There is language-teacher-specific recruitment occurring, following the ongoing recruitment of teachers more generally.

**MR DAVIS:** Minister, what measures does the ACT government have in place to support students who learn a particular language in primary school, or have family or cultural reasons for their language choice, to continue learning that same language when they transition to their high school or college?

**MS BERRY:** Generally, schools support young people across the education system to move into schools where they are eligible, within their own priority enrolment area, to make sure that there are languages across our schools, leading from primary school into high school. The Canberra Academy of Languages in the ACT also provides opportunities for language learning across our schools, particularly with regard to our senior secondary students. We are also making sure that those services are able to be provided across our schools.

It is not the only place where languages can be learnt. Lots of organisations provide language programs outside school hours. It is a difficult area in which to recruit at the moment. It is a specialised area. However, we are working closely with the Education Union, the profession and universities to encourage more people to take up that specialised area of education.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Minister, can you please explain how language learning is an important part of supporting multiculturalism in the ACT?

**MS BERRY:** It is an important part of school education that our schools are places that are inviting for anybody, regardless of their background, and that education in the ACT is inclusive. People from different nationalities being included in schools and having the opportunity to share their cultures is a really important part of our public education system in the ACT.

Our schools are even more multicultural than they ever have been, certainly from when I was a student. I think that is something that is embraced by our school communities. Sharing language and culture is an important part of making sure that our schools welcome any student, regardless of where they come from, as well as their families.

One of the areas where we have been working very closely with our school communities is with regard to Indigenous language and culture, particularly Ngunnawal language and culture. All of our schools have an Indigenous language and culture program and plan in place. They share culture and knowledge, and engage

with local Ngunnawal people and Elders in the ACT, to ensure that those cultures and languages can be shared across our community and our schools are as inclusive as they possibly can be.

### **Education—NAPLAN results**

**MR HANSON:** Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development. Recent NAPLAN results show concerning trends in ACT education. According to those results: one in three year 9 students aren't meeting proficiency benchmarks for reading; a third or more of our children scored in the bottom two bands in writing, grammar, and numeracy; a quarter of students are falling behind in spelling; and around one in 10 students are unable to read and write at the basic level expected for a student in year 9. Minister, why are one in three year 9 students failing to meet benchmarks for reading?

**MS BERRY:** NAPLAN is a point-in-time analysis of a child's learning across particular areas. The ACT government—and governments across the country—have been working to ensure that NAPLAN is fit for purpose and have made some changes recently that have lifted the bar on where analysis and data can be gathered around a child's education with regard to those areas of literacy and numeracy.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MS BERRY:** Madam Speaker, the interruptions are incredibly distracting. I am trying to stay on task here, but the snide little comments coming across the chamber are incredibly difficult.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I suggest, one, that you ignore them, and, two, that the other side cease providing them.

**MS BERRY:** It is important to note that NAPLAN in 2023 has changed from previous years, so it is difficult to make comparisons across previous years. In fact, it would be impossible, given the changes that have been made around the proficiency standards. Our schools in the ACT, in fact, have done really well this year compared to other schools across the county. Nineteen out of the 20 domains have been at “strong” or “exceeding” levels.

**Mr Hanson:** On a point of order of relevance, the minister has given a bit of a dissertation on NAPLAN, but the question is why one in three year 9 students are failing to meet benchmarks for reading. It is quite a specific question.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Address that area if you can in the time you have left, Ms Berry.

**MS BERRY:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. All the results from NAPLAN have not been delivered yet for this year. They will come out later in the year, which will provide us further opportunity to analyse where things are up to. At the moment, what I can say is that our schools are achieving at or above every other state and territory in a range of areas, and are exceeding in 19 of the twenty—

**Mr Hanson:** That is not true.

**MS BERRY:** It is true. You can pick the pieces of— (*Time expired.*)

**MR HANSON:** Why are a third or more of our students in the lowest two bands in writing, grammar, and numeracy?

**MS BERRY:** We have the highest number of students exceeding, in the ACT, according to the latest NAPLAN results. You can pick the areas and continue to talk down our public schools in the ACT. I, however, spend time celebrating and promoting our public schools as great places to learn and great places to grow.

**Ms Lee:** They are fine; I think you are the problem!

**Mr Hanson:** Madam Speaker, on a point of order.

**Ms Berry:** A point of order, please.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** No, you can resume your seat, Ms Berry. Mr Hanson was on his feet with a point of order first.

**Ms Berry:** Sorry, if I can make my point of order after that, with regards to a comment that Ms Lee made?

**Mr Hanson:** The question is not whether she celebrates schools, which we all do. The question is: why are a third or more of our students in the lowest two bands in writing, grammar and numeracy?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you. Your point of order, Ms Berry?

**Ms Berry:** Ms Lee said: “Our public schools are not the problem; you are.” That is a direct personal attack on me.

**Ms Lee:** Sorry, Madam Speaker. Our public schools are not the problem—through you, Madam Speaker—you are the problem. Is that what you want? That is just stupid!

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Can we just stop snide commentary across the chamber. Minister, you have 50 seconds left for you answer. Try to address an element of Mr Hanson’s question.

**MS BERRY:** I can confirm that we have the highest number of students in the ACT exceeding in reading across every year level.

**MR COCKS:** Minister, what are you doing right now to improve literacy and numeracy in ACT schools?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Mr Cocks for his question and his interest in English literacy and numeracy learning across the ACT in our public schools. I have been absolutely on the record, every year, in my advocacy for making sure that NAPLAN meets the

needs of our school communities and provides the data that students, teachers and parents need to get that additional support, should they need it. That is why all of the state and territory governments got together and changed proficiency standards so that we could understand better—

**Mr Hanson:** Madam Speaker, on a point of order, the question is: what are you doing to improve literacy and numeracy in ACT schools? It is not—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** There is no point of order—

**Mr Hanson:** There is, Madam Speaker, because what she is going to—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** If you want to contest my ruling, please do, but this is not the place. The question was around: what are you doing to improve literacy? She is talking about support for schools and teachers, which, in my opinion—

**Mr Hanson:** She is talking about a review of NAPLAN, not about what she is doing to improve literacy in schools.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** There is no point of order. Ms Berry, you have 50-odd seconds left.

**MS BERRY:** This is part of understanding what is happening in our schools—providing those supports and advocating for a system that provides data that actually is meaningful to our schoolteachers, parents and young people, so that they can get the support that they need and so that we can understand where the gaps are and then provide the additional supports that are required. That is an important part of actually making changes to our education system that actually are meaningful, rather than creating league tables that pit schools against each other. These changes to NAPLAN have taken many, many years to come around, and I am proud to have been one of the state and territory governments that have led that reform.

### **Suburban infrastructure—projects**

**MR PETTERSSON:** My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, can you please provide an update to the Assembly on how the government is delivering against the 2030 Better Suburbs Statement through the Suburban Infrastructure Program?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Mr Pettersson for his question. The ACT government is delivering on key community priorities across our suburbs. Some members here who have been here for a few terms, particularly last term, might recall that the Better Suburbs Statement was developed in 2018 through a deliberative democracy process, bringing together ordinary Canberrans to make collective decisions and recommendations for city services right across our city. They identified 14 key priorities for action by government, from active travel to play spaces, shopping centres, libraries and streetlights.

In the 2023-24 budget, the ACT government is delivering on some of these key priority areas by funding \$26 million for cycling and walking infrastructure,

\$23.4 million for more tree maintenance and to plant more trees, \$2.6 million to continue our rapid-response mowing team, \$3.2 million for upgrades at Yerrabi Pond District Park, and by increasing funding for the streetlight infill program, road maintenance and stormwater infrastructure. This new funding builds on the extensive Suburban Infrastructure Program that is delivering a range of improvements across local playgrounds, upgrades to nine shopping centres, two new dog parks, major upgrades at Lake Tuggeranong foreshore, and more. I have been updating the community, including participants of the Better Suburbs Forum, about how we are acting on the recommendations that they provided by providing a biannual update.

I table the following paper:

Better Suburbs—Progress update—2022-23—Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Minister, when can the community begin to see some of these key projects begin construction?

**MR STEEL:** Thank you for your supplementary. The government already has a range of projects in the Suburban Infrastructure Program underway, with construction of upgrades at Brierly Street, in Weston Creek, in my electorate, and at the Charnwood shops as well. A fortnight ago, I joined Mr Pettersson and Ms Orr as we turned the sod on the new Community Recreational Irrigated Park in Casey. These projects join others that have recently been completed, at Duffy shops and the new bridges at Umbagog District Park, which are due to be officially opened very soon.

Works will soon commence at the Lake Tuggeranong foreshore to improve public recreation amenities, active travel connectivity, and also the town park, and on a range of play space improvements in Chisholm, Gordon, Aranda and Ngunnawal. We are also progressing with the procurement for upgrades at Kippax Group Centre and the Age Friendly Suburbs Program in Chifley, Reid, O'Connor and Scullin. The government looks forward to advancing further projects later this year, including the Inner North destination playground, the next tranche of local shopping centre upgrades across our city, and a new halfpipe for skating at Belconnen Skate Park.

**MS ORR:** Minister, how is the government supporting better city services across our city this year, in line with the Better Suburbs Statement?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Ms Orr for her supplementary. As our city grows and our climate changes, the way that we need to respond to keeping our growing city well-maintained and looking tidy is evolving. In this year's budget, we are supporting a range of better city services, including improvements to stormwater, a continuation of the rapid-response mowing team, and more funding to support our street and park trees. We are making a \$24 million investment to protect Canberra's trees for generations to come by supporting more tree planting and deep-watering across Canberra, and providing more funding for tree maintenance as well, to undertake more tree inspections and support the implementation of the Urban Forest Act. This new funding directly responds to a recommendation made in the Better Suburbs Statement.

By continuing the rapid-response mowing team for this mowing season, we are making sure that we are able to respond to changing growing conditions and the tail-end impacts of a particularly wet period of three years. We are also making investments in modern stormwater infrastructure, including upgrades at Kippax and Narrabundah, providing renewal to aging infrastructure and preparing our growing city for the impacts of extreme weather events caused by climate change.

Our government continues to deliver on key priorities identified under the Better Suburbs Statement and I look forward to delivering on these priorities for the entire community and providing regular updates as well.

### **Education—NAPLAN results**

**MR HANSON:** My question is to the minister for education. Minister, a recent Equity Economics report stated that the ACT has one of the most inequitable education systems in Australia; that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are several years behind their peers, with gaps in educational attainment widening over time; and that Canberra's most disadvantaged students are still being left behind.

Minister, what is happening in the ACT education system that means children from disadvantaged backgrounds are several years behind their peers?

**MS BERRY:** I acknowledge the report by Equity Economics, and it has been reviewed by the Education Directorate. The report does express some concerns around the number of proficient readers in the ACT; however, this is reliant on a limited set of data and disregards overall ACT growth. That is not to say that the ACT public school system is not always striving to do better and learn from other different methodologies and advice from different individuals. However, there is no one-size-fits-all approach, in my view, and in the ACT Education Directorate's view, that would be appropriate to be provided across our schools.

I think one of the things the ACT government has been doing through the Education Directorate is ensuring that all our public schoolteachers are supported to ensure they can deliver on version 9 of the Australian curriculum. This is one of the issues that was raised by the Equity Economics report—whether they thought we were prepared to be able to deliver on that, and of course we are. The school system provides a systemic, evidence-based approach to early literacy instruction through the 10 essential instruction practices in literacy.

We have had several conversations through the years I have been in this place about the different types and methods and pedagogies involved in delivering literacy education. My response is that there is no one-size-fits-all, and there needs to be a number of approaches made based on an individual child's ability and the way that they learn. I do not think it is possible to suggest that we do one particular style, and I think that was agreed by Ross Fox, in fact, who was talking about literacy education and the Catalyst program in the non-government, Catholic schools across the ACT—that they use more than one approach. *(Time expired.)*

**MR HANSON:** Minister, could you outline what some of these evidence-based approaches are that are being adopted to ensure that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are not being left behind?

**MS BERRY:** One of the approaches that we have in place is the Literacy Champions network. That consists of 141 teachers and leaders who are tasked with embedding the 10 essential instruction practices in literacy across our schools and supporting all teachers, including beginning teachers, to be able to deliver on that. The new education network provides the introduction to the 10 essential instruction practices in literacy and how to implement them in the classroom.

We have been working really closely with the University of Canberra for a number of years to make sure that our schools and beginning teachers are prepared and ready to teach when they are on the ground in our schools by providing those specialised supports and mentoring—through the University of Canberra, but also with specifically tasked mentors. They are trained to be able to provide advice and support to beginning teachers to ensure they have all of the supports they need to implement the 10 EIPs and support EAL/D via the service portal, which has been provided by the ACT government Education Directorate for school communities to access those additional supports to provide education in our schools.

**MR COCKS:** Minister, are the intervention programs you currently have in place effectively identifying and working with all children who are falling behind?

**MS BERRY:** I can say that I would suggest any parents who are concerned about their child's learning in our schools should, as a first step, speak with their teacher about the different kinds of supports that that student might need. Sometimes it is not as simple, and there might be a few trials that need to be made as far as what the kinds of supports are that the young person and their family might need—to provide them with the supports to give them the best possible chance at a great education. However, I know that our schools, schoolteachers and educators are absolutely focused on providing those opportunities to young people. They are professionals, and I have absolute confidence in education professionals within our schools: that they are able to deliver that.

### **Schools—infrastructure**

**MR HANSON:** My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, the ACT government website on school infrastructure funding states:

The latest round opened in October 2022 for the 2023-24 PSIRP budget allocation, and more than 60 schools submitted applications for over 320 individual infrastructure projects ... This year 51 school projects in 37 schools will receive funding for infrastructure projects through the PSIRP budget.

Minister, of all the applications for funding in ACT schools, why did less than 20 per cent receive funding?

**MS BERRY:** There are record levels of funding within our public schools across the ACT over recent budgets through upgrades and building new schools. The Education Directorate works closely with schools to understand what their priorities are and, like any budget, the Education Directorate needs to prioritise where those priorities are for funding across our school communities. For example, with roof replacements across our schools; understanding those schools that are beyond a point where they can be managed safely and need to have roof replacements. For example, recently Dickson College, Melba Copland Senior Secondary School as well as the College have received funding for roof replacements.

We have funded obviously more than the Canberra Liberals with their commitment for \$15 million. The ACT government has invested significantly more millions of dollars, not only through its infrastructure program but through its hazardous materials removals as well as making sure that our schools are fit for purpose and that new schools can be built. For the roof replacement program, over four years, which is fully funded, there is Latham Primary School, Gowrie Primary School, Red Hill Primary School and Telopea Park School. The northside special school renewal was \$8 million over three years. The school infrastructure improvement package included Calwell which had \$2.92 million in 2023, as well as funding to address security issues and site issues at that school but also upgrades to bathrooms to enhance the school amenity with modern design and fixtures. I know, of course, every school is important for all of those school communities and they want the very best outcomes and fundings to go to the priorities that they see. The Education Directorate works closely, as I said, with those school communities to understand those priorities and then those are funded through the budget process.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, when will the 269 applications, representing the 80 per cent of applications that missed out, be funded?

**MS BERRY:** As I said, the Education Directorate works closely with those schools to understand where those priorities are and works with them about when that funding and when that program can be implemented at schools. Those kinds of funding requests for various things can also include partnerships with P&Cs who will do funding for themselves for smaller projects. We can partner up with P&Cs to go halves in that, which might mean an outdoor cupboard for a play space, or it might mean new paint, or garden facilities, or playgrounds. I know a number of schools do those kinds of works and work with the Education Directorate to have their funding supplemented for those projects. It is not like those schools are not going to be considered in the future. As I said, the Education Directorate works closely with all our schools to ensure they are fit for purpose and meet the needs of all our students and teachers.

**MR COCKS:** Minister, did union involvement in any way play a part in who or what contracts were awarded under this funding?

**MS BERRY:** No, Madam Speaker.

### **Women—grants**

**MS ORR:** My question is to the Minister for Women. Minister, can you explain what grants are available for women in the ACT?



**MS BERRY:** I thank Ms Orr for her question and for her ongoing advocacy for women in the ACT. The ACT government has a number of grants available to women and girls, and to community organisations in the ACT that are working to support women. The women's grants program is an annual initiative which aims to improve the status and lives of women and girls by funding their projects. Through these grants we prioritise projects that support women of diverse backgrounds and experiences.

One of the longest running programs is the women's participation grants, which have been running since 2012. These grants are for innovative projects focusing on health and wellbeing, housing and homelessness, safety, economic security and leadership. These grants will be open later this year.

The Audrey Fagan enrichment grants are also specifically designed for girls, young women, non-binary and gender diverse young people to develop their skills and knowledge in a particular area. Up to \$2,000 is available for each person to support them to achieve their goals.

A number of grants are currently open for applicants, such as the women's safety grants and the return to work grants. I know that other members in this place have often been approached by community groups that are seeking funding to support their projects. I encourage members to consider whether any of these grants are available and to share them across your social media networks, where they might be able to assist your communities.

**MS ORR:** Minister, why are these kinds of initiatives important?

**MS BERRY:** One of the fantastic grants that I just mentioned are the return to work grants, which are there to support women in returning to employment after being out of the workforce for six months or more. These grants provide up to \$1,000 for women to undertake training and education to develop their job-searching skills. This program has also been extended to women who are exiting the AMC, who can receive up to \$2,000. It is so important for these women, who are returning to their lives once they leave the AMC, to access this kind of funding, and this grant plays a key role in providing them with opportunities.

Financial independence and being able to find and keep a job are critical to women's safety, especially if they are vulnerable to domestic and family violence. One of the unique aspects of this program is the mentoring component, which allows women who have received the grant to receive one-on-one mentoring to better link them to education and employment opportunities. This is a key part of the return to work process and supports the grant recipients in deciding how best to spend their grant. Empowering women to take control of their future and their financial security is critical and I am happy that we have been able to provide this support to our community.

**DR PATERSON:** Minister, this year there is additional funding for the women's safety grants. Could you please explain what this is for?

**MS BERRY:** Thank you, Dr Paterson. Yes, this year we have expanded the funding available under the women's safety grants. This year there will be an additional

\$20,000 in grants specifically for events to mark the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, which begins on 25 November. The 16 Days of Activism is an annual international campaign to raise awareness about gender-based violence experienced by women and girls. In previous years we received feedback from our community groups that additional support around the 16 Days of Activism would be welcomed. The 16 Days of Activism is a crucial time for organisations in our community to undertake activism calling for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls.

This funding is in addition to the \$100,000 that is available more generally for groups and organisations that are developing activities that advance the priorities identified in the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children. I am happy that this year we are able to provide this additional funding, and I look forward to working with the community sector in the lead-up to November. These grants are currently open through the CSD website. I take this opportunity to encourage any community groups that are interested to apply.

### **Parks and conservation—rangers**

**MS CLAY:** My question is to the Minister for Planning and Land Management and it relates to the Parks and Conservation Service's ranger budget. Minister, in 2018-19, the PCS ranger budget for urban reserves was \$1.34 million. In 2022-23, this had dropped to \$1.28 million. Why is there less funding for parks and conservation rangers in urban reserves now than there was five years ago?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Ms Clay for the question. Can I first acknowledge the incredible work that our parks and conservation people do. I met with them at lunchtime for their annual day in preparation for the fire season, and it will be a tough one for them.

We employ approximately 220 staff in total, including rangers, technical officers, general service officers and admin staff. From figures readily available for the recent 2022-23 financial year: the budget allocation, excluding capital, for PCS was \$66.722 million, consisting of \$48.86 million assigned to PCS and \$17.862 million in overhead allocation. The PCS operating costs for the year were \$71.853 million, consisting of \$57.619 million assigned to PCS and \$14.232 million in overhead allocation. PCS also had \$9.5 million in initiative funding in 2022-23 and spent the majority of that funding.

**MS CLAY:** A supplementary or possibly just the same question again: Minister, in relation to the ranger budget, why has it dropped from \$1.34 million for PCS rangers to \$1.28 million for PCS rangers—just for the rangers?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** No, much more than that is allocated for the rangers as I have indicated in my initial answer to the first part of the question. There are, of course, different frequencies and groups of funding, depending on tasks, associated with funding from the budget itself and ERC. We have been increasing our funding over the years, and I am very pleased with the work they are doing.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Minister, will the growing impact of climate change mean we will need more rangers as there will be more invasive pests and species?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** Yes, there will.

### **Public housing—safety**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, recently I have received many pleas, as you well know, for help from public housing tenants desperate for a transfer because of—well, a myriad of reasons, but a lot of them because of poorly maintained and unsafe living conditions. In particular, I was contacted by a Condamine Court tenant on Tuesday last week due to damaged security infrastructure and a home invasion.

Minister, why have you failed to rectify unsafe living conditions in public housing, especially for vulnerable women and children?

**MS BERRY:** While I do not necessarily agree with the premise of that question from Mr Parton, he knows well the millions of dollars that the ACT government has invested in public housing across the ACT for maintenance issues. I do understand the concerns that he has raised with the Condamine Court tenants and I know that Housing ACT has been working very closely with those tenants to help with overcoming the issues that those tenants or particular tenant has been experienced there. It is a difficult issue that has been made more complex because of the needs of different individuals within that environment. However, I can assure Mr Parton that Housing ACT takes very seriously the safety of tenants across all of our public housing properties and will continue to work with Condamine Court tenants as well as more broadly across the system to ensure that our homes are safe and fit for purpose for all of our tenants.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, why did you not take immediate action to fix up Condamine Court in regard to those security issues and other locations where vulnerable tenants are under physical threat? Why did you not take immediate action to fix those situations?

**MS BERRY:** Mr Parton will know that I will not be going into detail about the particular circumstances across individual housing complexes or properties, and the reasons why that there are complex issues that need to be addressed. However, I am happy to talk with him about those complex issues that Housing ACT are trying to address across—

**Ms Lawder:** Well, he is asking you now.

**MS BERRY:** Well, I have already said I am not going to publicly talk about individual homes or tenants.

**Ms Lee:** It is in the *Canberra Times*. Condamine Court.

**Ms Lawder:** I am not asking you. You said Condamine Court.

**MS BERRY:** Well, I am not talking about individual homes.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Ms Berry, just ignore the interjections would be my advice.

**MS BERRY:** It is very difficult when the snide comments keep coming across the table, and we are much closer together now and I can hear pretty much everybody and can hear what everybody is saying. But I am very happy to—

*Mr Parton interjecting—*

**MS BERRY:** I always welcome Mr Parton's advocacy for public housing tenants across the ACT, and I am always happy to come and talk with him about particular issues in confidence to ensure that he is satisfied that Housing ACT are doing everything that they can to support tenants across all our public housing properties.

**MRS KIKKERT:** What immediate assistance will you provide vulnerable public housing tenants suffering intimidation and violence who wish to be moved away to a safer environment?

**MS BERRY:** If Mrs Kikkert is aware of any tenants in those circumstances, then could she please either herself get in touch with my office or put those tenants in touch with my office so that I can address those issues or have Housing ACT address those issues with those tenants.

**Mr Cocks:** Point of order, Madam Speaker. The question was not in regard to a specific scenario, but in regard to in general what are the supports that are available, and the minister has not addressed the question.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** You were on your feet within 20 seconds as well, Mr Cocks. You have another minute plus to answer the original question, Ms Berry, if you have anything else to add.

### **Public housing—mandatory relocation of tenants**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, why did it take a review and a report from the ACT Ombudsman for you to apologise and stop the forced relocation of ACT Housing tenants?

**MS BERRY:** ACT Housing has worked very hard on a very complex issue to ensure that homes across our housing portfolio are fit for purpose and meet the needs of our tenants now but also into the future, so that the thousands of people who are on the waitlist can get into a decent home of their own. It is a complex program and it is a challenging program, however, it is the right thing to do, and that has been backed in by the ombudsman that the policy around the renewal program is an appropriate policy. I have valued the ombudsman's report and his recommendations around what would be the appropriate way forward to support tenants to move into homes that best suit their needs and implementing the policy with regard to our renewal program.

I met with the ombudsman a few weeks ago just to understand his report and talk through that with him. He has also welcomed the opportunity to work with us, as well as our community partners, to make sure that the way that we progress this program is appropriate, that we do our very best to support our tenants moving forward and that we ensure that they are living in homes that best suit their needs.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, how will the halt on forced relocations delay the addition of new public housing dwellings?

**MS BERRY:** At this stage, I cannot confirm that it will have an impact on the program itself. However, through the pause, the ACT government and Housing ACT are leaving no stone unturned in working with our partners about making sure we get the communications right and engage with our tenants as appropriate.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MS BERRY:** However, during this period of time, we need to understand what we can do better, what we can purchase for housing and whether there are other opportunities in the private sector to purchase more public housing properties, or whether there are more opportunities to purchase land to build houses on or more opportunities to alleviate the pressure on the waitlist—also options for people on that waitlist through affordable rentals, through the work that Minister Barr has been doing around the \$62 million to encourage investment in more affordable rentals across the ACT.

It is not just public housing alone. Public housing is a very important part of addressing this complex issue, but it needs a broader response than just what we are doing in the public housing space. That is why the government is using a range of different innovative approaches to address the housing crisis that we are experiencing. I am providing a further update to the Assembly, like the one that I have done this week with regard to the renewal program, and I commit to doing that as often as required to ensure that members in this place are aware of what is happening with regard to building more and better public housing that best suits the needs of our tenants.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Minister, why did you ignore the advice of 14 community sector leaders, including former Chief Minister Jon Stanhope, calling on the government to end forced relocations?

**MS BERRY:** We have been working with our community partners all the way through this program and through the previous program to ensure we got it right. The ombudsman has found that we did not quite get there and has provided recommendations to us to ensure that we can do even better as we move through the program. I do not think anybody has suggested the policy itself for the renewal program and building better homes that are more fit for purpose, more affordable to heat and cool and better suit the needs of our tenants now, but also of those on the waitlist, is flawed. It was the process of implementing that program where the challenges arose, and we are working with all our community partners, including the ombudsman and the Human Rights Commission, to make sure that we get it right and that we do better.

**Public housing—asset stock**

**MR PARTON:** My question is directed to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, I refer to your parliamentary agreement with the ACT Greens, which set a target for an additional 400 public housing dwellings by 2025. The 2023-24 Budget Outlook indicates that the target delivery date has been pushed out to 2026-27, and that you are currently behind on the target number by 682 dwellings. Minister, can you please explain to the Assembly why you are so far behind on meeting your own target?

**MS BERRY:** Yes, Mr Parton, I can again explain with regard to the challenges that we have faced implementing the growth and renewal program. I will explain even further, during debate on Mr Parton's motion this afternoon, what the growth and renewal program aims to achieve under the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement. The aim in the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement was to grow our public housing by 400 and renew another 1,000 properties in our public housing. We are very close to meeting the 400 target; however, the renewal program has been delayed as a result of circumstances that were beyond our control. The La Niña effect, the wet weather, problems with construction supplies and construction companies' inability to find a workforce, interest rates, the lack of supplies as a result of the war in Ukraine, and a range of other issues that were beyond our control, meant that houses were taking much longer to build than they were initially.

Usually, the time frame for building a home is nine months; that had been pushed out to 18 months. What we are doing is working as closely as we possibly can with our builders to bring that time frame closer to what it had originally been—to nine months—but there are still challenges with supply. However, we are seeing some improvements in that space. Calwell was an example where we saw 30 new homes built in a nine-month period.

We are seeing a shift now. Unfortunately, we ended up with an international health pandemic and weather that was beyond anybody's predictions, which impacted the program. What we are doing now is investigating what we can do to catch-up that program, purchase homes off the market and understand whether there are properties in the ACT that could be redeveloped or upgraded to be put back for tenant allocations. We are leaving no stone unturned; we are in a housing crisis.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, what options did you consider to somehow stay on track to meet that promised 2025 deadline?

**MS BERRY:** The Parliamentary and Governing Agreement makes it very clear that the 400 new homes and 1,000 renewed homes would be challenging to achieve in the time frame that we had set. We made it very clear in the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement, but we have never taken our foot off the pedal within the means that we have been allowed to build those homes.

Nobody could have predicted the impact that the international health pandemic would have on construction across the ACT—not just within public housing but across a range of infrastructure projects that have been delayed as a result of the pandemic, as

a result of the impact of the war in Ukraine on construction supplies, and as a result of the impact of the weather on time frames for those projects. Nobody could have predicted the impact that that was going to have across our infrastructure pipeline in all areas in the ACT—not just public housing.

What we are doing in Housing ACT is making sure that we are leaving no stone unturned and making sure that we are looking into every opportunity to build more homes, to buy new homes and to build homes that best meet the needs of our community so that we can bring back that time frame and overcome all of those complex challenges that we have had before us.

In addition to that, we are partnering with a federal government that has never partnered with a state or territory government in the way that it has been committing to in the last 12 to 18 months: a \$50 million housing accelerator fund, which will have a huge impact on a small place like the ACT. We can actually have an impact. I have always said that we could not do this on our own and that we needed federal government support and the support from investors to come into the ACT and build more homes, more rentals and more affordable rentals. That is what the Housing Australia Future Fund could be providing for the ACT if it passes through the federal parliament. If we get that funding—*(Time expired.)*

**MRS KIKKERT:** I have a supplementary question. Minister, why can't these deadlines be recovered through adjustment of 2023-24 budget priorities in the housing growth strategy?

**MS BERRY:** For all of the reasons that I have outlined over several months in this place—the complexities around the delays in infrastructure supplies. Funding would not have made a difference to that; the supplies did not exist.

### **Economy—employment**

**MR BRADDOCK:** My question is for the Chief Minister. Chief, the government announced a new jobs target of 300,000 jobs for Canberra by 2030. While I welcome the step-up in city-wide ambition, how does this announcement account for the Assembly resolution of 6 June, moved by me and supported unanimously in this place, calling for an investigation of district-specific employment targets?

**MR BARR:** Certainly the jobs target of 300,000 reflects the current position of 264,000 jobs and looking at around 2 per cent growth over the period between now and 2030. That is consistent with the budget projections and is consistent with the rate of growth in employment we have been achieving in recent times. The distribution of employment across the territory is impacted by a number of factors, population growth is clearly a very strong driver. I do note that, with the exception of the airport precinct, the fastest rate of employment growth by district in the ACT between the 2016 and the 2021 census was in Gungahlin. Employment growth rose by 33 per cent in that five year period.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Is the 300,000 jobs target a whole-of-government target or an Economic Development Directorate target?

**MR BARR:** It is a target set by me as Chief Minister and Treasurer, so it is whole of government and it reflects the totality of the territory's labour market, which is comprised of employment in the public sector, the community sector and the private sector. So it is all the total labour force in the ACT.

That which is directly employed by the ACT government constitutes less than 10 per cent of total employment in the territory. It is around that level. The commonwealth government generally employs about one in four in the ACT. The ACT government is the next largest employer and then beyond the two governments, employers are particularly strong in the higher education sector, then in professional, scientific and technical services, in the carer economy, in areas like tourism, hospitality and retail. If you want further detail on how the current 264,000 jobs are distributed across industry sectors, that is available via the ABS website.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, how much of the target will be achieved through forecast population growth and how much will arise from the actions of the Economic Development Directorate and government?

**MR BARR:** Most of the growth comes from a growing economy, from a growing population and from decisions of government and major employers. The economic development strategy does seek to prioritise growth in areas of the economy that have an export focus. The interesting question is going to be to what extent will labour-intensive industries grow relative to other sectors of the economy. There are some broader trends emerging where digitisation and artificial intelligence will replace jobs that are currently performed by people. But there are other areas of the economy, particularly in relation to the growth of those sectors, so ICT and AI, where there is going to be a jobs boom. I would also anticipate that the care economy will grow strongly and that is population related but also to changing demographics. As our population ages, the need, for example for more aged care workers and more workers in the health sector, will grow. If we are able to successfully grow our international and domestic student numbers then that will lead to more employment in the higher education sector, which may not be strictly linked to the long term population growth in the territory but more transitory population growth associated with students coming to the territory. Short answer: it is a mixture of both. I hope all sectors contribute to total employment growth. I hope, like our 2025 target of 250,000 jobs which we smashed through in 2023, that we can get to 300,000 jobs ahead of our 2030 time frame.

### **Access Canberra—services**

**DR PATERSON:** My question is to the Minister for Business and Better Regulation. Minister, how has the community responded to the new option of bookable appointments at Access Canberra?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Dr Paterson for the question. Since the option of bookable appointments was expanded to all Access Canberra service centres in late July, we have seen more than 1,000 appointments made across the five centres. Belconnen and Woden are the most popular of the service centres newly open for bookings. Dickson, where bookable appointments first commenced, continues to receive the lion's share of bookings.



Appointments are generally filling up the day prior, and we are seeing people choosing to book appointments at the service centre closest to their workplace. Customers choosing to book an appointment are reporting that the main reasons for doing so are convenience and to receive extra assistance. This initiative is another example of the government's ongoing agenda to make it simpler, smoother and more effective to engage with necessary services.

**DR PATERSON:** Minister, what was learned from the trial of bookable appointments at Dickson service centre?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Dr Paterson for the supplementary question. The Dickson specialised centre has been operating for the bookable appointment model since it reopened to customers in October 2022. During that time, appointments have been consistently well received, especially by older Canberrans and those requiring additional support to complete transactions. Appointments are able to be booked on the phone or directly from the Access Canberra website. Customers and staff are better prepared for a transaction when it has been booked. Pleasingly, we have seen even greater efficiency for these appointments than was anticipated. This has enabled Access Canberra to double the number of appointments available each day.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Minister, will this new service offering be reviewed to ensure that it remains a success?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Mr Pettersson for the supplementary question. Access Canberra will be undertaking three-, six- and 12-monthly reviews of this expanded service offering to understand its impact on a range of important measures, including customer satisfaction and wait times. Demographic data on the customers taking up the bookable appointment option will also help to inform targeted communication to members of the community who would benefit most from this service.

Access Canberra is also working with ACTCOSS and COTA to continue to enhance accessibility for Canberrans with low sensory needs and other additional requirements. For example, one option may be to have dedicated booking slots available each day where low sensory considerations are in place. We will continue to keep the community updated as to any changes.

I take the opportunity to thank the service teams in Access Canberra for their dedication and enthusiasm as these changes have been employed.

**Mr Barr:** Further questions can be placed on the notice paper, thank you, Madam Speaker.

## **Supplementary answers to questions without notice Board of Inquiry—Criminal Justice System—funding**

**MR RATTENBURY:** I was asked earlier about how much the government set aside for the board of inquiry. I said \$4.5 million. It is actually \$4.3 million, just to clarify the record.

**Education—NAPLAN results**

**MS BERRY:** I just wanted to add some more information and some clarity to the response that I provided to Mr Hanson's questions with regards to NAPLAN.

I think it is important that the answers to the questions that he asked are put into context with regard to the changes to NAPLAN and how well our schools are actually doing in the ACT. For example, in the past, a student might have been just above the national standard and may have been down in developing level, which meant that they had not demonstrated achievement at the expanded standard but they may not be far off. The changes that we have made across the system to the four provisional standards gives us the chance to understand where young people are not at the exceeding, strong or developing level and need additional support.

As to the questions that Mr Hanson asked with regard to young people who might not be doing as well as we would like them to do, that is easily understood through the new proficiency standards that the state and territory ministers have implemented through the recent changes to NAPLAN.

As I said, the changes to NAPLAN include being able to better identify sooner those who might need more support, because the test occurs sooner. We can then ensure that parents and schools can work together to give that support so that they can get the best out of their schooling.

With regard to NAPLAN 2023 results, consistent with previous years, ACT mean scores were statistically similar to the national scores for all year levels and domains. In 2023, the ACT performance was equal highest across all year levels and domains except for year 5 writing.

While results are not able to be compared with previous years because of the changes to NAPLAN, jurisdictional relativity seems to be similar, which is to be expected. The proportion of ACT students at strong or exceeding levels were similar to or above the national proportion for all year levels and domains.

The ACT has continued to deliver a very strong and stable performance in NAPLAN. We have the highest proportion of students exceeding in reading in all years—something that we should be celebrating.

The ACT mean performance was the highest or equal highest across 19 of the 20 recorded domains, which I said. In the ACT we are constantly striving for improvement at both the individual student and school levels. Areas for improvement are determined by available data, including NAPLAN, which, as I said, occurs sooner in the year and so we can get that data or any information sooner.

Mr Hanson referred to the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage, ICSEA, metrics in the ACT. Those comparisons really do need to be done with caution. As noted in the national report that was released by ACARA, due to the apparent anomalies, the operation of the formula for calculating ICSEA values for the ACT is currently under review.

What that specifically means is they are working with ACARA to review whether these metrics operate differently in predicting NAPLAN performance in the ACT for both public and non-government schools compared with other jurisdictions.

I hope that that provides some context for members here, as well as Mr Hanson, when he is understanding some of the changes to NAPLAN in the ACT and the performance of our public schools here in the ACT.

## Papers

Mr Gentleman presented the following papers:

### **Subordinate legislation (including explanatory statements unless otherwise stated)**

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

Architects Act—Architects Board (Academic Architect Member) Appointment 2023—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-211 (LR, 17 August 2023).

Board of Senior Secondary Studies Act—

Board of Senior Secondary Studies Appointment 2023 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-207 (LR, 14 August 2023).

Board of Senior Secondary Studies Appointment 2023 (No 3)—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-208 (LR, 14 August 2023).

Duties Act—Duties Regulation 2023—Subordinate Law SL2023-18 (LR, 10 August 2023).

Emergencies Act—Emergencies (Multi-Hazard Advisory Council Members) Appointment 2023 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-204 (LR, 10 August 2023).

Legal Aid Act—Legal Aid (Commissioner—ACTCOSS Nominee) Appointment 2023—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-205 (LR, 7 August 2023).

Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Act—Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Amendment Regulation 2023 (No 2)—Subordinate Law SL2023-17 (LR, 7 August 2023).

Remuneration Tribunal Act—Remuneration Tribunal (Fees and Allowances of Members) Determination 2023—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-206 (LR, 14 August 2023).

Transplantation and Anatomy Act—

Transplantation and Anatomy (Designated Officers) Appointment 2023 (No 57)—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-209 (LR, 17 August 2023).

Transplantation and Anatomy (Designated Officers) Appointment Revocation 2023 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-210 (LR, 17 August 2023).

Utilities (Technical Regulation) Act—Utilities (Technical Regulation) (Listed Dams) Determination 2023—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-203 (LR, 27 July 2023).

## Public housing—asset stock

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (3.09): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes that:
  - (a) in August 2020, there were 2,209 people on the wait list for housing in the ACT. This month, there are now 3,175 on the wait list, an increase of 44 percent over three years;
  - (b) the Labor-Greens Government committed to adding 400 public housing dwellings to the stock by 2025 under the current Parliamentary and Governing Agreement, a commitment that was later revised to 400 dwellings by 2026-27;
  - (c) since 2017-18, there has been a net reduction in the public housing stock of 333 dwellings, despite the Government investing over a billion dollars into public housing growth and renewal since 2014;
  - (d) a member of this Government expressed his outrage over his own Government's failings in the public housing sector, stating that the raw number of assets owned by Housing ACT has been in a structural decline for at least two and a half years, constituting a potential breach of the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement; and
  - (e) recently, the ACT Ombudsman found that Housing ACT's signature growth and renewal policy was deeply flawed, causing significant distress to tenants. Housing ACT's communication with tenants impacted by the program was found to be impersonal and the decision-making process was not only flawed, but cruel and callous. The Minister for Housing and Suburban Development was then forced to apologise for the distress that her directorate caused to hundreds of public housing tenants; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to:
  - (a) publicly release a six-monthly snapshot of public housing stock, which would include complete numbers of renewed properties, newly built properties, properties sold, and existing properties purchased;
  - (b) provide a six-monthly update on the progress of meeting the growth and renewal targets; and
  - (c) rule out any additional extensions to the deadline on the addition of 400 new dwellings to the public housing stock.

At the base of this motion is the premise that, if a government promise to do something, they really should do it. It is not good enough to just continually say that you are going to do it; you have to deliver it.

Additionally, if you have made a steadfast promise to, for argument's sake, deliver a certain number of additional dwellings, you must continue to inform the Assembly and the Canberra public as to how you are progressing to that end, particularly if and when it becomes clear that you are having enormous problems in fulfilling those promises. You cannot just walk away from the promises or encourage people to look

the other way and hope that nobody notices. It is not good enough to have just said that you are going to do this stuff; you have to actually do it.

For many years, this government and this minister have trotted into this chamber and promised to grow the public housing stock, and they have not delivered. Every year there are more heartfelt promises, and we do not see the outcome that has been promised. I think that this minister is somewhat embarrassed by that non-delivery. Irrespective of the reasons that were given in answers to some questions on notice earlier, I think she is a bit embarrassed—and she should be embarrassed.

I have no doubt that, over the time I have been the shadow housing minister, this minister and this government have done whatever was in their power to mask the truth of the failure of their public housing growth failures. That must change.

I am here for change. It is often very difficult to bring about change, particularly from this side of the chamber. But I would note that this motion has already brought about change. This morning we were treated to a ministerial statement from Minister Berry with regard to the Growth and Renewal Program, particularly focusing on the tenant relocation process.

Given the events of the last month, it is absolutely no surprise that the minister made this statement. But I think it is clear that this morning's ministerial statement had been modified because of this motion. You cannot tell me that the ministerial statement that was rolled out this morning was in the same form as the original draft. It was not. It had been modified as a consequence of this motion—and that is great. That is why we are here. We are here for change.

The minister will tell us that she has been as transparent as a sheet of glass in this space—and she has not. I know that. ACT Shelter, ACTCOSS and Canberra Community Law know that.

Of significance is that a member of the government sat here in this chamber several weeks ago in estimates hearings and castigated the housing minister in extremely robust terms for that lack of transparency and for miserably failing to meet, as he pointed out, what were fairly modest targets. They were quite modest targets. Although with thorough questionings in the hearings and on notice in sitting weeks, it is possible for us to get an understanding of exactly where we stand, it should not be that hard.

Even in the ministerial statement today, although we see some of the information that we have requested in this snapshot, we do not see all of it. It is not good enough to just tell us how many properties have been added. What we all want—and I know I speak on behalf of Mr Davis, and you do not hear me saying that very often!—to know the net numbers. We want to know exactly how we have arrived at the position that we are at today. After you subtract what has been taken away and then add what has been added, where does that leave us with regard to the start number and the target end number? That is all we want. It is pretty simple.

We are not alleging that the government are lying. They are just making it very difficult to get a clear view of the truth. That is what is going on here.

With regard to the power-sharing agreement between Labor and the Greens, well, I will leave them to sort that out. I can see some of that playing out in this motion. Although I was briefed by Mr Davis on the proposed amendments—they have just been placed in front of me, and I have not read them at this stage—my understanding is that they both refer to the power-sharing agreement. I think that is correct. So we will see how that plays out.

Some would say that it is a beautiful, beautiful day when all three parties can come together and agree on something. But let us be honest about it: although I have had cordial conversations with both Ms Berry and Mr Davis and although it appears that we are all going to end at the same place, the biggest single reason for Labor agreeing with us is that they do not want to be caught out on a limb. How bad would it look if the Liberal and Greens members voted for absolute transparency and the Labor Party voted against it and died on that hill? It just would not look good at all, would it? Labor are voting with us because they know they cannot win. That is why.

Some would say that, with this motion in this week, based on everything that is going on at the moment in the housing space, perhaps I have missed an opportunity here and that perhaps we should have gone harder on some things—that this motion perhaps should have been a bit broader; that maybe it should have focused on the dysfunctional basket case that this space has become under the stewardship of this government. It is a bit of a shambles.

This motion of course does reference the botched relocation program enclosed in the Growth and Renewal Program. Everybody knew that this was a complete disaster right from the start. I knew, ACTCOSS knew, Jon Stanhope knew and ACT Shelter knew. Everyone except the minister knew. I know that the minister addressed this in her ministerial statement this morning and addressed it somewhat in question time today, but it is pretty amazing that it took a scathing ombudsman's report for this minister to wake up to what was going on.

I did say on radio last week that some constituents have suggested to me that in the ACT we have various ministers flying the plane on autopilot and that, in this case, the minister is actually working from home and flying the plane remotely; she is not even on the plane. I know that that sounds like an extremely unkind statement to make, but I dare you to run it past any of the tenants at a certain complex. I am not going to mention the name of the complex, because it gets mentioned all the time. But run it past the tenants of that complex and see if they would agree with it? If you want to talk about disastrous outcomes that were so easy to predict, it is difficult to go past that one, is it not?

There are so many more but most of them do not end up in the public eye. If you want to talk about dysfunction, let me give you a list of all of the public housing properties that have been vacant for six months or beyond—some of them for nearly a decade. We have got a list. It is an incomplete list, because the information is a closely guarded secret.

If you want to talk about dysfunction, we could talk about the disaster that is the public housing maintenance under program facilities maintenance. We could talk about the

growing waiting lists. We could talk about the growing incidents of crime and anti-social behaviour. But I digress. We are not going to get into those matters today.

Change has to start somewhere. So let us get this change up today and improve the transparency in this place and provide this six-monthly snapshot for all to see and then progress to the next step after that.

**MR DAVIS (Brindabella) (3.19):** By leave, I move:

1. After paragraph (1)(e), insert:

“(f) the tri-partisan Select Committee into Cost of Living Pressures in the ACT tabled its report on Thursday 11 May 2023. The Committee made 52 recommendations aimed at addressing cost of living pressures in the ACT, with 8 recommendations specifically related to the Growing and Renewing Public Housing program. In particular, the Committee’s recommendation 26, which states “The Committee recommends that the ACT Government honour its commitment made in the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement to increase its public housing portfolio by 400 properties by 2025”.

2. After paragraph (2)(c), insert:

“(d) honour its aim the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement to deliver a total of 400 additional public housing dwellings by 2025.”.

I want to start on some positives, because my emotions have a habit of taking me to a terribly negative space in this policy debate. So I want to start with the good news. The good news is that, unlike in other states and territories across this country, all 25 members in this place and all three political parties appear to be committed to the idea that growing your public housing portfolio is good—and we all agree that we want that to happen.

While state and territory governments of both political persuasions over the last decade have sold off public housing in other jurisdictions at a rate of knots, I think it is a credit to this parliament that the three parties within it seek to maintain and grow our public housing portfolio. I think that is good.

I was really excited—and I commend the minister—on the delivery of 30 brand new class C adaptable energy efficient homes in Calwell, in my electorate of Brindabella, in public housing earlier this week. That is wonderful news. That was 30 homes delivered in less than nine months.

What that tells me is that there is light at the end of the tunnel of what has become a hugely problematic and flawed Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program, that we are capable of delivering on our ambitions and that when we, as the minister says, put our feet to the floor, we can deliver more and better homes for people on the public housing waitlist.

I say this as someone who grew up in public housing, I say this as someone who loves people who currently live in public housing, and I say this as a representative of Tuggeranong, proud to welcome 30 new families to my electorate living in public

housing. Indeed, I am a proud YIMBY, and I want all members of this Assembly to be a proud YIMBY when public housing properties come to their community.

I want that because public housing tenants are unfairly and unreasonably stigmatised, sometimes in the most obvious and crass of ways but other times in ways subtle and unfair. When we continuously talk about public housing as the landlord of last resort, stigma is created. It suggests that public housing tenants are always people struggling, on the margins, prone to addiction or violence.

But, actually, more than 20,000 fellow Canberrans live in public housing. They are overwhelmingly good and hardworking people. They are people with hopes, dreams and ambitions for their lives and for their children's lives. They are people who contribute to this community. They are people just like me and my family.

I am concerned that members in this place have consciously or ignorantly contributed to a stigmatisation of public housing tenants, either supporting the forced relocation of public housing tenants—something that would never happen for a tenant living in our private rental market—or joining with concerned neighbours for that typical front page of the *Canberra Times* photo op of a bunch of people, arms crossed, opposing the most modest of urban infill development, largely because poor people dare to move into their neighbourhood.

But, indeed, if every political party and politician in this place really does want more public housing, then it stands to reason that every member of this place must actively and enthusiastically support the purchase of properties from the private market to add them to the portfolio, support the construction of appropriate, modest and high-quality urban infill development designed to increase the size of the portfolio and, because public housing tenants deserve to live everywhere, they should celebrate new public housing properties when they are released in their communities and they should support the hopes, dreams and aspirations of every one of the almost 20,000 Canberrans who live in public housing.

It is my aspiration that this city leads the country not just practically but also culturally on public housing. It is not enough to build and buy; we have to celebrate the people who live in these homes.

It is no secret that I have been highly critical of the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program, not because I am critical of growing public housing or renewing public housing but because, in the three years that I have worked in this place, every rock I turn over on that program suggests another failure. It is not what it says on the tin; in short, it has not been growing public housing.

The government sells public housing in large part to fund the purchase of construction of new houses. What that means is that the portfolio must dip before it increases. I acknowledge the number of challenges that the minister has outlined on many occasions, and they are all real and true: workforce shortages in the building and construction sector, supply shortage issues for materials, the pandemic, the geopolitical circumstances and, indeed, even the weather.



But we have not yet seen the size of our public housing portfolio increase. No matter how many times we say we are growing public housing, we are just not. To which my solution is pretty simple: do not sell another home or knock another one down until you have already replaced it, to ensure that there is no point in time, as the minister tells us, where that portfolio is ever in decline.

It is worth noting that that is not just my view; that is the view of the Select Committee into Cost of Living Pressures, which I was proud to lead. We made 52 recommendations, eight of them on the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program.

For the benefit of colleagues, I will remind them of the recommendations that we made: that the government promote the social, environmental and economic benefit of the provision of more public housing; that the government speed up both the demolition of old vacant properties and the construction of new properties; that the capacity of Housing ACT be increased to support the delivery of the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program—that one was for the heads in Treasury; the minister needs more money; and that the government manage the sale of public housing to ensure the portfolio stock is not in decline at any one time.

Indeed, the tripartisan committee recommended that the government honour the commitment made in the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement to increase the public housing portfolio by 400 properties by 2025, not 2027; that the time between moving tenants between old and new public housing on the same site be limited—this goes to construction contract management; and that the government determine and publicly state how many applicants on the public housing waitlist require class C adaptable properties.

I distinctly recall being told by Housing ACT officials that one of the many barriers that are listed for the government's inability to meet these modest targets was how many people on the public housing waitlist require class C adaptable properties. It would stand to reason that I would then ask those officials, how many people on the public housing waitlist, which has now grown to more than 3,000, require class C adaptable properties. I think it is very telling that that question could not be answered then and that it still is yet to be answered.

The committee also recommended that the government continue to build public housing and purchase from the private housing market to grow the overall supply of public housing to cater for all level of accessibility needs on the public housing waitlist. And this was the kicker: the tripartisan committee recommended that the government refer the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program to the Auditor-General for inquiry! That is a pretty sizeable intervention.

My view is that that is necessary because, as Mr Parton's motion today aptly demonstrates, there is no agreed understanding within the government or within this Assembly of exactly the health and state of our public housing portfolio, nor the health and state of the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program—no shared understanding.

On any given day there will be different figures put out about the total number of stock, whether you are measuring it from day A or day B, the stock sold, how many are demolished, how many are currently vacant and the reasons for, how many have been purchased, and have tenants moved into those. These figures change regularly, and a cynic might argue they change regularly because the government will put out the number which most favourably represents their work on any given day.

Many of these figures actually contradict independent assessments, including the Pegasus Economics report prepared for the budget committee, which demonstrates, as I have said in this place before, that our public housing portfolio is in structural, long-term decline.

We need to have consistent and a universal understanding, a shared understanding, of the state of the portfolio and how the government is tracking in delivering this program. Indeed, if the government is proud of its delivery of this program, that is not a hard request.

Every member of this Assembly and every person in the community should know how many homes the ACT government owns; how many are vacant; the circumstances of their vacancy; and whether they are waiting for allocation or waiting for maintenance. We all deserve to see that this program is doing what it says it should do on the tin.

Many of my constituents have benefitted from the renewing part of this program. So it is not all bad. I have heard fantastic feedback from my constituents who have benefited from upgrades and maintenance. They commended the hardworking tradies who got the work done on time and effectively. This is really important because public housing tenants deserve to live in good homes.

But the sticking point in this Assembly, where we are seen to agree in the Assembly and indeed even within the government, is the rate at which we are growing. I and the ACT Greens have made our aspirations for public housing abundantly clear. We want it to grow, grow quickly and by at least 400 homes by 2025. We want it to happen so badly that it was a key component of our negotiations with ACT Labor upon the formation of this government.

As recently as earlier this week, we heard the minister on ABC Radio tell us that we are apparently only 22 properties away from reaching our target. That surprised me, because last November the minister presented a ministerial statement in this place saying that we would need to push out our target to 2027 because we could not meet it under the existing time frame.

Optimistically, I would like to assume that sustained pressure by public housing advocates in this place has meant that we are actually on track to meet our Parliamentary and Governing Agreement target. Alternatively, this is just another point in time figure that does not accurately tell us the whole story. I certainly hope it is the former.

But it is the inconsistency of information that is available to us provided by the government, appearing to contradict one another, that makes it very hard to get a clear and accurate assessment of the state of our public housing portfolio. That is why this

motion from the Canberra Liberals, which the ACT Greens are pleased to support, asks simply for that: information to be presented to this Assembly transparently to inform the ongoing debate and inform the community about the state of public housing.

I understand that the Chief Minister, who will respond fulsomely to the Select Committee into Cost of Living Pressures report—will come out soon, and I want to make it abundantly clear that I am absolutely committed to the recommendations outlined in that report. I believe, under scrutiny of the program through that committee inquiry, that they are the bare minimum required to get this program back on track.

Everybody would benefit from the assistance of the Auditor-General in checking on the government's homework. Everybody would benefit from independent scrutiny from a third party to tell us whether we are on the right track.

I say that because we are not divided in this place on wanting the public housing portfolio to grow, which should mean we all want the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program to be a success. We all want it to achieve. It appears that it is not. So some humility by the government is required here to ask for help, to ask for intervention and to ask for some advice.

Let us get someone to check our homework. Let us get some feedback, let us get some transparent and accurate data, and let us make sure that the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program does what it says on the tin—grow and renew public housing.

**MS VASSAROTTI** (Kurrajong—Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services and Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction) (3.33): I rise today to speak in support of Mr Davis's amendments to Mr Parton's motion around public housing.

**Mr Parton:** To my motion or just the amendments?

**MS VASSAROTTI:** Your motion as well, sorry, Mr Parton.

All parties in the Legislative Assembly care deeply about housing and public housing. I believe we are united in our desire to see housing in the ACT as affordable, accessible and appropriate, and public housing is a really important part of that. I know that we are all concerned about the deepening housing affordability crisis that has been felt both locally and across the country. More people are falling through the cracks of the housing system and we know that it has been particularly felt by lower income households. A key driver in all of this has been increasing housing costs and increasing private rents, which has meant that people on lower incomes in particular have fewer options and often have to live in substandard housing, suffer overcrowding, or forego essentials such as food and medicines due to the need for most of their money to go towards rent.

This has seen a significant increase in the waiting list for public housing. As the motion notes, we have more than 3,000 people on the housing waiting list. As Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services, I have oversight of that waiting list.

While we have seen a reduction on the priority waiting list in recent months for those that are in most critical and urgent need, this number is still too high. I hear daily from constituents about their experience in waiting for public housing. These people represent some of the most marginalised in the ACT, and they need a place to call home. It is imperative for housing to serve as a community good.

It is not just about the number of people on the waiting list; it is also important to consider the experience of those who are on that waiting list. Applicants on the priority waiting list wait, on average, over nine months. For the over 2,000 applicants with high needs, the average wait time balloons to over three years. Those waiting for public housing are waiting in limbo. They are waiting too long to access the stability they need to build a good life for themselves and their families. The only way we will solve this is by providing more public housing. We need more public housing to provide homes for people and families. Governments, both federal and local, need to invest more direct funding to build the homes we desperately need.

The motion by Mr Parton and the policy of the government demonstrate that we are again united across our parties in recognising the urgent need for more public housing. The government's Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program has been the way in which this has been delivered. In addition to increasing the number of homes in the Canberra community, it has also sought to renew a thousand properties to provide homes that are better suited to the needs of our tenants.

There have been many successes in delivering homes through the program—we saw one this week—but it has resulted in dozens of phone calls to my office about people who are on that waiting list and are desperate for homes. However, there has also been a range of factors that have made it more difficult now than at any other time to build more homes. We have heard about extreme weather, a pandemic, geopolitical issues, rising construction costs and skills shortages that have all impacted it. This morning, Minister Berry shared some of the challenges of delivering this program. As a government, we need to honestly assess the impacts of the program where it has fallen short and make sure that, moving forward, we do so much better.

The ultimate questions raised by Mr Parton's motion and Mr Davis's amendments are: what is the ACT government doing to respond to the very real challenges that the growing and renewing program has faced; is the ACT's public housing supply meeting demand; and what are the new strategies that we need to put in place to get to the place where everyone does have a decent place to call home? The calls in the motion for six-monthly updates of public housing stock and progress of the growing and renewing program are an opportunity for more transparency and accountability to the public about how the government is performing against its own public housing targets. These updates would provide the information needed to assess existing policy and consider new policy options as necessary.

I recognise that, across the chamber, there is a range of perspectives on how we meet housing needs across the community. As my colleague Mr Davis has articulated, in order to deal with this housing crisis, we need to do everything and do it all at once. We need to prioritise for the good of our ACT community by providing more public housing, meeting the agreed target for housing supply, and committing to an approach to housing that is centred on the wellbeing of current and future tenants.

The ACT Greens will continue to call for significantly more direct investment in public housing, both at federal and local levels. We thank Mr Parton for the motion and Mr Davis for his amendments. I provide my support to the motion. Thank you.

**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) (3.39): I would like to thank Mr Parton for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. It has been an interesting experience over the last few years in this place to actually have people supporting public housing. In the past, I felt that I was the only person in this place who was supporting public housing tenants and the building of new and better public housing homes. Mr Parton, it almost feels like the Greens and the Canberra Liberals are colluding again with regard to these kinds of motions, just like the old days!

Labor will be supporting this motion, and the proposed amendment by Mr Davis will not be opposed either. As members will know, I provided a ministerial statement in the Assembly today to update members on the work that the government is doing to respond to the ombudsman's report. This work is important. There is no denying that it is hard work. It is about better understanding and empathising with tenants in our public housing system. It is very important work and we are not shying away from that.

Mr Parton, in your speech you referred to not properly understanding the growing and renewal program. You have been offered a brief. I offer again, today, to take you through the growing and renewal program and exactly what is on the table. However, obviously I am very happy to provide information every six months, or however often, and to provide you, Mr Parton, with briefs on the program and where it is up to at any time, as I would on any subject. I have always been open to offering those opportunities to you with regard to individual tenants or the program more fully.

There is no doubt—and everybody knows this—that Canberra's population is growing. While we have the highest proportion of public housing in the country and we should continue to be proud of that, we know that the need for public housing in our community, as in every other community, is increasing. It is right to say that everybody deserves a place to call home. Everybody deserves to have a decent place to call home. Public housing provides that home for many people in our community. Public housing represents an opportunity for a fair crack of happiness for people who do not have the same kinds of choices or opportunities as the rest of us. That is why we need to continue to invest in more public housing, and that is what this ACT government has been doing.

But our ambition is for more than just growing the public housing stock. We also want to improve the quality of public housing homes. It is untenable for us in this place to suggest that public housing tenants should live in substandard properties that are expensive to heat and cool and are not sustainable or accessible. Many of our Canberra public homes are aging. They are not accessible. They are not comfortable. They are expensive to heat and cool. Public housing tenants and those on the wait list deserve a decent place to call home, just like the rest of us. That is why we are

developing properties and selling off some of our end-of-life properties. This has been a cornerstone of the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program.

I feel I have always been transparent about the complexities of this program. I know that has not always been met with applause by everybody—it is a complex program—but I have never kept that a secret. I have always been honest about how difficult it is to deliver the program, as I was during the negotiations for the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement, and I am today. It is still proving to be the case that it is a complex program and it is difficult to achieve. However, that does not mean that we are not trying to do everything that we possibly can to make sure that we are building more homes and better homes for public housing tenants.

This program was always going to involve fluctuations in the public housing stock numbers, because we are knocking down older, unsuitable and no longer fit-for-purpose properties to build more. The numbers go down before they go up. I want to explain that more simply. The growing and renewal program has two parts: growth and renewal. The first part is 400 additional dwellings. That is the 400 in the PAGA. The second part is the renewal. In that part, we are redeveloping existing properties to end up with 1,000 new properties—more sustainable properties that meet the needs of our tenants, those on the waiting list and those into the future.

We are delivering both of these programs at the same time. What this means is that, while the government is on track to deliver the 400 additional properties by 2025, the public housing stock will not increase by 400 immediately. However, as I said, we have not taken our foot off the pedal. We are leaving no stone unturned. We are investigating ways in which we can pull back the program and recover some of the time that we have lost as a result of the circumstances that I have identified time and time again, so that we are in a situation where we can perhaps make some improvements and build more and better public housing.

That does not mean that we will be sitting back, naval gazing, wringing our hands or just saying we need to build more. We are actually going to do it. We know that increasing public housing in the ACT is a complex issue, but we are onto it and we are up to it. I am pleased to talk to this motion today so that I can provide even more regular updates to the Assembly about the program, where we are up to, and the different kinds of initiatives and innovative solutions that we are coming up with in order to ensure that every person in the ACT that needs a home can get one in our public housing stock.

We have experience and we have the knowledge and the partners in our community in order to use their strengths and come up with innovative ideas, just like we did through COVID when I worked with the CatholicCare to implement the Axial Housing program to get rough sleepers off the street and into homes with wraparound supports. Again with CatholicCare, we opened MacKillop House to provide housing to women and their families, as well as the Winter Lodge at Ainslie Village to get people into a safe place that is warm at night, and then provide them with opportunities to get in other kinds of housing, whether that is community, social or public housing.

In those kinds of innovative ways, we are working together with community stakeholders to find different ways to provide housing across the ACT, but particularly public housing. We have more funding and support from the federal government than we have ever had before, as I said earlier, and we are going to use that funding in a way that actually makes a difference to public housing and to build more and better public housing.

For me, this is not about a political quick win. Of course, it is great to be able to celebrate when we do achieve outcomes like the public housing that has been built in Calwell, and we will continue to do that as public housing is built, because people on the wait list and those in our existing public housing deserve the hope that one day they will be in a home of their own that will meet their needs, and I am determined to ensure that will be the case.

We are looking after today's Canberrans and we are preparing for the future generations. We chose this path on our growing and renewal program, not because it is easy but because it is the right thing to do. We are playing a long game, but we know that we need initiatives up-front and now for innovative ways to provide better homes, build homes, purchase homes, and redevelop and renew homes, to make sure that everybody gets a decent home that they can live in, and that they get a fair crack at happiness, as every one of us deserves.

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (3.47): We will be supporting the amendments by Mr Davis. One of the great fears that I had in bringing forward this motion today, Assistant Speaker Pettersson—and I know you will fully understand this; I am being honest with you—was that I was giving yet another platform for a Johnathan Davis performance! But, in the end, Mr Davis's contribution was quite sensible, and that is good. We had already discussed his amendments, and they have certainly been rolled out in exactly the way that he and his office outlined them to us, and we are extremely supportive of those amendments. I am often somewhat troubled by Mr Davis's contributions in this place, but today I am most pleased to have his support, and the grudging support from Ms Berry.

We do not get many motions up in this place. The hardbound copies of *Hansard* in my office are littered with the remnants of really solid Liberal motions that were never seriously considered by our progressive friends on the other side—not because the motions were without merit but often just because they were brought to the chamber by us. In my seven years here, I could easily count on my available digits how many motions I have managed to get up in a largely unamended state, so it is quite pleasing to get a motion up, particularly in such an important space. It is a really important space.

I take my role as the shadow minister for housing very seriously, and the biggest reason for that is the people that I have met in the role. I have sat, face to face, with hundreds of public housing tenants across the seven years. I have listened to their grievances. Where possible, I have offered words of support. I have advocated on their behalf and fought as hard as I could to bring about positive outcomes for them. During that work, I have come to understand that the role of shadow minister for

housing is desperately important, because this is a portfolio space which affects people's lives 24/7. I have the transport portfolio, and transport is pretty important, but, if you look at public transport, by and large, people who are using public transport might be on it for 20 minutes at the start of the day and 20 minutes at the end of the day. Aside from those times, they do not even really give it much thought.

When it comes to housing, the place where you live forms such a large part of the definition of who you are. It is where your dogs run around; it is where you put your shoes under the bed; it is where you prepare the food that you love; it is where memories are created. It is so desperately important. It is the sort of matter that Mr Davis mentioned in his speech, in terms of why it is so important. I guess we are saying the same thing in a different way.

I do not doubt for a moment that Ms Berry also takes those sentiments to heart. This is just a case of myself and the rest of the Assembly urging Ms Berry to do better, at least in the delivery of information regarding how this program is going. I thank members for their contributions. It pleases me that sometimes we can all get along.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **Schools—canteen facility**

**MR DAVIS** (Brindabella) (3.52): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) nutritious food supports children and young people's health and wellbeing, academic achievement and brain development;
- (b) childhood is a formative time for the development of healthy eating habits and lifestyles;
- (c) ACT Health's Preventative Health Plan 2020-25 highlights that food choices are influenced by our environment, including schools, and chronic disease prevention includes reducing children's unhealthy food consumption levels;
- (d) research estimates that up to one-third of a student's daily energy intake is consumed at school and can total up to 2,400 lunches over 12 years of schooling;
- (e) responsibility for enabling children and young people's healthy eating habits while at school falls primarily on parents and carers, and is supported by teachers, school canteens, free school meal programs and paid meal programs;
- (f) the ACT Government is piloting a free Meals in Schools program across five ACT public schools to ensure the program is designed to best meet the needs of individual school communities; and



- (g) canteens play a role in:
  - (i) ensuring children and young people have food to eat at school;
  - (ii) influencing children and young people's food choices;
  - (iii) supporting equity of health and wellbeing in children and young people;
  - (iv) supporting parents and carers by providing additional meals for their children; and
  - (v) connecting schools with local communities;
- (2) further notes that:
  - (a) 31 ACT public schools do not have canteens;
  - (b) 42 percent of ACT public schools without canteens are in Tuggeranong;
  - (c) the establishment and management of canteens at ACT schools is at the discretion of individual schools and can be delivered by school management, Parents and Citizens Associations/Parent and Friends Associations, or outsourced to private businesses:
    - (i) the ACT Government does not provide any financial support through annual budgets to help schools or local communities establish or operate canteens;
  - (d) equity challenges exist for school communities striving to deliver financially sustainable canteens while also prioritising healthy food choices:
    - (i) many canteen operations are dependent on volunteered time and expertise of school communities, which can be highly variable between communities; and
    - (ii) some school canteens are expected by school management to generate profits, while canteens at wealthier schools can operate at a loss;
  - (e) public school canteen menus are expected to comply with the ACT Public School Food and Drink Policy, national guidelines that classify foods according to a nutrition content traffic light system ('green', 'amber', and 'red' foods), and prioritise the availability of healthy foods:
    - (i) research shows that foods classified as healthy ('green' foods vs 'amber' and 'red' foods) under national guidelines are more expensive for canteens than unhealthy options;
  - (f) the ACT Government, through the 2023-24 ACT Budget, has reinstated funding for free annual menu assessments for ACT public school canteens in line with the *ACT Public School Food and Drink Policy*; and
  - (g) research has revealed potential trade-offs for school canteens between prioritising healthy food choices, the capacity and capability of volunteer staff, and the financial viability of operating canteens as a small business; and

- (3) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) conduct an audit of the kitchen and canteen facilities at every ACT public school;
  - (b) enshrine an agreed standard for school canteen facilities in the Education Directorate Infrastructure Specifications, which would inform future ACT Government infrastructure upgrades in ACT public schools where necessary;
  - (c) consult with school communities, the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Association, the Australian Education Union and the ACT Principals' Association to investigate implementing a policy that would provide every ACT public school with an operational school canteen;
  - (d) reinstate free annual menu assessments for ACT public school canteens, funded in the 2023-24 ACT Budget, by the middle of 2024 to ensure that every ACT public school is providing children and young people food and drink options that align with the national guidelines and the *ACT Public School Food and Drink Policy*; and
  - (e) report back on all work completed as a result of this motion to the Assembly, including tabling the kitchen and canteen facilities audit, by the last sitting day in June 2024.

Food, and indeed eating food, is an essential part of life. Nutritious, high-quality food provides for good physical and mental health, a clean environment and sustainable communities. Education is inseparable from these goals and is critical to good health, while, conversely, childhood health and nutrition are key determinants in education outcomes. Poor health and malnutrition often intersect with other factors that influence access to education, such as poverty and food insecurity.

The building blocks for healthy eating habits and lifestyles must start from childhood, and we all know that children spend a huge portion of their formative years in the school environment. It is understandable, then, that the World Health Organization has identified schools as an important environment to promote healthy eating and good nutrition. School can help address the social determinants of health and meet the needs of disadvantaged learners.

Research estimates that up to one third of a child's daily energy intake is consumed at school. This can total up to 2,400 lunches over 12 years of schooling. As the UN World Food Programme says, we so often invest in learning but not in the learner. Investing in feeding children healthy food can change that. This understanding is reflected in our own national strategies, including the National Preventative Health Strategy and the National Obesity Strategy. Our own ACT Preventative Health Plan highlights that food choices are influenced by our environment, including schools, and chronic disease prevention includes reducing children's unhealthy food consumption levels.

Many other countries have formalised the connection between schools, healthy foods and healthy lifestyles, with government support to implement widespread school meal programs that prioritise nutritious foods. In many Japanese schools, teaching kids about healthy food and cooking takes place not by serving them meals but, instead, by

kids serving them to one another. Students take turns in cooking and serving meals for their peers and cleaning up afterwards, using the practice as an opportunity to learn healthy eating habits and food etiquette. In Brazil, schools are required to serve healthy lunches with a portion of the ingredients sourced from their local farmers. In 2009, school meals were expanded to all schools, catering to more than 40 million children.

In England, more than two million children receive free meals at school—almost one-quarter of public school students. Ireland, Scotland and Wales also have extensive school meal programs, most of which are widely available in the first few years of schooling. They are means tested for eligibility or tied to the receipt of other income or concession support for students in higher years. Even back in the 90s, some UK schools used smartcard programs to incentivise better food choices at school, with healthier choices being rewarded with points towards things like free stationary vouchers.

The widely known campaigns of Jamie Oliver in the UK since the mid-2000s to improve nutritional quality of school lunches which successfully increased government funding for school meals, implemented basic meal nutrition standards and ensured food education was part of the school curriculum. Despite the success of these campaigns, studies show that further improvement is still needed. Recent research that surveyed more than 3,300 lunches in UK primary and secondary schools found that they were overwhelmingly filled with ultra processed foods. Ultra processed foods made up 82 per cent of energy content in home packed lunches and 64 per cent in school meals. The health profile of foods eaten at school declined as students got older, because more unhealthy food was served in secondary schools. A key challenge raised by schools involved in the survey was that funding and support from government had not increased over time and that schools were being driven to serving cheaper and healthier foods.

I am extremely pleased that the ACT government is currently piloting a free school meal program in five ACT public schools, including two in my electorate: Richardson Primary and Gilmore Primary. We have a huge range of international examples to look up to, and I am very much looking forward to seeing the results of this pilot and the hopeful expansion of this program to all ACT public schools someday.

Until then, food still plays a prominent role in the school day for children, and our school canteens have huge potential for improvements to help support students' healthy lifestyles. Responsibility for enabling children and young people's healthy eating habits while at school, both in the ACT and in Australia more broadly, falls primarily on parents and students' carers, but it is also supported by teachers, school canteens and initiatives like free school meals and paid meal programs.

Parents and carers have huge pressures on them to provide the best lives for their kids. On top of the mental load of working, other caring responsibilities and dealing with the current cost-of-living crisis, it is a privilege to have some spare time to go above and beyond through regular, ongoing involvement in the school community, volunteering time to work at the school canteen or preparing nutritionally balanced meals for kids' school lunches five days a week.

For parents and carers who have taken a second job or are doing more overtime to pay their rising rent, medical bills and the like, making those meals might be the thing that they just cannot handle on a particular day. I know that, for my parents at least, a few gold coins sticky-taped to a brown paper bag was the easiest way to ensure that I did not go hungry at school. But for many a few spare coins are just as hard to come by, if not even harder than finding the spare time. An estimated 1.2 million Australian children were living in food insecure households in 2021. We know that food consumption or the lack thereof can have huge effects on children at school, including negatively impacting attendance, concentration, their academic performance and their behaviour in the classroom.

I do not want any parent or carer to feel overwhelmed by the stress of feeding their children or risking them being hungry simply because their school does not have a canteen. While I want to strive for a vision where every student is provided nutritionally balanced meals in school, at a bare minimum we should strive for every ACT public school to have a good-quality canteen that offers affordable healthy food for students. Unfortunately, that is not currently the case.

There are currently 31 ACT public schools that do not have canteens. This simply is not good enough. What is worse is that 42 per cent of those schools are in my electorate of Brindabella. My constituents—parents, carers and students—are disproportionately impacted, and I will not accept the risk that their health and education futures are less than that of people living in other parts of the ACT. I would be particularly devastated to find out that anybody in my community had chosen to send their child to an expensive private school because their canteen facilities or meal programs made them more attractive than the great ACT public schools.

Establishing and managing canteens is at the discretion of individual public schools and can be delivered by school management or community groups like parents and carers or parents and friends councils, or it can be outsourced to private for-profit businesses. Schools are left to their own devices to manage their budgets and what they prioritise, and the ACT government does not provide any financial support to help schools or local communities establish and operate canteens, outside of their standard school resourcing budget.

Schools that do not pay for canteen operators and staff tend to rely heavily on their local P&C group to run the canteen with volunteer hours and expertise. Parent involvement in education and school activities such as canteens is always a goal and will deliver better academic outcomes for students, but communities will vary in their ability to recruit and retain a volunteer workforce from within their school community.

An independent review of ACT school canteens showed that P&C canteen models experienced many challenges. Many canteens assessed required fundraisers or other subsidies to make their canteen financially sustainable. Most struggled to make a profit, even though some canteens are expected to do that; extra funding can supplement spending in other school areas like teaching and learning.

With constrained budgets and a tightly packed curriculum, I want to make it absolutely clear that I do not expect principals or teachers to dip into their existing

funding allocations to put money towards canteens, nor do I want to add anything on to teachers' already burdensome workloads. If additional expectations are being placed on schools, we must resource them adequately in alignment with these expectations. Leadership from the Education Directorate is needed.

While I want every public school to have a great canteen, we would be doing our communities a disservice if we stopped our ambitions there. Canteens can help make sure that no child ever goes hungry at school. Any food is better than no food, but healthy, nutritionally balanced meals are better than processed fast food.

Food and drinks served in ACT public school canteens fall under both the ACT Public School Food and Drink Policy and the national guidelines that classify foods according to a nutritional content traffic-light system. "Green" foods are considered healthy and should be prioritised, compared to "amber" foods that have a low nutritional content. "Red" foods should not be served in canteens. Unfortunately, challenges in operating sustainable canteen models can influence the types of foods that are procured and made available in school canteens.

Many schools can find it difficult to comply with the National Healthy School Canteen Guidelines. I looked at these guidelines and I do not envy the volunteers that have to spend their time calculating the nutritional content of the recipes used or foods purchased to stock their canteen. I strongly suspect that the time and skills required to determine the traffic-light system for different foods and to cook healthy meals would be a task that many canteens would struggle to sustain. This risks encouraging greater reliance on precooked foods and unhealthier options and therefore increasing the availability those unhealthy foods for students. Many local organisations support canteens to deliver healthier meal options, including the ACT Nutrition Support Service, the Healthy Kids organisation, and the Federation of Canteens in Schools, and the P&C council has canteen fact sheets available on its website.

Unfortunately, the Select Committee on Estimates heard from the ACT Nutrition Support Service that the ACT government has not provided the free annual meal assessments that are promised in the ACT Public School Food and Drink Policy since 2021. The ACT Nutrition Support Service stepped in to provide this service in the government's absence but were understandably unable to provide it for free. It is beyond me why funding for delivering this important government service stopped a few years ago, so I welcome the minister's recommitment to delivering this service, with \$418,000 over four years included in the last ACT budget. I sincerely hope that this service would never be stopped again.

A study on school canteens in South Australia highlighted that tension often exists between the volunteer model of canteen delivery, challenges in maintaining the financial viability of the canteen and pressures to prioritise those healthier food options. Research shows that foods classified as healthy—the "green" foods under the national guidelines—are more expensive for canteens to buy and serve to students than the unhealthier options. Purchasing "green" foods can be up to 30 per cent more expensive than "amber" foods. School canteen service deliverers need significantly more support to enable them to run sustainable models without compromising the health priorities of the food that is provided.

My motion calls on the government to consult with the key school community stakeholders, the Council of Parents and Citizens, the Education Union, and the principals association to investigate policies that would provide every ACT public school with an operational canteen. Equity is core to everything I seek to do in this place, and I want equity to be ensured in those canteen facilities, both old and new, which requires the government to audit all existing kitchen and canteen facilities and then develop an agreed standard for canteens in the Education Directorate's Infrastructure Specification. My hope is that this audit and agreed understanding of what constitutes a school canteen will help inform the government in making future investment decisions and ensuring that equity is at the front of all infrastructure investments.

My calls on the government will further the work that I have done previously as a part of the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion. Last year, the committee inquired into the management of school infrastructure in the ACT. It was that inquiry that recommended that the government provide capital funding to school kitchen facilities for onsite food preparation to facilitate the ACT government's much lauded free school meals programs. The government response noted the recommendation, saying that the trial would involve consideration of school infrastructure.

I hope that food related infrastructure will be prioritised by the Education Directorate going forward and will never be a barrier to delivering nutritious food in our schools. No child should ever go hungry, no parent or carer should ever have to worry about their ability or their school's ability to provide healthy meals to their children, and no canteen service should ever have to sacrifice prioritising healthy food options for children.

When the minister for education says that every ACT public school is a great school, I categorically agree with her, but we can always aspire for better.

**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) (4.05): The government believes that helping all children to reach their potential needs to be our priority. A great education for every child is key for them to have an equal chance at a happy and successful life. But our children and young people cannot make the most of their learning opportunities without access to healthy and nutritious food. Children and young people learn best on a full stomach; that is pretty obvious.

Canteens are one option for children and young people looking to make good food choices. But not every child comes to school on a full stomach, not every child comes to school with a packed lunch; and, importantly, not every child or family can afford to have their children visit the canteen.

That is why in 2020 ACT Labor committed to trialling free breakfasts and lunches, three days a week, for students at five public schools. National and international research shows that students benefit from access to healthy and nutritious food at schools. These free meals will be available to all students in participating pilot schools, because no student should feel stigmatised for accessing a free meal.

Like any good policy, things work best when the community is engaged in program design and delivery. The ACT government is working in collaboration with school communities, including parents and citizens associations, to design and deliver this pilot. Teachers, students, parents and carers are being engaged to ensure that the pilot meets the needs of their particular student community. Subject to procurement processes, it is anticipated that the meals services will commence at some schools in term 4, and in early 2024 in the remaining schools.

We know that canteens are highly valued in the schools where they currently operate. I am sure members of the Assembly have fond memories of their favourite school tuckshop orders. But it is probably fair to say that canteens have changed a bit and upped their nutrition game since many members of this Assembly were at school. Canteens now play an active role in supporting children and young people to live healthy lifestyles and make positive food choices.

In ACT public schools, canteens follow the National Healthy School Canteen Guidelines and ACT Public School Food and Drink Policy. These policies ensure that our children and young people have access to healthy food and drinks that support their learning and wellbeing.

An important part of these policies is annual canteen menu assessments, to ensure that canteen menus comply with the nutritional content safety traffic light system of green, amber and red foods. The ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations are strong advocates for public education and for P&Cs. When they drew our attention to the fact that free annual canteen menu assessments ceased at the end of 2021, we listened. They told us how valued this trusted, independent and free support for canteens was, particularly for volunteer-run P&C canteens. We agreed that it should not be up to individual school canteens, which are often run by volunteers and often not even make a profit to find the money to fund these menu assessments themselves. As I said, we listened, and we acted. In this year's budget the government reinstated funding to enable school canteens to access these independent annual menu assessments for free.

This government recognises the invaluable role that P&Cs play in supporting much-valued school functions like school canteens. We want to support them to ensure that children and young people continue to benefit from access to healthy and nutritious food options at school.

We all know that canteens are a valued community service, but they often cannot run without the valuable volunteer support. Our community has changed; sourcing volunteers from parents and families is much more difficult, with all parents and carers now working, whereas in my day there was often one parent managing the house and volunteering at the school. That simply is not the case anymore and there are not those options.

I know from my own conversations, from my own experience as a parent, and from conversations with the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations and parents, that some schools are really struggling to find volunteers to run their canteens. To put it simply, running a canteen is hard work.

I believe in working with stakeholders to properly understand the issues that they are facing and responding to those concerns appropriately. The government will continue to work with school communities, the ACT P&C council, the ACT Principals Association and unions over the coming months to understand the difficulties faced in sustaining a viable school canteen.

This government is committed to ensuring that every child and young person has the best possible access to learning, no matter their background or circumstances. We know equitable access to health and nutritious food is a key enabler. We will deliver free meals in schools to ensure that those children who cannot afford to visit a school canteen do not have to learn on an empty stomach.

We are reinstating the free annual menu assessments to ensure that children and young people have access to positive food choices at school and will listen carefully to stakeholders to understand what more can be done to support our valued school canteens.

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (4.11): The Canberra Liberals will be supporting this motion. As the motion states, nutrition obviously plays a vitally important role in developing our children. An article by the Royal Australasian College of Physicians entitled “Food for thought: The effect of school canteen food on children’s health” states:

What children eat affects not only their physical health but also their mental development, mood and learning capabilities. And habits that are built at a young age become a lifestyle well into adulthood ...

Parents have a tremendous responsibility in setting the right examples ... But children spend a large part of the day at school when they are most active, learning from their educators, engaging with their peers, and consuming food that is available to them.

The motion speaks of the importance of the national standards. According to the RACP, New South Wales school canteens are required to implement the New South Wales Healthy School Canteen Strategy. In Victoria, Queensland, Australian Capital Territory, Northern Territory, Western Australia and South Australia, school canteens use a traffic light system. In the ACT all school canteens need to follow the National Healthy School Canteen Guidelines and have a food safety supervisor who oversees canteen hygiene. The canteen staff are required to undergo nationally recognised training. We support these initiatives and would like to see them expanded. This motion would assist that.

The motion also talks about some clear disparities in the current system. Many school canteens in the ACT are excellent but, concerningly, many schools do not have a canteen at all. As the motion points out, it seems Tuggeranong in particular is missing out yet again.

We support the call for a comprehensive audit and plan to be developed and for a report to be made, but we need to look at why we need this motion. The current system essentially means school canteens are run by well-meaning school and parent



groups—and well done to all of those that do that. We recognise the importance and benefits of good nutrition for our children, yet far too many schools do not offer anything at all. None of them receive funding or support from the government.

The question is: why has the government taken such a hands-off approach? Some of that has to be due to the dearth of funding for schools across the board. As we discussed at question time today, in the most recent round of infrastructure funding, the PSIRP funding, more than 60 schools submitted applications for over 320 individual infrastructure projects, yet only 37 schools received funding; and, of the 320 individual projects for which support was asked, only 51 projects received additional funding. Hundreds of schools are missing out on infrastructure programs that they are asking for. In fact, less than 20 per cent are actually getting the funding to support the infrastructure programs that they are looking for. Obviously, there is more to canteens than just infrastructure, but it is an important component and speaks to this government's priorities.

When you look at the list of projects that did get funding, it shows just how little they are receiving. One school received a fence; another got LED lighting. If you look at the list of funding, a lot of it is just routine maintenance. It is not actually enhancing or developing those schools; it is just maintaining them. It is the sort of maintenance that should be an ongoing responsibility of this government.

That goes to the core problem with schools across Canberra. Our schools are not getting enough funding to keep up, let alone get ahead. New schools are often already full by the time they are built, and our old schools—many of them are now decades old—are under-capacity and do not have enough space. We know that lots of school spaces like libraries, teaching spaces and staff spaces are being taken up as classrooms.

Compare that to the funding for the tram, Mr Deputy Speaker, because all tracks lead to the tram. According to Infrastructure Partnerships Australia, this government signed a contract recently, last year, for \$181 million to deliver and operate five additional light rail vehicles. Wow! \$181 million for light rail vehicles. That is on top of the \$218 million provided by the commonwealth, and an increase of \$85 million on previous announcements.

Instead of spending that money—and we have billions and billions to come for phase 2A and phase 2B—just imagine, Mr Davis, what you could do for schools in Tuggeranong. Instead of wasting all of your money on your shiny trams—billions and billions of dollars on a tram—what could you do for schools in Tuggeranong, Mr Deputy Speaker? Imagine the difference that would make to kids down your way.

We do support the motion as it is presented. I think that it is very important, as we have these debates in here, that they are not just empty debates, because we are spending all of our money on other priorities that are sucking the life out of things like our schools and our health system. We should think about where our priorities lie. Do we want to have teachers or trams as a priority? Is it about school lunches or is it about light rail?

I would suggest that, although we support this motion today, this is a government that is abjectly failing to deliver. I think Mr Davis is acknowledging that it is failing to

deliver. It is not delivering on the last motion, on housing, as well. Why is that, Mr Deputy Speaker? I will tell you why. It is because this government is spending, and plans to spend, every spare available dollar on trams instead of teachers!

**MS DAVIDSON** (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health, Minister for Mental Health and Minister for Veterans and Seniors) (4.17): Eating well is a key part of learning well. It helps you to stay focused in the classroom. Mr Hanson was right when he was talking about the impact of good food on mental health as well. You are more likely to feel irritable if you are hungry, and we do not want students to be “hangry” in the classroom.

We know that a growing proportion of Canberra households are feeling those cost of living pressures and they do not have the household budget for food that they used to have. A 2019 report by ACTCOSS, *Food security, food assistance and the affordability of healthy food in Canberra*, found that 3.6 per cent of Canberrans were living in a household that, in the past 12 months, had run out of food and had not been able to afford to buy more. That is about half of all people who are living in poverty in Canberra, and it demonstrates the direct relationship between poverty and food security.

The Women’s Health Matters 2018 report on physical activity and healthy eating said that women accessing food relief services for their household include people with insecure work, people with chronic health conditions and people who do not have a permanent resident visa. We know that people with these pressures are living everywhere in the ACT, but we also know that there is a higher proportion of people with these pressures in parts of Canberra like west Belconnen and Tuggeranong, and that is where these kids will be going to school.

Income support payment rates have a direct relationship with people’s ability to eat well. We saw a massive increase in calls for food relief help from Canberra households during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, when the former Liberal federal government cut the coronavirus supplement and dropped JobSeeker back below the Henderson poverty line, where it still is.

We are also seeing that the demand for food relief has continued to increase in 2023 as a result of inflation and cost of living; and the biggest cost of living in this city is housing, but it is not the only cost. Food prices are impacted by supply chains, with the cost of freight having risen by more than 150 per cent.

This government has been working with a network of community sector food relief providers to strengthen food relief in the ACT long term. There is a strong network of community-led local food pantries, and that means people will have multiple access points for food relief geographically, as well as opening days and times. It also strengthens links between food relief and other social services and supports that people might need. I will talk about that work in more detail during the debate on the budget bills.

Food security and eating well are something that our wider community wants to be involved in. We saw it in the establishment of mutual aid groups and street pantries, in volunteers joining efforts to put food on the table during the COVID quarantine, and

every day in the way we create connection in our communities by sharing meals together and in the really great levels of volunteering in so many community-run canteens within our public schools.

Mr Davis's calls for better support for school canteens are important. They support our caring, connected school communities in prioritising healthy eating and good nutrition, and I commend the motion. But I would add that we also need the federal government to raise the rate for income support—\$88 a day, at minimum; a \$4 a day increase is not even remotely close to enough. Ditch the stage 3 tax cuts. We need the federal Labor political party to work with the Australian Greens as a matter of urgency to increase public housing supply. The current HAFF bill will not meet the scale of Australia's very real housing crisis. We need the federal government to fund public housing directly, as they do for education and health, not from investment fund returns. And let us end unlimited rent increases and support renters to have housing security in every city of Australia. I commend Mr Davis's motion.

**MR DAVIS** (Brindabella) (4.22), in reply: Before I start my closing remarks, can I point out that I love an interjection as much as the next person, and I am fond of them. But Ms Berry and Mr Hanson had a full conversation during the entirety of Minister Davidson's speech. That is just not on. It was such a difficulty to even hear Minister Davidson speak. We should all focus on the matter at hand, which is not light rail, as Mr Hanson would like it to be; it is school canteens.

I am pleased that it appears that this motion will be passed today. I am pleased that all three political parties and all 25 members agree that every school needs a great school canteen. I am pleased to see a shared awareness across the Assembly that, while this might seem niche and specific, in the context of the broader education system, homing in on canteens shines a light on the challenges in achieving equity.

I do not think there is anybody in this place—indeed in the government, and especially not the minister—who wants to see an inequitable public school system, but the reality is that it is inequitable. It is inequitable because what you get at ACT public school A might be different from what you get at ACT public school B. School canteens are a good example of that. I note that Mr Gentleman is in the chamber. I am sure he shares my concern that, of the 31 public schools that do not have a school canteen, 42 per cent of them are in Brindabella, in Tuggeranong. That is an inequitable outcome.

I am hypothesising a little bit here, Mr Deputy Speaker, but given that we know so many of our school canteens rely so heavily on the passionate volunteer commitment by parents, it suggests to me that families in Tuggeranong, in particular, are struggling to find that free time in the day. There are hardworking families, two-parent families, with both in the workforce, and some are struggling to find the time early in the morning or late the night before to pack and send their kids to school with a healthy lunch. Others are certainly challenged to find the free time in their incredibly busy working week to commit five, six, seven or eight hours to their P&C and subsequently to their school canteen.

It is reminiscent of an example I raised with Education officials in a recent public hearing into the future of school infrastructure. I highlighted that members of the

committee visited a number of public school campuses across the ACT. We visited one fantastic public school that were incredibly proud of themselves—and so they should be—showing off a range of fantastic new infrastructure pieces they had in their school. A kitchen garden was one example; there was a shade sail over their playground and new bitumen across their basketball courts. They explained to me that it was because they had such an active P&C. Many members of their P&C are former or current public servants—“bureaucratically literate”, they described them as, to me. I have spent three years in this place, Mr Deputy Speaker, and I am still not bureaucratically literate. I will learn to speak fluent acronym in time. I will need a second term for that, I am sure.

In these school communities, they were challenged. They knew where to find grants. They knew how to write grants so that they would win grants. I do not begrudge any ACT public school for shaking the money tree and grabbing every note that falls out of it, because I want everything that is coming for our public schools. But that situation creates an inequity, in and of itself, because it puts the increased burden on the teachers and the school leaders in communities with smaller, inactive or indeed less bureaucratically literate P&Cs.

That means they do not know where to find the grants, they do not apply for the grants, and their schools miss out. It means they do not have the active parent community required to run a school canteen, let alone a school canteen that provides healthy food options.

Indeed, why I can see that this is impacting my constituents disproportionately is that the government, rightly so, is spending an awful lot of money to build wonderful schools in our newer suburbs. I recently had the pleasure of attending the Canberra Roller Derby League with Minister Davidson at the Evelyn Scott School. For anyone who has not seen those school facilities, go out and have a look. That is a whizz-bang school that would put many expensive private schools to shame. That is a schmick campus.

Equally, the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion visited schools interstate, public and private, and concluded our visits at the Throsby School. My assessment is that we are building schmicker schools here than other jurisdictions around the country. Throsby is an impressive school campus. The parents, teachers and students at Throsby should be really proud of themselves.

In our electorate, Mr Deputy Speaker, we have many older school campuses. Many are comparable to the stock in the public housing portfolio that we have determined have reached the end of their natural life, thus the justification to sell them or demolish them.

This is putting a disproportionately high burden on Tuggeranong schools to dip into their per-head-of-pupil funding to maintain and sustain infrastructure. That is then money that is taken away from teaching and learning and invested in infrastructure in the school, like school canteens.

To compound that burden on Tuggeranong schools in particular, we have schools in our electorate, Mr Deputy Speaker, that are operating at 50 per cent of their capacity.

On average, Tuggeranong schools operate at about 70 per cent of their capacity. Of course, when you have schools that are overrun with students, particularly in Gungahlin, it is right that the government invests in building those schools and expanding those schools, particularly when so many families are choosing a great ACT public education. But there is only so much money in the money tree, and that means Tuggeranong schools with a smaller amount of students and an ageing infrastructure have this compounded disadvantage in maintaining their school buildings and maintaining the viability of their programs, including their school canteens.

If we are going to be really serious about equity, the department must have oversight and understanding of where public schools are accessing additional funding outside their per-head-of-pupil funding arrangements. The department must balance that when making additional infrastructure investments in other public schools.

For example, if school A has received \$100,000 in the last 10 years from EPSDD for a bunch of environmental projects, maybe the education department should know about that and offset that by additionally resourcing the school that has not, when the funding comes up. That is an equitable outcome.

An equitable outcome is every school having a school canteen. With the greatest of respect to the tremendous parents who work so hard to provide viable school canteens in their school communities, I do not believe that the parents at school community A, who work hard to maintain a viable school canteen, would begrudge this government providing additional support to school B, that does not have a school canteen, so that they can have one as well. I do not believe that the parents at school A want to see the kids at school B miss out, either. I believe that, on the whole, the Canberra community holds the value of equity dearly.

In order to do that, we have to go back to first principles, and that is what this motion calls on the government to do. First of all, it should audit the kitchen and canteen facilities in every ACT public school. It should get a really clear understanding of what we are working with. There should be an agreed understanding across the education department and with the community about exactly what we understand a school canteen to be.

The reason why that is so important is that, in some of our you-beaut, schmick schools on the north side, their school canteen is an industrial-strength kitchen that, again, I stress, puts some elite private schools to shame, in terms of the quality of their infrastructure. In some schools, there is a pie warmer and a kitchen sink. And they are both described as a school canteen.

We need a shared understanding about what a “school canteen” means. When we understand the facilities that we are working with and we have an agreed understanding of what a school canteen is, we can do that work consulting with the necessary communities, the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Association, the Australian Education Union ACT branch and the ACT Principals Association, so that that work can inform the government’s decision-making on where to spend its money on infrastructure.

I would hazard a guess, based on my understanding, the work required to complete this motion, my deep engagement with the stakeholders involved and my understanding as a local member for Tuggeranong about exactly what the requirements are in Tuggeranong schools, that such an audit and such an agreed standard would see substantially increased investment in school infrastructure and facilities in Tuggeranong. As the local member for Brindabella, I welcome that future investment.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## **Appropriation Bill 2023-2024**

[Cognate bill:

Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2023-2024]

Debate resumed from 29 June 2023, on motion by **Mr Barr**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

**MR DEPUTY 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.

**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) (4.32): I thank everybody for their contributions to the in-principle stage and wish that the Appropriation Bill be passed by the Assembly, after debate.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

### **Detail stage**

**MR DEPUTY 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 by each part, consisting of net cost of outputs, capital injection and payments on behalf of the territory. Is this the wish of the Assembly? That being the case, 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.

Education Directorate—Part 1.1.

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (4.34): Mr Deputy Speaker, we have heard a lot from the government about what is in the budget for the education system. I am here to highlight what is not in the budget. I am here to talk about the incredible stress put on the system because of the decisions made by this minister and by this government. I am here to talk about the schools that have not seen a major upgrade in decades. I am here to talk about the violence and the impact it has had on our entire community. I am here to talk about the teachers—the teachers who give so much yet get so very little from this government. It is the teachers who build this system. It is the teachers who are being let down.

The first failure of the decisions of this government is the incredible workload placed on teachers. This has been addressed many times by many teachers and by the Australian Education Union. In their survey they found the following:

97% of the full-time teaching workforce who completed the survey work unpaid overtime during any typical week.

When asked to describe their workload, 78% of respondents said it ranged between ‘difficult’ to ‘extremely difficult’ to meet expectations.

70% of school principal respondents gave answers ranging from ‘very difficult’ to ‘extremely difficult’.

These are not unique results. These results are consistent with surveys and research conducted by other bodies, including the Monash University Faculty of Education, as well as other branches of the AEU and the government’s own Teacher Shortage Taskforce final report.

The really compelling stories are not in the statistics; they are in the statements given by the teachers. I will share one from an AEU member, from the AEU report, who said:

I am an experienced, passionate and capable teacher. I am overworked.

I am broken and I am exhausted and ready to leave the profession if something does not change soon. I love teaching; however the culmination of the current staffing shortage, massive class sizes from split classes and missed planning time has got me drowning without a lifeline.

Most days I go home crying from the pressure I am under and my personal life is suffering as well as my mental and physical health.

Every single day we have been required to fulfil duties that are outside our core roles—whether it is exceeding class sizes to cover the vast staff shortages, preparing extra work for split children, having too many children in our classrooms for the physical space density, having release and student support programs collapsed due to shortages, having to sit with sick children sometimes an hour after phone calls were made for them to go home—the list goes on. The staff that remain at school are mentally and physically exhausted.

The pressures described by that teacher are pressures that result from this government's decisions. That fact was acknowledged in the Teacher Shortage Taskforce final report, which states:

EDU and AEU acknowledge that teacher and school leader workload is a critical issue that needs to be addressed ...

High emotional demands and role overload has been identified as an area of improvement ...

These pressures are not just the pressures of teaching; these are the pressures of being asked to do non-teaching jobs—not just administration but all the roles; teachers talk of being counsellors, financial consultants and psychologists. They are expected to take an entire community service role from one teacher position. As one teacher said, “We do not have the time to teach because we are doing the directorate's job.” I will say that again: “We do not have the time to teach because we are doing the directorate's job.”

Another area of failure is that of relief teachers. The Teacher Shortage Taskforce final report said:

The current casual relief model no longer meets the day-to-day staffing requirements in schools, and teacher absences are expected to increase ...

According to that report, the average daily casual gap—that is, the gap between teacher leave taken and casual teacher FTE engaged—was 59.7 FTE in 2019. Over the past 12 months it increased to 162 FTE a day. That indicates that, on average, on any day, relief for 162 full-time equivalent teacher absences is not being met through casual relief teachers. That is enormous. There is no relief pool. As one expert stakeholder has said, they are relying on a pool of relief teachers that does not exist.

Then there is the issue of violence. The ACT has a level and nature of violence that is simply unacceptable. We have had teachers rolling up their sleeves to show us the bruises that they received at work. The impact goes well beyond the teacher and the perpetrator; it goes into the entire classroom, where young girls witness violence against their female teacher and the perpetrator is back in class in days, if not hours.

Currently, there is no adequate or effective policy on suspensions. There is no adequate or effective process for dealing with problem students, or problem parents, before they return to school. There is no recognition that violence is directly linked to a lack of resources and support from this government. As the teacher taskforce report stated:

The AEU Survey Report showed that there is a connection between teacher shortages and workplace safety which includes safety from physical violence ...

The problems of violence are the problems of this government.

I move now to facilities and infrastructure. As we know, there is yet another inquiry into facilities and infrastructure occurring. While I will not comment on the work of that committee, we can note previous reports. The Auditor-General's report of 2019



entitled *Maintenance of ACT Government School Infrastructure* found that the implementation of the framework was impeded by weak supporting systems and processes, and that the directorate had not identified asset management objectives for its assets, nor implemented operational asset management planning. The report also found that the directorate's Infrastructure and Capital Works Branch had a rolling program of building condition assessments every three years that was scaled back in 2014. I note that there is another matter that is currently before the Integrity Commission that resulted from the previous Auditor-General's report into Campbell Primary School.

It is very instructive to look at the actual current works program. During debate on the last motion and in question time today, I went to the government's own website, which states:

The latest round opened in October 2022 for the 2023-24 PSIRP budget allocation, and more than 60 schools submitted applications for 320 individual infrastructure projects.

All proposals received were assessed using the Education Directorate's Project Prioritisation Tool.

This year 51 school projects ... will receive funding.

That is 51 out of 320 requests, and only 37 out of the 60 schools that asked for help. That means schools that need not just some sort of maintenance or a heater replaced but entire refurbishment. Teachers should not need to take over hallways for staff. They should not have to take up those spaces that are needed for libraries, for gymnasiums, for staff spaces because they do not have enough space in those schools. Infrastructure and maintenance must be improved. I think that those numbers are illustrative of this government's failure to address deteriorating infrastructure. It seems that we have endless reports being done by both the Auditor-General and also this Assembly, but the government's inaction—not addressing over 80 per cent of the requests—speaks volumes about their priorities.

Some of the most illuminating statistics come from the annual reports of schools themselves. This data is collected from the front line. I will take an example. I will not name the school, but if you look at the annual reports of any schools that are available, they will show similar results. In one report, less than half—49 per cent—of parents' opinions and ideas had been sought to make major decisions. That is a school in Belconnen. In another, 36 per cent of students said that student behaviour is well managed. Only 36 per cent! When the students were asked, "Do you think that behaviour is being well managed in the school?" only a third of students thought that it was. In another school 45 per cent said the school was well maintained. Only 45 per cent of students think that their school is well maintained! In a survey of 311 students, what did the students think? Only 23 per cent said that student behaviour was well managed. (*Second speaking period taken.*)

If you listen to Ms Berry and the government, they will give you a story. Let's get right down to the students. Ultimately, that is why we have schools: to teach students. What do they think? Only 23 per cent said that student behaviour was well managed. Less than half said the school was well maintained. Less than half said they felt safe.

How about that, Mr Deputy Speaker? This is an ACT public school. This is north of the lake. I will not identify the school, but only half of the students in that school say that they feel safe. That is a failure. There are no two ways about it. That is a failure. Less than half feel the school is maintained properly.

That is not the teachers' fault. The teachers are doing their very best—as I outlined earlier in some of those quotes—in a system that is failing them. That is in report after report taken from the front lines of our schools, not put through the spin doctors of this government. When you actually go directly to the schools to find out what the teachers, the parents and the students are saying, it is grim. No wonder all of this combined is having such an effect on student outcomes.

We understand that NAPLAN results are not as good in many areas as we would like them to be. These reports have been released. We cannot ignore them. I will quote from an article in the *Canberra Times* by Jess Del Rio. She is one of the people in our community who writes and comments a lot on what is going on in ACT schools. She said:

... one in three year 9 students aren't meeting proficiency benchmarks for reading.

... a third (or more) of our children scored in the bottom two bands in writing, grammar and numeracy. A quarter of students are falling behind in spelling. Around one in 10 students are unable to read and write at the basic level expected for a student in year 9.

... Equity Economics' analysis showed that the ACT has one of the most inequitable education systems in Australia. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are several years behind their peers, with gaps in educational attainment widening over time ... Canberra's most disadvantaged students are still being left behind.

Whether they come from less advantaged or more advantaged backgrounds, these results represent much more than numbers on a page, they represent a group of children who are leaving school with such a low level of literacy that it will impact on their wellbeing, on their mental health and their physical health, on whether they can join the labour force, get a job, and their level of income.

It is possible to help these children by taking a scientific approach with evidence-based policy and practice, to do more of what works, and less of what doesn't.

I am not proposing to get into a debate here on teaching methodology, but we do need to acknowledge those comments, and we do need to do better. There is no doubt about it. I look forward to working with those teachers and experts across the system and with the union. I had a very productive and good meeting with the union over the last couple of weeks to talk about the issues. I welcome much of the work that they are doing to support our school system.

What we do need is a bit of a reset here in the way that we are looking at our schools. They should be the best funded and best resourced in the country. According to the evidence I just outlined—from what students and teachers are saying, and from the

hundreds of projects that have been missed out and the dozens of schools that are missing out on projects—it is clear that that is not the case.

The reality is that all of that investment—all of that money on infrastructure, on teachers, on students and on literacy—is not going to happen if this government's priority is to spend billions on tram infrastructure, not school infrastructure. You really need to consider your priorities. Consider your priorities, as a government, when you are putting money into trams, not teachers. You are spending all that infrastructure money on this single, enormously expensive project, at the expense of our schools.

Let me be very clear, as the shadow education minister, that all those issues that we have identified we can address, we can fix, because we will not prioritise trams over teachers. By taking the money that we will not expend on phase 2B of the tram, we can have an enormous investment in other areas of government. I will be fighting very hard to make sure that our schools are maintained as best they can be and that we put that investment into them. We will make sure that our teachers are supported far better than they are, and that we do not see more than half the school population saying that they do not feel safe. Our priorities are pretty clear in terms of where we will head, as an opposition, if we do get into government. I outlined them in a paper, a couple of years ago now, that set out a strategy. But we could certainly resource that strategy if we were not spending money on the tram.

**MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi) (4.50):** I rise very briefly to support this government's massive investment in public education in the 2023-24 budget. This is a \$1.7 billion investment in Canberra's education system and it continues this government's commitment to public education.

Expanding Gungahlin's education infrastructure is a key feature of this budget, and it is why I have risen to speak today. Gungahlin is a young district. Roughly 30 per cent of its residents are under the age of 18. As Gungahlin continues to grow, it is important that the public education system does, too, so that it can continue to provide for the local community.

This budget invests \$114 million in building a new college for Gungahlin's senior students, located in Nicholls. This college has been called for by the community and it is so important to see it delivered in this budget. In addition, this government is building two new public high schools for Gungahlin. The new east Gungahlin high school in Kenny is almost complete. I know that the community is eagerly awaiting its opening. The second new high school will be built for north Gungahlin students and will be located in Taylor. It was an immense pleasure to join the minister recently onsite to see work progressing and inspect some of the designs. I know it will be a beautiful school. These investments mean that students in Gungahlin can enjoy well-funded local public schools all the way from kindergarten to year 12.

In addition to investing in new schools, this budget invests in early childhood education as well. From next year, all three-year-olds in the ACT will have access to one day a week of free early childhood education. Both national and international research has shown that access to universal high-quality early childhood education is one of the few proven strategies for improving outcomes for all children and provides

lifelong benefits. More than 5,000 three-year-olds will be able to enjoy early childhood education across Canberra thanks to this initiative.

I welcome these commitments to Canberra's public education system. I look forward to seeing these new schools grow in Gungahlin, and the community that goes along with them.

**MR DAVIS** (Brindabella) (4.53): I rise to speak on behalf of the ACT Greens to the budget appropriation bills, relating to the education portfolio.

The ACT Greens believe that providing a great education is a responsibility of government and it is one of the most important investments that government can make. Access to education can shape the direction of children's lives. Our schools are where our future leaders will spend a huge portion of their formative years. As I have said many times before, I am a proud public school kid, and I want every child in the ACT to look fondly on their years in our great ACT public schools.

Firstly, I would like to thank the ACT government for making the ACT's teachers the best-paid teachers in the country. We will never reach the full potential of our education outcomes without demonstrating how highly we value our teaching workforce.

This budget provides for the realisation of the most recent ACT public sector enterprise agreement, approved by the Fair Work Commission only last week, with a \$200 million investment. It provides for better pay and better-paid professional learning time for casual teachers to ensure we are valuing our current and future workforce and it provides a pathway to more sustainable workloads for teachers and for reduced face-to-face teaching hours, allowing teachers to adequately prepare for the classroom.

Importantly, credit for this outcome goes entirely to the Australian Education Union. Let this budget announcement be a reminder to all of Canberra's workers of the power of the collective struggle represented in the union movement, and let the teachers demonstrate to you why you should join your union.

These commitments are critical to ensuring teachers' working lives are sustainable and enjoyable. No work environment should force people to retire, change professions or take extended absences earlier than they would have if conditions were better. As the AEU have said, teacher working conditions are student learning conditions. Teacher shortage is a symptom of teachers being understaffed, under-resourced and under-appreciated. These conditions do lead to avoidable practices like collapsing classrooms, leading to compromised learning outcomes and a greater risk of classroom violence.

Finally, centralising school building services will support teachers to focus on teaching and learning, easing the burden of administrative and facilities management duties that are currently assigned to them. There should be no dark side to school autonomy that sees highly qualified school leaders spending their time organising building repairs and figuring out how to pay for it out of their learning budget.

I commend the ACT government for working in good faith with the AEU as representatives of all ACT public school teachers to address these issues. This budget demonstrates the ACT government's national leadership through the commitment to work with teachers to reduce workload pressures and implement the recommendations of the Teacher Shortage Task Force. Again, it is worth noting that it is the only subnational government in the country to establish such a task force, with \$39.6 million invested.

Additionally, the budget allocates \$3 million to expand the Safe at School Task Force to address safety culture in ACT public schools, which has already made seven key recommendations that have been accepted by the government.

If my praise is not clear, once again I will underline it, Mr Deputy Speaker, in the hope that someone somewhere will print it and that every working person hears it. Everything you have seen this government deliver teachers is a clear message to join your union. You have a stronger voice, and you can better advocate to government and your employer, be they government or private, for the issues that matter to you. The ACT Greens look forward to seeing the outcomes of these commitments improving teacher and learning environments in all ACT public schools.

This budget makes significant investments in education infrastructure, with an allocation of \$230 million. With our growing population, we know that new schools will need to be built and the prospect of ACT students learning in new state-of-the-art facilities excites me. Indeed, in the previous motion, Mr Deputy Speaker, I spoke about my experience in visiting some of these high-quality teaching and learning environments.

I hope that these will be modern, high-quality centres of learning that teachers want to teach in and students want to learn in. We welcome new school investments, including commitments for new Gungahlin and Molonglo Valley colleges, inner city schools like Telopea Park and North Ainslie primary, and a feasibility study for Forrest and Fraser primary schools.

While the majority of education infrastructure investment is for new schools, and rightly so, as I have stressed in my previous motion—and it bears repeating—we also need substantial ongoing additional funding commitments to upgrade and maintain high-quality infrastructure across our older schools.

The budget commits infrastructure funding for ongoing repairs and maintenance to older schools through initiatives for roof replacement, removing hazardous materials from schools, enhancing teacher workforce systems and efficient heating systems. But many of these go to keeping our schools' quality at a bare minimum. I am not entirely convinced that some of our older schools even meet a minimum standard that satisfies their school communities.

This was certainly brought home to me in my work as a member of the education committee in the school infrastructure and maintenance inquiry. We must be alive to the real risk that extensive investment in shiny new schools and only a basic investment in the maintenance and upgrades in older schools could result in a growing

chasm regarding opportunities in our public schools. Kids in every postcode, in every inch of our city, deserve nothing but the best.

I will not labour this point, given the ongoing committee inquiry into the future of school infrastructure; but, as my motion earlier today noted, where you live in this city can influence drastically what type of learning infrastructure you have access to and the quality of that infrastructure. That is not equitable.

We know that many new families are continuing to choose public education, and I do not want that to change; indeed I want that to increase. Every child deserves a high-quality public education, and I want our public schools to continue being the preferred choice of Canberra families. Equity in education must be a priority and equity of access is just as important as equity in outcomes.

Equity in education must also cater to students in all of their diversity. This budget funds a new program of inclusion coaches, with \$9.2 million to be initially introduced in the Tuggeranong public school network. I understand that these coaches will support inclusive education for students with a disability. I welcome this initiative and I commend the directorate for committing to work closely with schools and stakeholders through its development and its rollout.

I must admit to being a little bewildered that these inclusion coaches have been funded before they are fully designed and before the government's inclusive education strategy is fully developed and released. There is no funding in this budget for the implementation of an inclusive education strategy. Additionally, it is a commendable ambition for these inclusion coaches to be fully qualified teachers, but at the budget estimates committee hearings I learnt, and sincerely hope, that the ACT government's efforts to improve teacher shortages will ensure that we have the available workforce to fill these positions.

We also need better pathways for social workers and youth workers in our public schools. Young people need more access to high-quality supports to deal with the extensive challenges they face, such as climate anxiety, mental health issues and recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, just to name a few.

Teachers are overloaded with a huge range of work; at the same time they are expected to be ambulances at the end of the cliff for our young people who are struggling. We need more and better auxiliary services in and around our schools to help kids live their best lives. Great teachers can only do so much if kids come to school hungry, with unsupported mental health challenges or from a violent home. Teachers need to teach, not be social workers. I am not aware of any new budget initiatives specifically to support teachers and students in this way.

Education starts before your formal schooling years with early childhood education or preschool providing the critical foundation for future schooling. The Greens welcome the \$56 million investment in one day per week of free preschool for three-year-olds, giving a welcome head start for kids in the ACT. The ACT Greens aim for this policy to be extended further to 15 hours per week in the future. I look forward to continuing to engage with the minister's office on the implementation of this initiative, including enabling many existing preschools and play schools to participate in the program.

Access to community sporting facilities and sports facilities located on school grounds continues to be an ongoing challenge for community sport organisations and recreational sports players that I work with and represent as the Greens spokesperson for sport and recreation. Delegating the task of facilitating community access to school sportsgrounds to school management is yet another load on school leaders that could and should be centralised within our directorate. I am therefore extremely glad to see the capital investment of \$2.4 million to introduce a new online booking platform that will initially roll out to sports facilities at 12 ACT public schools.

I have heard from numerous community sporting organisations about the challenges of maintaining personal relationships and agreements with a handful of schools to ensure that they can access the right facilities when they need them. This system also risks making community sport organisations compete against each other for the finite facilities.

This is another perfectly good opportunity to remind the Assembly of the Greens' commitment to a multi-use indoor sports facility in the Woden Valley, on which I know Minister Davidson continues to advocate to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. I am glad to see the directorate taking responsibility and the initiative on this issue to ensure public school sports facilities are utilised to their full potential for the benefit of our whole community that play sport.

This budget progresses key policies and programs to make our public schools an even better place for teachers and their students, and the Greens are proud to support the education budget appropriation bills.

**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) (5.03): I am proud to be a champion of public education in the ACT, which is why I am proud of this government's commitment through the ACT budget to deliver our largest ever investment in public education and early childhood education.

Education is our greatest chance to deliver equality across our city. Every child and young person, no matter their background or circumstances, deserves a high-quality education and the life chances that flow from it. That is what this budget does. It enhances opportunities and choice for young people and children at all points in their educational journey. It recognises that a quality education is the ticket to a lifetime of opportunity.

The 2023-24 ACT budget invests more than \$800 million over the next four years on new and upgraded public schools to meet the needs of our growing city. This includes funding to build a second college in Gungahlin, to be located in Nicholls. The new college, planned to open before the end of the decade, will have an initial capacity of 800 students, with room to expand to 1,100 students in the future, if required. I know the new college in Gungahlin has been eagerly awaited by people in our city's north, and I am pleased that we are moving ahead. This will be Canberra's 10th public college.

The 2023-24 ACT budget provides funding to modernise and expand the high school facilities at Telopea Park School to cater for enrolment growth in the inner south. We are also funding roofing upgrades at Latham primary, Gowrie primary, Red Hill primary, and Telopea Park School, as well as infrastructure upgrades at Cranleigh School and Black Mountain School to ensure that they can continue to deliver high-quality specialist education services across the north of Canberra.

This budget also funds feasibility, planning and design work for a new college in the Molonglo Valley. I know from my conversations with the Molonglo Valley Community Forum how keen they are for that work to begin. It also funds feasibility, planning and design work for modernisation projects at Fraser Primary School, North Ainslie Primary School and Forrest Primary School.

All of these projects are in addition to the funding for infrastructure works already underway across ACT public schools, including the annual Public School Infrastructure Renewal Program.

The ACT government has delivered six new schools in the past decade and will deliver two more in the next two years, with the opening of the Shirley Smith high school in east Gungahlin next year, and the opening of the new school in north Gungahlin in 2025.

Education is not just about buildings; it is also about people—students, teachers, families, carers. People sit at the heart of education and this ACT budget. For our public school teachers and leaders, the 2023-24 ACT budget funds the new enterprise agreement which will make them Australia's highest paid public educators. This new agreement also outlines a clear approach to managing teacher workloads so that our public school staff can do what they do best: teach and lead.

Some of the workload reduction measures funded in the 2023-24 budget include the implementation of the recommendations from the *Teacher shortage taskforce final report* and the centralisation of building services so that schools can prioritise on teaching and learning. Also, the Sustainable Workload Management Committee has been established to work with the AEU and the Education Directorate across the life of the agreement to make real day-to-day workload reductions. The funding in this ACT budget will help us in recruiting and retaining more teachers, and, in doing so, assist in addressing the impacts of the national teacher shortage being felt here in the ACT.

I also want to highlight how the ACT budget is delivering for our youngest learners. The 2023-24 budget includes the ACT government's biggest ever investment in the early childhood sector. We know that early childhood learning and development in the early brain-building years are key to the future of school achievement, social, emotional and health outcomes, and ultimately life opportunities.

From 2024, Canberra families will be able to access one day per week of free three-year-old preschool. Equitable access to quality play based early learning has lifelong benefits. We expect more than 5,000 three-year-olds across Canberra will be eligible for free three-year-old preschool from the start of 2024. This initiative will also help



families with young children address the rising cost of living, saving the average family with a three-year-old preschooler around \$1,329 a year. It will increase preschool programs delivered through early childhood and education and care centres by university-degree qualified early childhood teachers laying the groundwork for a lifetime of learning for Canberra's children. Recognising the importance of the early childhood profession to the delivery of free three-year-old preschool to Canberra families, this budget also invests and supports the workforce, including professional learning resources networks and wraparound supports, including study, financial assistance and paid leave, as well as scholarships.

Through this budget, the government is also investing \$2.7 million in early intervention services for children as part of the Child Development Service. This includes funding to expand the Autism Spectrum Disorder Assessment Service. The funding will also support four new senior psychology positions. Once recruited, those senior psychologists will support more timely diagnosis and treatment, and this will improve outcomes for children. This funding for the Child Development Service will also support the continued operation of the Children and Young Person Equipment Loan Scheme. CAYPELS is the only paediatric equipment loan scheme in the ACT. It provides critical and lifesaving equipment to children. The service manages over 900 pieces of equipment, including wheelchairs, hoists, assisted feeding equipment, walkers and much more. As children grow and change quickly, managing equipment changes can be very challenging for families. CAYPELS enables quick and easy access to equipment to ensure that young people continue to live safely with the supports that they need.

Finally, this budget funds work to redesign services delivered through the Child Development Service. Services are currently provided from Holder, but we are working to ensure we deliver services in areas where the community can best access them. We have recently trialled moving all services to be delivered from within the Child and Family Centres and, in some cases, we are trialling screening services at schools. This funding will continue looking at alternative ways these services could be delivered to enable the Child Development Service to continue to meet ongoing demand and flexibility to support children and families.

The ACT government is serious about making positive change that will bring about a more equitable society. The 2023-24 ACT budget includes \$9.2 million to support inclusive education. The key part of this funding will be the rollout of inclusion coaches in our public schools, beginning in the Tuggeranong school network. These positions will provide school based expertise and leadership in inclusive practice. Starting in Tuggeranong, mentors will try, test and learn to better meet the needs of schools and ultimately students before rolling it out to all public schools across the ACT.

Resourcing has already been provided to deliver professional learning to educators in key areas such as universal design for learning, managing complex behaviours and understanding neurodiversity. The 2023-24 budget also funds the creation of formalised partnerships between specialist and local public schools to share knowledge and connect students and staff across settings. This is an important step in building confidence and understanding of inclusive education for students, families and schools and will set us up to further strengthen inclusive education in future years.

Significantly, the budget also funds work to develop and prepare for a new needs based funding model for students with a disability, which we know will create an important shift in the way schools are resourced to meet the needs of these students.

Inclusion sits at the heart of public education. We know that inclusive education practices deliver positive academic, social and wellbeing outcomes for all students and are key to creating a more equitable society. I am proud to be part of a government that places such an emphasis on the importance of educating the next generation of Canberrans.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

ACT Local Hospital Network—Part 1.2.

ACT Health Directorate—Part 1.3.

Canberra Health Services—Part 1.4.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I understand that it is the wish of the Assembly to debate parts 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4—the ACT Local Hospital Network, ACT Health Directorate and Canberra Health Services—together. That being the case, the question is that the proposed expenditure for parts 1.2, 1.3 and 1.4 be agreed to.

**MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (5.13):** I am speaking today as shadow minister for mental health because this budget represents yet another wasted opportunity to reform the ACT mental health system. While so many Canberrans struggle with mental health issues, unsure of where to turn, the government and the minister have offered nothing but recycled announcements and tinkering at the fringes.

On far too many occasions since I was sworn into this place, little more than a year ago, I have met with individuals and families who have been let down by the mental health system—people who are unable to find support for severe mental health conditions or even for mild and moderate conditions. And, most distressing and saddening, I have met with too many people who have lost family and loved ones to suicide. Too often, they tell me about how gaps and failures in the system have contributed to the loss of the one they care about.

When I speak to people who interact with the mental health system, the picture they paint is one of disconnection, gaps and cracks. The system is not connected. In fact, you could barely call it a system at all. Under this government and the minister, we have an agglomeration of services, with little way to navigate between them, many of which have ever-narrowing eligibility criteria because they are overstretched, which brings me to the next failure.

This budget is another wasted opportunity to address this government's mental health workforce problem. The minister has continued to blame national trends. Over the last year, it has seemed she relished talking about how she is waiting for the National Mental Health Workforce Strategy before she will do anything. After years as Minister for Mental Health, perhaps it is time she stopped waiting for someone else to fix her problems and did something herself.

When it comes down to it, the 2023-24 budget's mental health package is comprised of re-announcements, bandaids and tinkering. The minister announced either \$28 million or \$30 million, depending on the source you use, of supposedly additional funding for mental health. That is a four-year figure, meaning that, on average, there is just around \$7 million a year and, of that, roughly 50 per cent is dedicated to the operation of Canberra's eating disorders centre, which is an initiative that was driven by the former Liberal federal government, announced in 2019, and should already have been delivered and incorporated into the budget. This is not new and, importantly, it is not additional. This will be paid for by opaque cuts in the health funding envelope.

The next biggest line item is funding for community based mental health accommodation, which is a worthy-sounding initiative and one which sounds pretty familiar, because, once again, it is a simple re-announcement of an existing initiative. When I saw this line item in the budget, I was excited. I thought that maybe this would be the funding for the Curtin MyHome project, which was promised by the government at two elections. It features in their Parliamentary and Governing Agreement and it is still languishing. I knew it was not the full funding that MyHome needs, but I was hopeful. Sadly, the minister confirmed during estimates that this is simply a continuation of an existing program funded by a combination of previous underspends and cuts in the health envelope. Please understand that supported accommodation for people with mental health conditions is important. The initiative seems to be really worthwhile, but the minister should be honest about it. It is not new and it is not additional. To claim otherwise would simply highlight the accounting fudge. Over half of the already meagre so-called additional funding for mental health is nothing of the sort. In fact, apart from the second Safe Haven, the only really new things are bandaids—including bandaids for federal Labor's cuts to mental health in the ACT.

The second Safe Haven seems really worthwhile. The first one seems to be doing great things, but the service is forced to operate in the same dysfunctional and restrictive system as everything else. Similarly, supporting services that had their funding cut by federal Labor is worthwhile, but it should not be necessary and it is only for one year. In fact, when you look at the total additional investment this budget claims to make to mental health, it is telling that it is a mere fraction of what the government blew on a single failed IT system.

I will say again: this budget is a missed opportunity. There is no ambition for system-level reform or repair—not even an attempt to invest in building our mental health workforce—and zero recognition that the government's failure is pushing more people to rely on the private system, even when they cannot afford it. I must make mention in that context of the impact on GPs and general practice services—the very group the government seems to be at war with right now.

GPs are already often the unsung heroes of the mental health system. Mental health represents a significant proportion of the load our GPs bear and is a significant proportion of expenditure under Medicare. Outside the public mental health sector, GPs are often at the heart of an individual's mental health care and treatment. In

mental health care, they can be stewards and greenkeepers. They connect mental health care and physical health care. They connect multidisciplinary care and they make sure the care and treatment every person receives is evidence based and effective. That is the role of the GP.

It is noticeable that federal Labor cut rebates for GP mental health care, and every member of this government voted to back that cut. Today, the Chief Minister stood in this chamber and suggested there is a problem with unnecessary GP consultations. If the Chief Minister is concerned too many people are relying on general practice, perhaps he and the Minister for Mental Health ought to do more to create a functional and effective mental health system here in the ACT. This is a missed opportunity and Canberrans deserve better than this.

**MS DAVIDSON** (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health, Minister for Mental Health and Minister for Veterans and Seniors) (5.20): As I am sure you are aware, Labor and the Greens have our fair share of differences and disagreements across many issues. That is how democracy works. Health, however, is a shining example of the ACT Greens and Labor working constructively together to achieve better outcomes for people, and perhaps even a useful case study for our colleagues on the hill.

My ministerial responsibilities cover both health and community services. They are two areas which are intrinsically linked. Budget debate conventions will force a temporary split in this happy marriage while we debate budget initiatives and health and community services spaces separately, but I will emphasise that health improvements are not just achieved through acute health funding and hospitals. To quote my crossbench Greens colleague Johnathan Davis, “The best kind of hospital is an empty one.”

As the minister responsible for mental health and justice health, I strive to ensure that people in the ACT receive the best health care possible. Having access to care at an earlier stage in their illness, and as close to home as possible, reduces barriers to good health care and helps people on their recovery journey faster. With my community services responsibilities, I am also working to take the strain off the acute end of our health sector by helping Canberrans improve their wellbeing and change the social determinants that can lead to mental ill health or poorer physical and mental health of people in the justice system.

When people are supported in their mental health and wellbeing, the entire community benefits. In the 2023-24 ACT budget, we are investing \$241 million to support mental health, and this is roughly 10 per cent of total health expenses. There is a strong focus on investing in, and improving access to, early intervention support, so that people can get the help they need before reaching a crisis point and continue to stay engaged and connected with their communities.

For example, in this budget we have dedicated \$2 million to establish a Safe Haven at the Canberra Hospital. Following the success of the first Safe Haven in Belconnen, which provides warm and welcoming care for people in distress, we will soon have a second Safe Haven to support people in Canberra’s south. This is what was

recommended by the co-design team for the Safe Haven, a team that included clinical experts, advocates, carers and people with lived experience of mental ill health.

By staying true to the original intent of the co-design team, we will have Safe Havens in the community as well as an alternative to the bright lights and noise of emergency departments for people in distress seeking help on the hospital campus. It is important that we continue to invest in safe, nonclinical spaces such as this, where people can receive support, led by peer workers who have been through tough times themselves and understand what is most needed in times of crisis. Peer workers also often have a strong understanding of the social determinants of mental wellbeing—how situations like relationship breakdown, job loss, housing insecurity or experiences of violence contribute to distress and make it harder to regulate challenging emotions.

We will continue to expand this service by considering where we can have more Safe Havens in the ACT, providing better outcomes for people in a time of need, and taking pressure off our emergency departments.

In this budget we have also provided funding for the operation of the ACT's first residential treatment centre for eating disorders, which will officially open in Coombs in mid-2024. This will be the first free-of-charge residential treatment centre to be built in Australia, and it will support people with this complex mental health condition to continue their recovery journey in a supportive, homelike environment.

This is a really crucial step in ensuring that people with eating disorders receive the right level of care for the stage in their recovery process. It was driven by years of work by a reference group here in the ACT that includes clinicians, academic experts, community advocates and people with lived experience, and continues the good work that was started by our first Minister for Mental Health, Minister Shane Rattenbury.

I know that we have more work to do to ensure that a continuum of publicly available eating disorder services is offered in the ACT in line with the territory-wide model of care. Establishing an eating disorder day service in a future budget will ensure that there is support for people with eating disorders who are medically stable but need more time to be psychologically ready to attend the residential centre.

This would also be in line with the focus on the stepped model of care and integration between services in the National Eating Disorders Strategy 2023-33 that was launched today by the National Eating Disorders Collaboration. It is great to see this national focus on what is needed for an effective, equitable, coordinated system of care.

With the ACT already having established a clinical hub in January 2022, the early intervention service delivered by CatholicCare in February 2023, the service delivery for the new residential treatment centre to be delivered by Canberra Health Services from mid-2024, and my clear intention that we will also have a day program in a future budget, as well as ongoing support for prevention activities, including those delivered by community sector partners such as MIEACT and family support such as that provided by Eating Disorders Families Australia, the ACT is clearly thinking along the same lines as what we are seeing in the National Eating Disorders Strategy.

I am also pleased to announce that funding for the second police, ambulance and clinician early response—PACER—team has been extended for nine months. Our two

PACER teams, which run 24 hours a day, seven days a week, continue to be an ongoing success in the ACT. We have already learned a lot from the pilot, and I will be looking to make this service even better in future budgets by looking for additional services to support people attended to by PACER, such as a safe space for people in crisis who cannot be at home or do not require acute care from hospital, such as crisis or respite care.

In this budget, we are also extending funding for crucial youth mental health programs such as WOKE and Stepping Stones that were previously funded by the commonwealth government. It is disappointing to see that the commonwealth government has discontinued funding for these critical services for our community from 1 July this year, and it is clear that the previous federal Liberal government did not plan to properly evaluate these programs or plan for their future when they originally funded these programs, which is actually a bit surprising for a party that claims to be good at economic management.

I note the strong support for both WOKE and Stepping Stones from community members who have advocated strongly for them to continue. I will continue to advocate to the commonwealth government to step up and support funding for these programs in the long term. Right now, I am here to say that the ACT government will not leave our young people and their families stranded now that the commonwealth funding has ceased.

This budget also continues funding for the MindMap youth mental health navigation service and the Youth Aware of Mental Health education program in our high schools, which were pilots originally funded through a partnership with the commonwealth government. The funding continuation includes evaluation to better understand how to improve these services further and what resourcing is needed for an ongoing service.

There is funding in this budget to improve the interface between mental health and alcohol and other drug services, improving the skills of workers in both sectors and building stronger connections between community and hospital-based mental health and alcohol and other drug services. This reflects the advocacy of many of our community organisations, people with lived experience and their carers and families that both mental health and alcohol and drug dependence should be treated in an integrated, person-centred way.

It is so important that we are continuing to build a system where people are empowered to access the support they need for their mental health when they need it and in the right therapeutic setting. I believe we have made significant progress towards this vision in this 2023-24 budget, and I look forward to continuing to build on what we have achieved so that we can live in a kinder, more supportive community.

These budget initiatives are lifesaving and life-changing. Ever since the Greens secured a dedicated ministerial portfolio for mental health, we have seen bigger and better budget initiatives year on year—diversifying our health care services, focusing on prevention and early intervention, increasing peer workforce capacity, improving accessibility and doing more of what works. People get better outcomes with Greens in government.

**MR DAVIS** (Brindabella) (5.28): I rise to speak to the government's budget appropriation for the health portfolio, which the ACT Greens will support. I welcome this budget's commitment to providing for the health of Canberrans. Delivering high-quality healthcare infrastructure and prioritising preventive health care and a robust healthcare workforce are important steps towards giving every Canberran access to free, high-quality public health care. It goes to the diversity of funding and services that are needed to keep people healthy, living their best lives and, when needed, provide timely health care both in and outside a hospital setting.

This budget includes the biggest infrastructure investment in the history of self-government—the \$1 billion commitment to build the new north side hospital. This investment will provide for Canberra's growing population, particularly in the north of our city, where demand for hospital services will more than double by the 2040s. The north side hospital will enable better, more efficient and more cohesive healthcare delivery across different sites, and more opportunities for healthcare workers across our public healthcare system.

This budget also provides for new investments in our community health network, which we know are an integral part of keeping people out of hospital, supporting health needs in the community and facilitating care transition to the community after a time in hospital. This investment will go towards the development of three multidisciplinary local public health centres. I am extremely pleased to see that the first of these centres will be established in Tuggeranong, with a \$16.6 million capital injection in this budget to enable full development of the centre, due to open in 2026.

I look forward to seeing these centres bring together general practitioners with nurses, nurse practitioners, allied health professionals and other medical expertise. This will better serve community health needs while leveraging the skill sets of our talented healthcare professionals. As always, I am particularly delighted when the first of anything comes to Tuggeranong.

These health centres will expand the range of community-based health services. Canberrans already have access to the much-loved nurse-led walk-in centres located throughout our city, which have consistently provided urgent care for Canberrans. They meet a healthcare need in the community that complements services provided by the emergency department and general practitioners. This budget saw additional funding for the Dickson and Weston Creek walk-in centres.

These commitments expand on previous initiatives from the ACT government to provide health care for Canberrans, including committing ongoing funding to Tuggeranong's hydrotherapy pool, some of which has been rolled over from previous budgets. But construction is finally set to begin, with delivery expected by the end of next year. People in my community and nearby will have access to hydrotherapy for a wide range of therapies and conditions.

As I have said before in this place, I believe that good dental care is the foundation to good health. While some children and young people can access free or subsidised dental health care, the Greens support the expansion of Medicare to provide dental care to all. The cost of getting your teeth checked and fixed is bank-breaking for some, and onerous for others, and that should not be the case.

I know Mr Barr loves talking about all of the progressive things he is doing to make Canberra better, and I love hearing about them. As Treasurer, Mr Barr, I would encourage you to work with your federal Labor friends to add this one to the list: I know that every Canberran would support broader access to free dental care. I will always take every opportunity to remind anybody who will listen that I, and many of the people I represent, continue to be confused as to why, when we designed a free healthcare system, we decided your brain and your teeth were not included.

People suffering eating disorders will soon be able to visit a purpose-built residential care centre in Coombs which will provide holistic care to support a more sustainable path to recovery. This initiative is being delivered by my Greens colleague and the Minister for Mental Health, Emma Davidson, with \$17.3 million invested by the ACT government.

The ACT Greens support further expansion of eating disorder services to include a day service, which will provide tailored care for a wider range of patients. We heard just this morning in national news how important dedicated supports for people struggling with eating disorders are.

The police, ambulance and clinician early response unit, known commonly as PACER, provides in-community mental health treatment at a time of mental health crisis, and it is working. Eighty-two per cent of people who have been visited by the PACER team have been able to avoid emergency department presentations and receive follow-up care and referrals to ongoing support as required, while remaining in the community.

The Greens are proud to have initiated the first PACER team and the first Safe Haven cafe—under Greens leadership, with the first and second Greens mental health ministers in the country. The Safe Haven cafe, a place of safety where people can go to recover from mental health crises, is an important part of our integrated mental healthcare network. We would support future budget business cases to support the continued expansion of PACER where there is a proven need, as well as the provision of these safe spaces.

The ACT Greens know that good health care is also about good nutrition, as we discussed earlier today. It is about good parks—as Ms Clay is always keen to advocate—green space and planning that enables and encourages walkable neighbourhoods and active transport, and clean air for everyone. These things are intimately connected. That is why the ACT government last week delivered even more nation-leading reforms with the commitment to phasing out wood heaters by 2045. I would like to commend and thank Greens minister Rebecca Vassarotti for her leadership on this issue, as well as the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment and every single community member, many of them my constituents in Tuggeranong, who have been working so hard for so long to get policy change on this issue.

I have been actively calling for reforms to the government's policies on wood heater replacement programs to make it easier particularly for low income households to electrify their homes and their heating. We know that there is absolutely no safe level of exposure to particulate matter 2.5, the air pollution commonly associated with the household wood heater. This target will ensure that Canberrans breathe clean air all



year round. As Minister Davidson said before I got the opportunity to say it, the best hospitals—indeed, the best publicly funded healthcare facilities—are empty ones. The way we work to keep them empty is to keep people healthy in their homes.

Our hospitals and our healthcare centres would be nothing without the incredible people who provide care to those in need. Our frontline healthcare workers are the backbone of our healthcare system, and one of the best investments that we can make in our healthcare system is in our healthcare workforce.

I noted in the previous discussion about education that our teachers are the best paid in the country. Our nurses and midwives will bargain soon with the ACT government, and I look forward to welcoming a similar outcome for these invaluable essential workers. We know that well-paid, well-respected frontline healthcare workers deliver the best patient-centred outcomes.

New buildings are important, but they are useless if they are not staffed with high-quality and well-supported professionals who are valued and trusted by their communities and by their government. Well-paid and well-supported professionals also create a good workplace culture. It can be hard to speak to efforts to improve workplace culture through monetary investment alone, but I believe the ACT government's efforts to improve the culture in Canberra Health Services are genuine, earnestly delivered and will be enabled through this budget and future budgets.

Further infrastructure development and improvements to the workforce can be symbolic, like the proposed free-standing birth centre model proposed by my colleague Ms Jo Clay. A free-standing birth centre facility that is patient centred and prioritises a model endorsed by healthcare staff can deliver both better patient outcomes and better workforce outcomes, with the possibility of helping us to recruit and retain even more midwives. I hope to see a free-standing birth centre fully costed and committed for delivery in future budgets.

The budget initiative to provide additional study supports for nursing, midwifery and allied health students is also very welcome, and I look forward to seeing how the program is designed and delivered. This budget will help ensure that our healthcare workforce is resilient and capable of adapting to climate change. You may recall that, in October last year, I moved a motion in the Assembly calling on the government to develop a climate change preparedness strategy for the public health sector, including preparing for the impacts of climate change on patient health, delivery of care and services, infrastructure, workforce and supply chains. Funding of \$366,000 allocated in this budget for the next two years will support the work of ACT Health on focused research and programs to deliver a climate-resilient healthcare model.

Our nation-leading CanTEST drug testing pilot has received the necessary funding to ensure the centre will continue operating until December 2024. Drug testing, as a harm reduction measure, is long-standing Greens policy, which my colleague Minister Shane Rattenbury has been championing since 2016, when his motion to establish the service was first put to the Assembly. CanTEST reached a milestone in recent months, having tested more than 1,000 samples, empowering people to learn about the substances their drugs contain. People regularly discard their drugs at the facility once they have been tested. The ACT Greens have always and will always

push for this pilot to be established as a permanent service that the Canberra community can rely on in the long term.

This budget also sees new investment in services to reduce the harms of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, including \$3 million for a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Islander residential rehabilitation service for alcohol and other drugs.

Our healthcare system must cater to people in all their diversity and uphold people's rights to determine what happens to their body. That is why the budget supports the recent legislative reforms to uphold the rights in bodily autonomy and integrity of people with variations in sex characteristics through \$15.8 million for paediatric services that include a dedicated paediatric gender specialist service.

In closing, this budget will continue the government's commitment to supporting every Canberran to live a full and healthy life.

**MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (5.39):** Budget papers are normally a way for ACT taxpayers to review government expenditure, policy and performance. The recent health budget does not provide transparency to ratepayers. There is no performance data on hospital performance. There is a list of infrastructure projects that have been delayed, some of which have been passed down from the previous term of government.

Staff numbers and assets have not been provided after the takeover of Calvary, giving a false impression of Canberra Health Service's financial statements. The health minister and Treasurer's budget statements C, for CHS, are not worth the paper that they are written on. The government has failed to deliver on election commitments. It has underfunded the hospital and failed to fix significant workplace culture issues, which, in turn, are having negative impacts on the ACT's ability to attract and retain staff, which leads to further burnout.

Instead of taking accountability for these egregious failures, the government has blamed COVID, national and international shortages of frontline workers, DHR, bushfires and a litany of other factors! What this boils down to is thousands of Canberrans continuing to be let down by the minister's management of the health system. While these factors have had an impact, it was put to me when I first got to work in the health portfolio that the ACT's health system is broken, and external factors have only proved that the Barr-Rattenbury government has failed to adequately manage the system for more than a decade. Health is the largest area of expenditure in this budget, at \$2.3 billion. Last year, this was also the case, with spending of \$2.2 billion, yet the government can only provide limited updates on how the territory performed since November 2022, due to its implementation of the \$327 million Digital Health Record.

What we do know is that, since the last budget, there are still tens of thousands of Canberrans waiting longer than clinically recommended for outpatient appointments, elective surgeries and in our emergency departments. Once they are placed on an elective surgery wait list, there are still more than 1,000 people waiting longer than clinically recommended. For the four months from July 2022, only 44 per cent of

category 2 patients were seen within the recommended 90 days, against a target of seeing 80 per cent on time. This was similar for category 3 patients, where only 64 per cent of patients were seen on time, against a target of 93 per cent.

The last update we received on our hospitals' ED wait times was for the quarter between July and September 2022. The data showed that only 45.9 per cent of patients were seen within four hours of presenting to the emergency department. For this same indicator, the minister has set a target of seeing 90 per cent or more of these patients within four hours of presenting. Saying that the minister is not close to meeting her own target is an understatement. It is a complete failure. Despite the minister saying, back in February 2021, that she will fix these wait times in nine months, the fact is that, if you need to use our public hospitals for surgery or emergency treatment, you will be waiting far longer than clinically recommended.

The Productivity Commission's report on government services shows that, for the last five years, the ACT has seen less than 50 per cent of patients within clinically recommended wait times. Canberrans are repeatedly told that wait times will improve and they do not. The president of the AMA talked about the "secret waiting list", which is the number of overdue outpatient appointments. The data from this wait list was only reported through an FOI request that we lodged. The March 2022 outpatient wait list showed that around 25,000 out of 30,000 outpatients were waiting longer than clinically recommended on this "secret waiting list". That means 84 per cent of patients are waiting longer than clinically recommended.

The Canberra Hospital is the major tertiary referral hospital for the ACT and the surrounding New South Wales region. This government's failure in patients being seen within clinically recommended wait times, consistently for half a decade, means that it has failed to ensure our hospital delivers timely care. Due to this failure, people are leaving our public hospitals to seek care elsewhere. The government's own statistics show this.

The number of patients who do not wait to be seen in ED was at an alarming 7.2 per cent between July and September 2022 and at 8.7 per cent the previous quarter. The number of patients removed from the elective surgery wait list for reasons other than surgery was 694 for the July and September quarter. This is up 15.7 per cent. We often hear stories about people leaving our public health system and choosing to go to Sydney, Queanbeyan and other hospitals. Clinical guidelines are there for a reason, and too many patients are waiting with pain, discomfort or disability due to this government's failure to address these long waits over the past decade.

We know that \$2.2 billion was allocated for health in 2022. However, the minister could not produce any data for the eight months following the implementation of the \$327 million DHR system. The health minister has gone from saying, back in February, "Health services are working towards whole-of-government level of reporting being restored before May 2023," to then saying, five months later, in an answer to a question on notice, "If an automated process is not available before the final sitting week of 2023, I will table updated outpatients data during that sitting week." Only this minister could dismiss a major stuff-up like this. How can this happen?

We heard in estimates:

... data challenges that we have faced post go-live are more substantial than I had understood pre go-live, and probably more substantial than the project board had understood as well.

I find this puzzling because FOI documents show that the minister was briefed at least a month before go-live that there was a high risk that the territory may have problems with national reporting and that the data quality was poor due to insufficient focus on the design of the data, dictionary and structure. I do not accept that issues with data in DHR were only known post go-live when the brief that the minister received warned her of design issues and likely problems with data reporting, which again we saw through an FOI. So it is wrong to say that concerns were not escalated to the project board. This is another example of the minister mismanaging the health system because of poor oversight, communication and decision-making.

The minister is scrambling for excuses. Canberrans now question these excuses that the minister has provided and believe it is not appropriate for a government to budget \$2.2 billion for health and then not be able to provide any data to taxpayers on whether that money delivered any improvements to our health system.

What is more important to a health system than data is our incredible frontline workforce. For years, nurses, midwives, doctors, allied health professionals and many others have had to overcome issues that have festered under the Labor-Greens government. I have made the point before that frontline staff do not trust this government anymore. You only have to look at the statistically invalid response rate to their last poll survey to see that. When asked during the inquiry into the recovery plan for nursing and midwifery workers, the Australian Nurses and Midwifery Federation said:

... nurses and midwives ...did not participate in a recent survey ... Our workplace delegates, our counsellors and our leaders tell us that people could not be bothered because they thought there was no point.

In the inquiry, Mr Davis then said:

But I would hope that, given how long we have been talking in this place about culture in Canberra Health Services, there is some improvement ...

The response from the branch secretary of the ANMF was:

There is probably a minute amount of improvement.

Mr Davis could not have put it better. Given that we have been talking about workplace culture for years under the Barr-Rattenbury government, why has it not improved? Later in the inquiry, Mr Davis put this response to the health minister, when he said:

Minister, I feel compelled to say in Ms Castley's defence that the ANMF were here recently and they were scathing of the 35 per cent rate.

Shortly after the Labor minister was presented with the union's comments, she cut Mr Davis off and said:

And I am sure that you took the opportunity to ask them how many people complete their surveys.

Mr Davis replied, "Good point," and then the debate moved on. That is the kind of tough questioning, introspection and listening we get from the Labor-Greens health coalition, who are supposedly meant to be supporting workers. Instead, they are dismissive. Maybe Labor and the Greens do not understand the fact that workers from a government directorate are not responding to a government survey. That is the crucial point. Rather than acknowledge their own failings, the minister decides to bash the union's survey. Meanwhile, executives plan to move their next culture survey to warmer months when staff are more optimistic!

Again you can see that what the AMF is saying is true, from the government's own data. Medical officers and nurses were asked in the 2021 workplace culture survey whether there was a positive impact from the previous 2019 survey. Almost 40 per cent of medical officers and more than a quarter of nurses and midwives disagreed that there has been a positive impact from the government's previous survey.

Answers to questions on notice that I received from the minister show how the culture and burnout is not improving at CHS. (*Second speaking period taken.*) Between 1 July 2022 and 1 June 2023, CHS have had 2,476 staff incidents. Of these, 1053 were due to mental stress. That means that 42.5 per cent of staff incidents in the last financial year were due to mental stress—more than any other category, which includes falls, trips and slips from staff. To me, that does not sound like a health service that provides a safe workplace or fosters a great culture. The workers compensation budget for the 2022-23 financial year was exceeded. CHS made more than \$14 million in payments during this period. Between July 2022 and May 2023, there were 152 alleged bullying and harassment incidents, which is around 14 incidents per month, and these are just the ones that were reported.

It is clear that CHS still has a serious workplace culture problem. Unfortunately, the only people unwilling to acknowledge that there has been no improvement under the decade of the Barr-Rattenbury government is the Barr-Rattenbury government. Nothing typifies this more than the minister's response to the bombshell revelations that four units at Canberra Hospital have had their training term accreditation revoked or are in significant danger of losing their training accreditation. The Obstetrics and Gynaecology unit had its training accreditation moved to provisional status, which gives CHS six months to address the issues from the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetrics and Gynaecology report. The report highlighted serious concerns, one of which I will quote. Consultant staffing was described as being at a "persistently critical level" with the "ability to meet clinical needs often impacted by unplanned leave, staff turnover and increasing levels of staff burnout". This quote demonstrates clinical issues because of CHS's inability to attract and retain staff, which causes further staff burnout and exits, which, in turn, impact clinical settings.

These are the serious issues the minister describes as "known challenges"—known challenges that the Barr-Rattenbury government have failed to address for at least the

past 13 years. Perhaps this is why RANZCOG has requested a comprehensive workforce plan for the medium to long term from CHS to prove that it is taking steps to ensure the unit is adequately staffed. This is interesting. I am sure that we, in the Assembly, are all glued to the health conversations that we have and the debates.

You will remember that, back in May, the minister released her 10-year workforce strategy. She said it would attract and retain our talented students to remain in the ACT and recruit and retain new and experienced healthcare workers. You would think that this would mean that the minister already has a plan, but you would be wrong. It is a plan to write a plan! The ACT has no credible plan to address immediate workforce shortages, serious cultural issues or health and safety, as well as training accreditation standards, let alone long-term fixes. But do not mind that, though, because these are “known challenges”.

In this budget there was no addition of Calvary staff to the directorate staff estimates following the takeover. There is no figure on how much compensation for the takeover will cost in the CHS or CMTEDD budgets. And there are no figures related to Calvary in terms of assets and depreciation of those assets in the CHS financial statements. The government has not been transparent around this decision and rushed it through committee inquiries.

The minister has made 175 ACT government employees sign non-disclosure agreements since 3 April 2022. This seems to be at odds with the Chief Minister’s claim that existing mechanisms for deliberation, accountability, transparency and debate operated as intended—again, this from a minister who boasts to activists at her party’s national conference about moving legislation through quickly and quietly without raising too many questions during an election.

This is a takeover that was initiated by the minister because it was going to make the health system more efficient and effective. Instead, there has already been a code yellow and staff shortages in certain units around the hospital.

In a recent *Canberra Times* piece we learnt that 90 staff from Calvary Hospital chose to resign, retire or to continue to work for Calvary in their private hospital. Let us not forget that it was the ACT branch secretary of the ANMF who said, “If we lose a single member of staff, it could have real implications for some services.” Ninety frontline health staff have left our public health system because of this government’s arrogance and hostile takeover.

There was no consultation with frontline workers on the takeover. They have foisted this upon staff during the flu season and could spend hundreds of millions to takeover this hospital so that they can build a new one supposedly starting mid-decade. The promise to build a new hospital comes over what must be one of the worst track records of health infrastructure delivery. The Barr-Rattenbury government are more than 150 beds short of what they promised in 2011. The Canberra Hospital expansion has been delayed past when it was promised and is due to have fewer facilities than initially promised.

In addition, the government have abandoned their election commitment to build an elective surgery centre at UC and will fail to upgrade and expand endoscopy services

in this term of government. This theme is continued where at least 19 projects are delayed from the last budget to this.

When they do finally get around to delivering these projects, they try to re-announce them. An MRI machine that was announced in the 2018-19 budget is only just being installed at the hospital. This did not stop the minister putting out a press release saying, “ACT government is committed to investing in modern state-of-the-art infrastructure and equipment across the ACT health system.”

An incoming brief to the current health minister highlighted that a new MRI machine would improve diagnostic capabilities, provide faster scanning and service operating efficiencies. However, the government did not rush to purchase this and install a new MRI machine. Instead, the minister must have felt it totally acceptable to force Canberrans to wait five years to install the one machine and reap these benefits and then turn around and try and tell them how committed the government is to investing in new equipment!

The Chief Minister’s capital works update that he tabled on Tuesday shows that CHS and ACT Health only spent around 68 per cent of the money that was budgeted for these portfolios. At the same time, the minister tried to tell us in a ministerial statement that the ACT government is committed to building and maintaining a public health system.

Money has been diverted to the tram while our health system has struggled with outdated buildings and equipment. That is the legacy that this government has after more than 20 years in power.

What is also concerning about the budget is that it has not been prioritised as an issue. A question on notice I received from the minister shows that this financial year the Chief Minister and health minister have provisioned a very modest \$15 million for primary care. That is just a bit over half a per cent of the entirety of the health budget spent on primary care.

This is despite the minister saying earlier this year on ABC radio they “really need to kick in significant resources to make primary care more of a viable and sustainable place to go,” and the Chief Minister saying on 6 January 2023, “As far as I can see the best solutions will need to include more than just augmenting hospital services. They need to include holistic reform of primary health care and boosting capacity.” Both of these statements were in response to AIHW and ROGS figures, highlighting that once again the ACT had the worst emergency department wait times.

For this government, providing resources and reforms to primary care are just good lines to run when they are exposed again for failing Canberrans. If they were serious about reforming primary care and making the service more viable and sustainable, you would expect they would be jumping at the chance to help GPs by exempting them from the changes to payroll tax. But you would be wrong.

The president of the Royal Australian College of GPs said, “We have consulted with the ACT government and the new policy shows that they have limited understanding of the way general practice works or the pressure GPs are under in the ACT.” It really

does go to show that this government is clueless when it comes to improving our health system.

Everything I have mentioned today only touches the surface of the issues I have uncovered in this health system after countless questions, FOI requests and talking to stakeholders and staff and patients. What it does highlight is that this government cannot follow through on health budget election commitments, policy or infrastructure projects. The government has failed to improve our public hospitals ED outpatient, elective surgery and endoscopy wait times for the past five years. It has not provided adequate funding, staffing levels, beds or transparency for Canberra's health system.

The Barr-Rattenbury government have broken this health system, and all they have had to say about this is that these are known challenges. What the minister in government is saying is that she is aware of the issues but does not have the solutions, ability or maybe the support to fix these challenges.

Do not bother reading the 2023-24 budget if you want to understand what \$2.3 billion of your taxpayer money is budgeted towards. You will not find any answers or solutions in this budget. If they knew or cared enough to fix these issues, then our health system would have not been in decline for the past 10 years.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health) (5.58): Of course, health is one of the most important determinants of a person's wellbeing. It is vital that we continue to invest in our public health system, ensuring that it meets the needs of Canberrans now and into the future. That is exactly what this budget does.

The 2023-24 budget delivers more support for health workers, more health services and better resourcing for our health system. We are making record investments in expanding our health infrastructure and services and supporting our health workforce.

Total recurrent health portfolio spending in 2023-24 will reach \$2.3 billion and \$9.9 billion over the forward estimates. Health spending is increasing by 5.8 per cent on the 2022 budget, when adjusted for the removal of time limited expenses related to COVID-19 and the North Canberra Hospital transition.

This represents significant growth in our overall investment and reflects the commitment of this side of politics to delivering better health care for Canberrans and the promises we made at the last election. It was clear from Mr Cocks's contribution that he does not understand the operation of the health funding envelope. But perhaps he was in fact referring to the fact that our spending has exceeded the envelope for this financial year yet again.

The budget continues the record investments we have made each and every budget in this term to deliver better health care when and where people need it and to continue delivering on our vision of a learning health system with worldclass infrastructure and a skilled, dedicated and growing health force to deliver person centred exceptional care.



The ACT government is continuing to make record investments in health infrastructure. The 2023-24 budget includes \$195 million in specific new funding over the next four years to build health infrastructure for Canberra's future. Of course, this includes a brand-new state-of-the-art billion-dollar hospital on Canberra's north side. Over the next two years, we will invest more than \$64 million to undertake the detailed design work for the new hospital, which will be done in close consultation with hospital staff and the Canberra community.

The government is also investing \$15.5 million to design and build a new acute palliative care ward at Canberra Hospital. Once completed, this ward will mean that more Canberrans can access even better care and support as they approach the end of life in the hospital environment.

The government has also committed more than \$8.5 million to upgrade and expand endoscopy service suites at Canberra Hospital to improve patient experience and meet the needs of our growing community. This builds on our ongoing investment in more endoscopy services.

Beyond the hospitals, we are also investing in community-based care. The 2023-24 budget includes more than \$16.5 million to expand our network of community-based health centres into South Tuggeranong, North Gungahlin and the inner south. These new health centres will bring care closer to home for these communities.

Finally, the government has committed \$49 million to deliver the purpose-built, co-designed facilities for the Ted Noffs youth, alcohol and other drug facility and the Marymead Catholic Care youth mental health facility in Watson, and, of course, this investment will deliver on our commitment to build the ACT's first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled alcohol and other drug residential rehabilitation facility in partnership with Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services.

The government is also investing an extra \$43.6 million in frontline health services to make sure that we continue to meet the needs of the growing Canberra community. We are investing more than \$15.8 million into expanding paediatric services at Canberra Hospital.

I am particularly excited that this includes establishing a new paediatric Hospital in the Home program, because we know that home is a better place to be for any child if they do not need to be in hospital. It is better for them and for their families and carers. This program will mean that children can access the acute care they need in the comfort and support of their own home. The paediatric Hospital in the Home program will also strengthen the role of GPs in shared care arrangements, further supporting care closer to home for children and young people in the ACT.

This funding will also be used to upskill paediatric and emergency department staff in preparation for the opening of the Critical Services Building and to improve processes within the ED to ensure patient-and-family-centred care is better coordinated—a process that is already underway.

In addition, the paediatric weight management program will be expanded to reduce waitlists and waiting times and increase the quality of life for young people—something that was discussed in recent hearings of the Auditor-General’s report on childhood healthy eating and active living programs.

Canberrans will be able to access additional specialist medical and paediatric outpatient appointments, with a \$6.75 million investment over the next four years. This will deliver 2,500 more appointments for Canberrans each year for the next two years, growing to 5,000 additional appointments a year from 2025-26.

Canberra Health Services is also undertaking a range of initiatives to sustainably grow outpatient capacity, including increasing the proportion of new appointments and recruiting more specialists. An additional \$6.7 million in 2023-24 will help to address the significant impact that COVID-19 and the theatre fire had on Calvary Public Hospital Bruce’s elective surgery performance over the last two years.

In addition to catching up on lost elective surgeries, the government is also making a \$14.3 million investment to boost capacity at North Canberra Hospital. This funding will go towards providing more after hours and weekend support services, more allied health services, better coordination of care in the emergency department and four additional inpatient beds.

Ms Castley touched on the 90 staff who chose not to transition to Canberra Health Services with the acquisition of Calvary Public Hospital Bruce. I would note, as I said earlier today in one of my statements, that more than 2,000 staff transitioned from Calvary to Canberra Health Services with the acquisition and the transition to North Canberra Hospital. That is 200 more staff than Calvary had initially estimated were actually staffing Calvary Public Hospital Bruce.

The ACT government continues to strive to make Canberra the capital of equality for LGBTIQ+ people. To that end we are delivering on the actions in the LGBTIQ+ health scoping study and investing in more services to meet the community’s needs. The budget includes a further \$9.7 million to implement the recommendations of the scoping study.

Importantly, this includes the establishment of a new dedicated paediatric gender service and a new adult gender service. These services will deliver essential age-appropriate gender care. They will ensure that trans and gender-diverse people in the ACT can access the vital gender-affirming care they need, when and where they need it.

Earlier this year, the Chief Minister introduced nation-leading legislation to protect intersex children from harmful and unnecessary medical interventions. To complement this legislation, Canberra Health Services will develop an equally nation-leading psychosocial support service for intersex people, people with variations in sex characteristics and their families.

Of course, one thing we all agree on, in speaking on this chapter of the budget appropriation bill, is that our health infrastructure and health services need health workers to run them, and our dedicated public health workers are the backbone and

the essential core of our health system. The government is committed to investing in our health workforce.

This budget includes more than \$122 million in staffing and resourcing to operate the new critical services building at Canberra Hospital, which will open in 2024. As an aside, I would note that this project—which is a bigger project than the original SPIRE proposal—has been on time and on budget since its location on the Canberra Hospital site was finalised in late 2018 and the final business case was developed.

Unlike those opposite, who are still saying we should have proceeded with a project that would have reduced beds at Canberra Hospital for three or four years and seen us go into a pandemic with a big hole in the middle of the campus, we took the time to plan this project carefully, to avoid disruption of clinical services.

The operational investment is now being made through this budget, and includes more frontline health professionals, more frontline support services, more services and more state-of-the-art equipment. This includes funding for Canberra Health Services to hire more than 80 additional doctors, nurses, midwives and allied health professionals.

At the election, ACT Labor committed to funding an additional 400 full-time equivalent positions over this term of government, and I am delighted to say that the funding in this budget brings us to a total of 570 additional positions that have been funded since the 2020-21 budget. The government has not only reached our commitment early; we are exceeding it, getting more staff into our health services right now.

Building on our budget investments in this term, we have invested a further \$28 million over the next four years in supports for the health workforce. These investments are designed to fundamentally change the way our health workforce is supported now and into the future. We are investing in important planning initiatives to attract and retain skilled workers. We are providing more security, support and training for our junior medical officers. We are replacing and upgrading safety systems across Canberra Hospital. We are investing in the future of our health workforce by expanding study support payments for students.

We are also continuing the Indigenous Allied Health Australia health academy program to increase our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce, improve cultural safety in our services and deliver better educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander high school students.

Importantly, the government is also boosting the pay of Canberra hospital cleaners in recognition of their invaluable contribution to our healthcare system. I can confirm for Ms Castley that Canberra Health Services is indeed continuing to explore direct employment for cleaners as part of its work to plan for future insourcing of services, as identified in the budget papers.

These investments build on the work we have been undertaking to improve the safety and wellbeing of our dedicated health workforce. This includes providing

occupational violence supports, a continued push on positive culture reform and negotiating the next phase of mandated minimum nurse and midwife to patient ratios.

In response to Mr Davis's comment, we are currently negotiating the enterprise agreement with the ANMF and our nurses and midwives, and I am pleased to say that we are reasonably close to concluding that process. I look forward to the conclusion of that process and ensuring that our nurses and midwives continue to be among the best paid in the country.

Before I conclude, I want to touch very briefly on Ms Castley's comments about what was included in the budget papers in relation to the North Canberra Hospital. Madam Speaker, as you are aware, acquisition day for the North Canberra Hospital was 3 July, and the budget was brought down on 27 June. It simply would not have been possible to include the information that Ms Castley was requesting in this budget. Much of that information was not known at that time, including in particular in relation to the staffing elements around that. But I can assure her that updates will be provided and, if she would like a briefing, as the health and wellbeing committee is receiving briefings or if she would like to ask Mr Milligan to ask this question for her in those hearings, I am sure that we would be very happy to provide all of that information. As I have already indicated, we had more than 2,000 staff transferring across to Canberra Health Services and that information is in the public domain.

Improving and expanding our health services is, and always will be, a key priority for ACT Labor and this government. The investments we are making in the 2023-24 budget are clear evidence of that. We are continuing to deliver record investments in major health infrastructure through the new north side hospital, new community-based health centres, a new acute palliative care ward, and building a new hydrotherapy pool in Canberra's south.

We are providing Canberrans with more health services across a range of areas to better support the needs of our growing community. We are delivering more elective surgery and outpatient appointments, more allied health and after-hours services on the north side and more paediatric and gender services. We are investing in our incredible health workforce, supporting them to grow and thrive now and into the future.

The government set out with an ambitious and comprehensive health platform at the start of this term and, almost a year out from the next election, we continue to deliver on that plan. Indeed 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 can access better care, and we are the only ones with a plan that supports our healthcare workers to deliver care with state-of-the-art facilities, safe and supportive workplaces and more services closer to home for Canberrans.

Through this budget we are delivering on that plan, on the commitments that we made to Canberrans through record investments, new services and support for our health workforce. I commend this budget to the Assembly.

Proposed expenditures agreed to.

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

**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) (6.12): I rise to speak in support of the Appropriation Bill, which delivers an ACT budget that prioritises the safety of Canberra workers.

The ACT government will always uphold the right of workers to come home safely at the end of the day. The government will continue to ensure that the highest level of protection and safety standards are upheld across all Canberra workplaces. Ensuring the safety of workers benefits the whole community, particularly during a time when many Canberrans are doing it tough with cost of living pressures.

The 2023-24 budget provides an additional \$4.397 million in funding over three years to WorkSafe ACT, the work health and safety regulator. This funding allows WorkSafe to secure additional resources to increase regulatory activities for three targeted areas, including psychosocial safety, hazardous chemicals and the territory's large infrastructure projects.

The ACT government recognises the importance of ensuring psychosocial hazards are managed across all workplaces. Psychosocial hazards, such as workplace violence, harassment and bullying must be treated with the same seriousness as physical hazards. The regulator will continue to play a crucial role in proactive enforcing of compliance around the management of psychosocial hazards which may lead to psychosocial or physical injury.

WorkSafe ACT will also receive additional funding to expand its hazardous chemicals inspectorate team and will increase workplace visits and educational activities in businesses across the territory. It is anticipated that this will have the flow-on effect of increased permit applications for hazardous chemicals, including high-risk activities and the transport and storage of manifest quantities of hazardous chemicals.

Light rail stage 2 to Woden is Canberra's biggest ever infrastructure project and will see an unprecedented level of civil construction activity happening in Canberra over the coming years. Supported by additional funding in the budget, WorkSafe ACT is establishing a civil construction team to oversee the health and safety elements of light rail stage 2 during the project's duration. The team will also monitor and regulate civil construction projects in the territory during this time.

The 2023-24 budget also prioritises increased support for workplaces to manage risks to mental health and wellbeing. Over the next three years we will see an expansion of the existing work health and safety liaison service delivered by UnionsACT to support education and awareness, including around psychosocial hazards.

An expanded grant will support small to medium businesses to understand and implement their work health and safety obligations, preventing harm and supporting workers through psychosocial illness or injury if it occurs.

Additionally, funding of \$285,000 in the 2023-24 budget supports the establishment and operation of the Secure Employment Framework. The Secure Employment Framework will implement the commitments made by the government in the parliamentary and governing agreement through the implementation and operation of the insourcing framework, and the operation of the secure workforce conversion process.

The ACT government is committed to providing secure and, where possible, ongoing employment. At the start of this term, the government committed to maintaining the size of the public service, ensuring that public money is used to promote safe and fair employment and promoting insourcing so that work that could be done by public servants is not outsourced. The insourcing framework and secure workforce conversion process provide the basis for the ACTPS to ensure that it delivers the government's commitment to secure jobs through meaningful action.

The 2023-24 ACT budget continues to deliver on safety for Canberra workers. It prioritises the wellbeing of all Canberra workers by ensuring there are supports in place and compliance with work health and safety standards. I commend the appropriation bill.

**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) (6.17): I am happy to speak about this government's investment in sport and recreation through this year's budget. Expanding and maintaining our sport and recreation facilities across the territory is an important way that the government helps to promote health, fitness and social inclusion across the community.

Under the CBR Next Move strategy, the ACT government is committed to providing great places and spaces for Canberrans to be healthy and active. Indoor sports facilities, outdoor hard-court facilities and district playing fields are critical parts of those infrastructure needs.

Netball is one of the ACT's largest participation sports, with over 12,000 active members, including 10,900 female participants. This year's budget includes over \$7 million to undertake improvements at five district netball facilities in the ACT, including the Canberra Netball Association in Lyneham, the Arawang Netball Association in Stirling, the Belconnen Netball Association in Charnwood, the South Canberra Netball Association in Deakin and the Tuggeranong Netball Association in Calwell.

The funding will be provided to Netball ACT as a grant, and Netball ACT will manage the project, which will include court remediation and work to prevent future water damage and cracking of court surfaces. Work is expected to commence at a number of district netball facilities in early to mid-next year.

The ACT government is aware of the urgent need for more indoor court facilities, particularly for basketball. As outlined in the budget, the ACT government will

continue to work with Basketball ACT to support the expansion of, and upgrades to, the Belconnen Basketball Stadium.

Through the government's discussions with Basketball ACT, we are looking at the best model to deliver the proposed upgrade. This work is being informed by the options study that Basketball ACT commissioned last year with the help of a \$100,000 ACT government grant. The expected expansion of Belconnen Basketball Stadium will complement other investments in indoor facilities through new facilities and upgrades to ACT government schools around Canberra.

This budget also demonstrates this government's commitments to public schools, with over \$6 million in funding to support operations and essential upgrades at the Canberra Olympic Pool and Dickson Aquatic Centre. The continued operation of the facilities will have positive impacts on the members of the community who seek to visit these facilities for leisure and exercise.

Finally, I would like to take the opportunity to outline the main project which was funded through the sportsgrounds section of Transport Canberra and City Services for this specific budget. This year's budget provides \$1.3 million for upgrades to the Hawker District Playing Fields, home of the Belsouth Football Club. The funding will deliver various improvements to the playing fields, including the construction of two additional LED lighting towers, upgrades to existing lighting towers and additional toilet facilities and change rooms, including female-friendly change rooms.

The upgrade of lighting and additional lighting for the third oval will greatly increase access hours for the community, particularly during winter months. The provision of clean and hygienic change rooms which support the needs of female participants is critical to all levels of sport, from grassroots through to the elite. These types of upgrades are vital in supporting continued growth in women's sports participation. I was happy to see how excited representatives of Belsouth Football Club were when I went to Hawker to share the news with them.

Funding of \$1.2 million will be provided through the ACT budget to commence detailed design of the Stromlo District Playing Fields. The playing fields will feature a pavilion as well as both grass and synthetic grass fields and cater to a range of sports. This infrastructure will provide sporting groups and the local community with sporting and community facilities for a diverse range of health and physical recreation activities.

I look forward to seeing the design and construction work for various infrastructure upgrades in this budget and the benefits that the sporting community will experience when they are completed. I commend this section of the budget.

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

## **Adjournment**

Motion (by **Mr Gentleman**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

**Sir David Smith KCVO AO—tribute**

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (6.22): I rise tonight to reflect on the life of a great Canberran and Australian, Sir David Smith. It is now just one year since the passing of Sir David, who died on 15 August last year. Sir David Smith is best known as the official secretary of Governor-General Sir John Kerr, who, in 1975, read on the steps of Old Parliament House the proclamation that dissolved both houses of parliament, thereby revoking Prime Minister Gough Whitlam's warrant—the infamous dismissal. However, there is much more to this great Canberran.

David was born in Melbourne in 1933. He was educated at Princes Hill state school, Scotch College and the University of Melbourne, and later graduated from the Australian National University. It was at Melbourne University in 1953 that David met his wife, June, while they were both studying medicine. True love intervened in their studies and caused the young couple to make a life-changing decision. David's 37 years of public service therefore began in December of that year, 1953, in Melbourne, as a clerk working at Australian Customs.

He married June in 1955 and in 1957 seized an opportunity to advance his career and provide a better life for his family by moving to Canberra as a training officer in the Department of the Interior—the department at that time with the responsibility for administration of the ACT. He and June drove up the Hume Highway with their two young children, Michael and Richard, taking up residence initially in the old Acton Hotel and later moving to Deakin. A third son, Phillip, was born in 1959.

A short time later, David was appointed private secretary to the Minister for the Interior, a position he held for five years. Throughout this period, David also found time to be actively involved in the Canberra Jewish community, including officiating at the foundation stone ceremony at the National Jewish Memorial Centre in Forrest.

After serving in his minister's office for five years, David returned to the department, and then in 1969 was promoted to the Prime Minister's department. It was from there that he moved to Government House in 1973 and was subsequently appointed official secretary to the Governor-General. He went on to serve under five successive governors-general over a 17-year period until his retirement in 1990.

Earlier in his tenure he was directly involved in the design and establishment of the Australian honours system, spending time in both Canada, on whose honour system ours is largely modelled, and in the UK. He was attached to the royal household at Buckingham Palace for several months and accompanied the late Queen on many official engagements.

On the establishment of the Australian honours system he was the inaugural secretary of the Order of Australia. It is simply not possible to capture the contribution of his public service career over the 17 years that he was up at Government House, but the fact that Bill Hayden, on his own appointment as Governor-General, asked him to delay his retirement and stay on for another two years speaks to the esteem in which he was held and the value of his knowledge and experience.



Immediately before his retirement in 1990, he became a Knight Commander of the Royal Victorian Order, having been invested by the Queen in a private ceremony at Balmoral Castle in recognition of his personal service to the monarch. He had previously been awarded the CBO and an AO and a Knight of the Order of St John of Jerusalem.

Sir David had an active involvement in the scouting movement. He was an original member of the Samuel Griffith Society and Australians for a Constitutional Monarchy. The Samuel Griffith Society recently honoured him by instigating an annual Sir David Smith oration. Whether speaking or writing, Sir David relied on facts, not emotion. While he was fiercely loyal to the monarchy and to our late Queen, it is not correct to refer to him as a royalist. He was a constitutional monarchist. His true loyalty lay in his unyielding support for our system of government and the stability that it provides.

He is survived by his wife, June, Lady Smith; his three sons, Michael, Richard and Phillip; loving daughters-in-law; and seven grandsons, two step-grandsons, two step-granddaughters, three great-grandsons, a great-granddaughter and a step-great-granddaughter.

His legacy is so much more than his service to Australia or the size of his extended family. It is the personal qualities of kindness, decency and integrity that he has passed on to all who had the privilege of knowing him and being part of his life. David and June celebrated their 67th wedding anniversary together last April. June is in reasonable health in aged care. Their middle son, Richard, is here today.

I echo the words that were written by John Howard in the condolence book at Sir David Smith's memorial service and that are inscribed on his headstone: "Well done, good and faithful servant."

### **Ms Kate Moore—tribute**

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health) (6.27): Recently, Canberra lost a strong advocate, a leader who fought for key reforms across politics and health care, Kate Moore. I want to recognise that there are people watching online who knew Kate well. Kate was a Canberran who made a significant contribution to public policy through her involvement in the Labor Party and the health consumer movement. Kate held important positions at a local and national level and was a powerful advocate for social justice, addressing inequity and listening to consumers and delivering person-centred health policy.

As the ALP's first female elected national official, Kate was a trailblazer who held the positions of national organiser and international secretary for the ALP between 1984 and 1987. Kate also worked as a senior adviser and then senior private secretary to Neal Blewett, then Minister for Community Services and Health in the Hawke Labor government between 1987 and 1990.

Bringing a wealth of knowledge and a passion for health outcomes for consumers, Kate became executive director of the Consumers Health Forum from 1991 until her

retirement in 1999. Kate reflected on the Consumers Health Forum, in 2012, that it was “a way of challenging what those very powerful vested interest groups were saying and putting the patient at the centre of health policy”.

It was the social justice perspective that really appealed to Kate. One of the first areas of policy Kate worked through with the Consumers Health Forum was general practice reforms, leading to the establishment of divisions of general practice. These enabled consumers to articulate their expectations of their GPs to put in place mechanisms to consult with consumers. This was a significant shift in public policy at that time.

Kate was an important voice in the development of consumer organisations. She recognised that consumer organisations like the Consumers Health Forum and the Health Care Consumers Association bring lived experiences of services to the table. Kate described the role of the consumer movement as bringing “a collection of those lived experiences and some level of analysis around it in terms of what it means to be a healthcare consumer”.

Kate brought a sophistication to advocacy. She is described as being able to use her knowledge and connections to pave the way for consumer perspectives. Kate recognised that the role of consumer organisations like HCCA was to represent the interests of people who used the healthcare services not so much to say we want more and more but to look at “how the services are delivered, how they are shaped, what they cost and what the policy underlining it is”.

Kate continued to make significant contributions to the local healthcare consumer group in the ACT, as a member of the executive committee, as an appointed member and then as chair of the then ACT Health Council. Along with other members of the council, Kate advocated for performance and outcomes monitoring of multiple quality performance indicators. Kate supported the ACT Health Council’s work to organise a deliberative forum through a citizen’s jury on health priorities. The jury objectives were to engage the community and gain a better understanding of their expectations and to prioritise the delivery of health services, within budget constraints.

Kate’s other roles included member of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Board; consumer representative for the credentials and clinical privileges project of the Australian Council for Safety and Quality in Health Care; member of the ACT Health and Community Care Board; and consumer director of the National Prescribing Service. Kate was a consumer representative on the National Health Information Management Advisory Council, the ACT Health Information Network and the ACT Health Executive Council, and chaired the Community Advisory Council of the Capital Health Network from 2016 to 2020.

Kate has been remembered very fondly for her hard work and friendship. HCCA has kindly provided me with remarks from those close to Kate. Janne Graham was the chair when Kate was the executive director. They built a powerful, important friendship that lasted more than 30 years. Janne encouraged Kate to be more active in the ACT health system and HCCA after she retired. Janne could see the value Kate would bring. She has reflected on the importance of Kate’s contribution and leadership in the consumer movement:

Rather than leading from the front, Kate's leadership was primarily from behind, developing and guiding others in their leadership and activist roles.

Darlene Cox, Executive Director of HCCA, is one of the people Kate guided over many years. Darlene describes Kate as a strong advocate for consumers. She regularly drew on Kate's knowledge of the health system, especially health financing and decision-making processes. Darlene attributes her advocacy style to Kate's influence. *(Extension of time granted)*.

Fiona Tito Wheatland, another long time HCCA member and consumer leader, worked with Kate on health policy and patient safety issues over almost three decades and reflected on Kate's energy and commitment to making the world a better place for everyone. Fiona said:

Kate had a great sense of humour and fun. We shared a love of jigsaw puzzles, which is a bit of a metaphor for both our work in health. She was also compassionate and taught me a lot about the power of patience and diplomacy when you are wanting to change the world. I shall miss her laughter, her advice and her wisdom very much.

My thoughts are with Kate's family, friends and comrades at this time. Vale, Kate Moore.

### **Community councils—government support**

**MR BRADDOCK** (Yerrabi) (6.32): Recent media reporting on community councils in the ACT has included feedback from Bill Gemmell of the Weston Creek Community Council and Monique Brouwer and Ryan Hemsley of the Molonglo Valley Community Forum on the difficulties they are experiencing in their proposals for change. Before I go further, I will disclose that I speak as a former alumnus of the Gungahlin Community Council, a role that could be argued was a springboard into my political life.

They described the government's community engagement model as one that is falling apart at the seams, due to government disinterest and ministerial prejudice. I wish to draw attention to some key elements of their proposals, which I understand have been included in a letter from the Molonglo Valley Community Forum to the Chief Minister. They want an ACT government districts office, specifically designed to facilitate and support community councils so that volunteers do not need to navigate the complex, siloed and sometimes arcane halls of the ACT government's administrative arrangements. They also want an advisory group for district planning, which would allow for genuine and meaningful consultation about planning issues.

These calls echo feedback I have received from the Gungahlin Community Council, plus my experience here in the Assembly. Since my entry into this place, I have been repeatedly disappointed by the attitude towards the community councils that permeates some parts of the ACT government. With some notable exceptions, there has been a clear tendency to minimise or deride the views, perspectives and roles of the community councils. Are there issues within community councils in trying to

represent the full diversity of views and perspectives of the community? Absolutely. We have the same challenge here in the Assembly. Is it challenging for community councils to ensure that they provide safe spaces for constructive and productive conversations? Again, absolutely. Again, we share the same challenge here in the Assembly.

This Assembly enthusiastically supported Dr Paterson's motion for the Molonglo Valley Community Forum to be recognised and funded as a community council. But they have decided that the grant is not worth it. In exchange for the \$12,800 grant, which does not go particularly far, community councils are obliged to hold nine meetings a year but without any facilitation or secretariat support, and with no guidance on interacting with government directorates and no guarantee of engagement from elected representatives or public servants.

If the government wants its community councils to work better—and it should—then the provision of proper facilitation so that they can start better reflecting the principles of participatory democracy is sorely needed. Let's support those community councils to be an effective voice for the people in their community. Let's respect their expertise in their community. Let them have real input into how their community develops and operates. Foster their skills in providing constructive dialogues. As representatives, let's engage our community councils in meaningful dialogue.

Finally, to those who critique their local community council from the sidelines I say: be the change that you want to see in the world. Get involved. Provide input. Make sure your view is heard and that the council is representing the full range of views of the community. Give back to your local community. By doing so, together we can ensure that our community councils are vibrant, active parts of the community, providing a valuable service to all Canberrans. This is grassroots democracy in action.

### **Disability Inclusion Bill 2023—exposure draft**

**MS ORR** (Yerrabi) (6.36): I rise today excited to tell the Assembly about my upcoming Disability Inclusion Bill that I have recently released for public consultation. My Disability Inclusion Bill is a bill to promote the inclusion of people with disability in the ACT. The bill recognised the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and incorporates these principles into the ACT. The principles aim to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by all people with disabilities and to promote respect for their inherent dignity.

A major purpose of this bill is to help shift disability support from a medical to a social model. Currently in the ACT the medical model singularly informs any legislative approach to disability in the territory. If the Disability Inclusion Bill were to pass, it would result in a shift to a social model of disability in our law. The medical model of disability is all about what a person cannot do and cannot be. In contrast, the social model sees disability as the result of an interaction between people living with impairments and an environment filled with physical, attitudinal, communication and social barriers. This change in a disability model will result in a profound shift and help to overcome the barriers faced by people with disability.

The bill establishes a framework for creating disability inclusion strategies across government in a range of priority participation areas, such as health, education, employment, justice and social inclusion. It also requires ACT government agencies to develop disability inclusion plans that are specific to their organisation and that detail how they are going to adapt their work processes and programs to be more inclusive of people with disability. These strategies and plans will be developed in consultation with people with disability and other key stakeholders.

There are over 80,000 people living with disability in our community. One in 10 report facing discrimination, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics disability, ageing and carers survey. The same survey found that, of the 3.3 million people with disability in Australia aged over 15 years, one in three had avoided situations because of their disability in the previous 12 months.

As a member of the Legislative Assembly, and from my discussions with the community and disability advocates and organisations, I know that discrimination is still a very real factor in the lives of people with disability. I believe that we, as a community, can work together to remove these barriers and ensure that people with a disability no longer face discrimination or have to constantly advocate for their rights to be recognised.

Canberra is renowned for being a progressive and inclusive community. This bill seeks to drive change in a key priority area that addresses the ongoing discrimination still experienced by people with disability, creating a more inclusive Canberra. I see this bill as another way that we can lead, another way of being a supportive city for everyone in our community. New South Wales and South Australia are the only other jurisdictions with a disability inclusion act. I think it is time that the ACT had one too.

There is no better way to ensure that the work that we do will help people in our community than by listening to their feedback and ensuring that they have a say in the legislation that will impact them. That is why I am seeking the community's input and feedback on my Disability Inclusion Bill. I know that having input and seeking feedback from people with disability and those who have people with disability in their lives is vital for the bill to make a real change to the lives of people in our community that it is there to support.

I look forward to introducing this bill to the Assembly, hopefully later this year, and welcome the support of every member in this place. If you want to learn more about the bill, please contact my office or check out the details on the website.

### **Planning—National Capital Authority**

**MS CLAY** (Ginninderra) (6.40): I want to speak briefly today about a recent decision that saw a major city development abandoned due to difficulties with NCA approval processes. I know we do not have any control over this and we have limited interaction as well with the NCA, but they make a lot of decisions that affect our people and it is really difficult when they are making decisions that are moving in a different direction to our own policies. I do not want to speak about the individual development but it was a real loss of good urban densification and it is a real contrast

when you look at the development that we are getting in business parks on the city's edge when we lose something like this in our city centre.

The block that it related to at the moment is the lowest value urban land use you can get. It is a surface car park. A surface car park right in the heart of Canberra is only providing amenity to the people who park there. It means we have lost all the other land uses we could have for that. It cannot be residential. It cannot be commercial or civic infrastructure. It cannot be community land. The worst aspect of it is we have lost the opportunity to have Canberrans work in a part of Canberra that has the best public transport access. We have lost the chance to have more people live close to where they work and play and we have lost the chance for government to provide services that we know we can provide really easily in convenient, central locations like that.

There is a huge difference between locating jobs in Civic compared to other parts of Canberra. I will just run through that a lot of the implications have a big impact on how we travel around Canberra. This is the problem: if we have these decisions made around us, it is really hard for us to do our transport well. Our 2021 census data shows that of the workers who commuted to work in Civic, we had 23 per cent catching public transport, 14 per cent using active travel and 63 per cent coming to work by car. That is a lot of people driving. I was a bit surprised at how high that is but it is because we are still pretty car-dependent in Canberra.

But when you compare that to other areas where we have commonwealth office jobs you really see the difference. In Barton, we have only nine per cent of people catching public transport—nine per cent versus 23 per cent, when you are looking at Civic—12 per cent by active travel and 80 per cent by car. It locks us into a car-based commute. It gets worse when you look at the Canberra Airport. Out there, we have only four per cent of journeys to work by public transport, two per cent by active travel and 94 per cent by car. That is what happens when we get these planning decisions made around us.

If we want to get more than five times as many people using public transport and more than seven times as many people using active travel, the simplest way we can do that is to have more people working in Civic rather than on the outskirts of Canberra. It really matters in a climate crisis when 60 per cent of our emissions come from transport. If we keep making decisions like this we are not going to shift the dial.

The NCA has also recently approved a multistorey car park in the parliamentary triangle. Again, we are seeing some really low value land uses. It is only around 300 metres from the Barton bus interchange, which is a key public transport hub for commuters in the parliamentary triangle and people use that all through the week. If we want to increase public and active transport use, we need to prioritise public and active transport. That is what our transport hierarchy says. We really need all our planning decision makers to be doing that.

It was a poor outcome for Canberra, I think. It was a poor outcome for emissions and it was a poor outcome for making the ACT more livable. These decisions have a long-lasting impact and I hope that we can move to a world where we are starting to make much better co-location decisions.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**The Assembly adjourned at 6.44 pm.**