



Debates

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Tuesday, 12 September 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.

Dr Damian West PSM Motion of condolence

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism): I move:

That this Assembly expresses its deep regret at the death of Dr Damian West PSM, a valued colleague and friend who cared deeply, worked passionately and truly sought to make a difference in the public service, and tenders its profound sympathy to his family, friends and colleagues in their bereavement.

It is with sadness that I rise today to mark the passing of our friend and colleague Dr Damian West, who died suddenly on Monday, 24 July from complications of leukaemia. I particularly, this morning, welcome Damian's wife, Sian, his children Addey and Henley, his extended family, many colleagues from across the ACT government and the broader Canberra community to the Assembly this morning.

Dr West was a leader and change maker in the ACT public service. He was instrumental in shaping ACT public service culture and workforce practices, with a strong focus on consultation, collaboration and education. He played a leading role in supporting our workforce during the pandemic, including the establishment of safe work practices for those who continued to provide frontline services to our community and through the introduction and embedding of flexible working arrangements for those who were able to work remotely.

Post-pandemic, Dr West progressed these reforms through the development of regional flexible work hubs and contemporary inclusion and diversity, workforce safety, leadership and talent programs across the ACTPS. Through all of Damian's work, the ACT public service has become an employer of choice and recognised as one of the progressive public sector jurisdictions for its workplace practices.

Damian was recognised for this contribution through the awarding of a Public Service Medal in the Queen's Birthday Honours. He was passionate about the public service

and he was a central figure in driving workplace reforms through enterprise bargaining, which he saw as central to our capacity to attract and retain skilled people in the ACT public sector.

Prior to joining the ACTPS in 2020, Damian held senior executive roles in the commonwealth public service, including with Services Australia, the Australian Communications and Media Authority and the Australian Public Service Commission. He studied here in Canberra, earning first a Bachelor of Arts degree and then a PhD in business administration and management.

For a period between 2015 and 2017, Damian went south and worked for the Victorian Public Service Commission, where he was Deputy Public Sector Commissioner. In this role he led major change, transformation and reform to strengthen the capability, diversity, integrity, employment arrangements and leadership of the Victorian public sector.

On a personal level, Damian was confident, articulate and intellectually rigorous—a public servant who valued integrity and public sector accountability. He was always positive, energetic and generous, with a quick mind and engaging communication style. He built collegiate and strong working relationships with colleagues across the public service and with external stakeholders. I found this extremely helpful because I always knew his advice would be well-considered and would reflect a wide range of discussions and viewpoints.

Damian was also well-known for investing in his team, for acting as a sounding board for staff at all levels. He inspired many with his commitment to what good public service vision and sound practice can achieve and I know his team continues to feel his loss deeply. In the weeks since his passing, colleagues have reflected that Damian exhibited the best features of the public service: professional excellence; fearless and well-considered advice; and, most importantly, lateral thinking. He made an immense contribution to the territory and to the public service and has left a lasting legacy for those he worked with.

We miss him here in the Assembly and across the government. Pretty well every Monday morning each week we would begin with a meeting that included Damian. Often, my Monday morning meetings are not full of good news and at times I would ask Damian, “Is there any good news?” The response that “Port Adelaide won on the weekend” was probably not the answer I was looking for!

Our thoughts today are with those closest to him—Sian, Addey and Henley—his extended family and his many close colleagues across the ACT government and the community. I know my ministerial colleagues and others will contribute this morning to share their stories and experience of a great friend and colleague.

MS LEE (Kurrajong—Leader of the Opposition): On behalf of the Canberra Liberals, I pay tribute to Dr Damian West, who passed away suddenly on 24 July this year. I acknowledge his family, friends and many work colleagues who are joining us in the chamber today; in particular, his wife Sian, and two kids, Addey and Henley.

Dr West was a long-term senior public servant who served in the federal, Victorian, and of course, the ACT public service. As Deputy Director-General of the Office of

Industrial Relations and Workforce Strategy in the Chief Minister's Directorate, Dr West was instrumental in advancing whole-of-service stewardship and the consolidation and enhancement of work, health, safety and well-being, across the entire ACT public service, played an integral part in supporting the ACT public service through the pandemic and was a champion of change for the ACT public service graduate program.

Dr West's work was recognised in 2022 when he received the Public Service Medal in the 2022 Queen's Birthday Honours list for outstanding strategic leadership and development of the ACT public service. Dr West was national secretary of the Institute of Public Administration Australia, the IPAA, a member of the IPAA ACT Council and a member of the Australia and New Zealand School of Government, or ANZSOG, research network.

On a personal note, whilst members of the Canberra Liberals had a very limited working relationship with Dr West, in the times that we would sit across from each other during estimates hearings and annual reports hearings, there was no doubt about Dr West's professionalism and his deep commitment to ensuring that the public service was indeed being served well by senior officials like himself.

On behalf of the Canberra Liberals, I express our deepest regret and condolences, especially to his family, friends, loved ones and many, many of his work colleagues.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong—Attorney-General, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Gaming and Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction): I would like to start today by acknowledging Dr Damian West's family and all those who have gathered here with us. On behalf of the ACT Greens, I wish to extend our deepest condolences for the loss of a remarkable individual. To us, Damian was a dedicated and hard-working senior public servant but to you he was a cherished father, husband, son, brother, cousin and a decent mate.

Damian's first professional job was as a motor mechanic and no doubt, the industry was the worst off for losing his skills. The fact that, after a period across commonwealth government departments, Damian then became Deputy Director-General for Workforce Capability and Industrial Relations in the ACT government is surely inspiration to all of us who want to try something else, learn something new, or switch careers.

One of Damian's enduring contributions lies in his backing of the ACT government's graduate scheme. He understood that the ACT government could better deliver for Canberrans by being an attractive destination for bright graduates in a city where competition for talent is fierce. Damian was a huge advocate for education and training to enhance skills and broaden horizons. With a doctorate to his name which explored factors effecting employee engagement, he consistently championed investments in the skills of our public servants through thorough and rigorous training and education.

Thanks no doubt to Damian's dedication, the ACT Government Graduate Scheme achieved recognition as one of the top 100 destinations for graduates in Australia in 2022, out of more than 3,000 entries. Damian's commitment to nurturing emerging talent and providing support for budding policy and corporate officials set a tone that I hope will endure and expand, even in his absence.

I have learnt that people working with him like doing so because he was ambitious for them. He expected them to deliver, held them accountable but always backed them in, even if things did not go quite as planned. He helped make work important and worthwhile.

As a minister, I value senior officials who are able to embrace the collective brains of their teams and challenge their own assumptions. It makes for quality advice. The top-down approach just cannot be as effective. I know Damian was a believer in empowering others and I hope that this approach will be a legacy of his time in the ACT government.

Damian's innovation as a leader in human resources resulted in him gaining a Public Service Medal for his work in steering the ACT public service through the pandemic. He provided the technology and process investment which allowed our public servants to continue to serve the people of Canberra from home or remotely.

Whilst a convinced supporter of hybrid work, and no doubt supported by his passion as an active AFL player, Damian knew that coming together in person as a team was also essential to deliver winning results. Damian was not afraid to take on work which might have been regarded as too risky or too hard. For example, undertaking the review of the ACT's Dhulwa Mental Health Unit. Knowing that that would deliver some difficult findings did not deter Damian from taking it on, which was part of what made him so admirable as a public servant.

I hope in these few remarks that I have conveyed a picture of what Damian West meant to the ACT public service and to his colleagues and to those that worked with him. An individual who held ambitions, not only for himself but also for those around him, he possessed a strong work ethic, an unwavering determination to tackle hard challenges and a strong commitment to modernising the ACT public service.

As we reflect on Damian's legacy, let us also reflect on the valuable lessons he imparted; lessons of empowerment, of giving things a go and of lifelong education. Damian's spirit lives on in the hearts of those he worked with and I am confident his legacy will continue to inspire us to be reformers and leaders in our unique ACT context.

To Sian, Addey and Henley, and Damian's mother and sisters who are with us, and his broader family and group of friends and colleagues who are in the Chamber today, I once again offer our sincere condolences at this difficult time.

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): My office and I, we loved working with Damian. He was a great friend of ours. He was always so generous with his time. He had extraordinary patience with some of our wild ideas and questions. He always went well above and beyond to support the government, to make the best possible decisions for the Canberra community.

Damian had an unrivalled ability to just get on with solving problems. He did not muck around. He enthusiastically navigated barriers no matter how challenging, and

he was never hesitant to just pick up the phone and get to the bottom of things. He was always willing to have a chat about a policy problem, lend an ear, brainstorm solutions and for that my office will always be grateful.

He had a strong moral compass with people at the centre of how he thought about the world. Whether through making the ACT public service a great workplace, or providing excellent services to the Canberra community, Damian always put people first. As a public servant he was frank, fearless and fair. He exemplified the high standards of our public service and inspired respect and high expectations from ministers and their officers.

Damian was a giant within our public service and he had a huge impact on everyone who had the pleasure of working with him. Even, on the most challenging days, his energy, his humour and his nous made dealing with difficult situations just a little bit easier. Even on the most serious of occasions he would always warm all of our hearts with that beautiful smile. We all loved that about him.

Damian is missed every day by the ACT government. We all miss him terribly. I want to thank Sian, Addey and Henley, for being so generous and giving us the chance to remember, to celebrate and to grieve with you. We miss you, Damian.

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): It is with sadness that I rise to speak on the passing of a colleague and a friend, Dr Damian West, PSM.

Dr West served the people of the ACT and the people of Australia as a dedicated and hugely respected public servant and leader. I had the privilege of working with Damian over several years and it is that work to which I will speak to today; to the legacy of Dr West as a public servant, a colleague and a mentor.

It is right and proper that we memorialise the man for who he was to his family and his loved ones. And so too, it is right that we celebrate the incredible achievements for which he remains so highly respected by those who knew him in their working lives.

Following his unexpected passing, an online space was created for friends and colleagues to post comments and memories for Dr West. It is a place for people to come together in both mourning and celebration alike.

I need not read far through the messages to know that Dr West had an overwhelming respect and admiration of his peers. The prevailing message is that Dr West was one of the world's great fixers, a generous and talented leader, a standout intellect and problem solver and an immensely kind and supportive friend. Almost every message of memory speaks not only of the incredible impact of his work but the fantastic humour and enthusiasm with which he did it.

Dr West served as Head of the Office of Industrial Relations and Workforce Strategy where he deservedly had the respect and admiration of both his colleagues and of major government stakeholders that we see here today in the Chamber.

Leaders of the public service, government and the trade union movement all have spoken with great admiration of Dr West's contributions to the ACT community. CPSU Regional Secretary, Maddy Northam, had this to say.

CPSU engaged with Damian constantly, working in partnership with him to resolve issues quickly and fairly wherever possible. This was particularly so during COVID where Damian and I would speak multiple times a day about the issues effecting CPSU members. Damian was generous with his time, affable and in my view, the embodiment of the ACT governments union encouragement policy. Damian's absence will be felt not only at CMTEDD but across the service, such was his reach. He will certainly be missed by CPSU delegates, members and staff that worked with him.

From the United Workers Union Director, Lyndal Ryan, she said,

I really appreciated Damian's ability to solve problems. More than anyone I have ever met in the public service, Damian could grasp the issue facing our members. I never had to write a lengthy submission or draw pictures for him to quickly understand the guts of the problem and then find a practical solution. I have been fortunate to have worked with many very capable public servants; Damian was the best of the best.

It is a rare thing for those in the public service to be so roundly admired and respected. Few of us in this place could hope to be remembered with the overwhelming respect and honour of such a diverse array of people. People from across the political spectrum, from public services across Australia, and from times both recent and long past, have joined their voices in mourning and in celebration of the life of a cherished colleague and friend.

To Damian's loved ones, Sian, Addey and Henley, and all of those who held him dear, his family, we send you our deepest condolences. Dr Damian West will be remembered and upheld for many years to come for his extraordinary contributions to the lives of so many people.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Skills, Minister for Transport and City Services and Special Minister of State): It is with great sadness that I rise to speak on this condolence motion for Dr Damian West. Damian was truly a people person and that is first and foremost the reason for his success. His expertise in industrial relationships and safety contributed a great deal to reforms in the ACT public service. The office of industrial relations model that Damian helped establish streamlined and brought consistency to human resources decisions across the government.

His personality and intellect allowed him to build bridges that made his workplace better for everyone. Damian was an innovator, responding to calls for more insourced functions and less reliance on consultancies. He worked with his team to establish the Strategic Transformation Unit. That team provides advice to areas across the public service about how to improve their processes and services, much like a consultancy, except the expertise is part of the public service: an idea that has now been taken up by the federal government.

His distinguished service as a long-time public servant served Canberra well. He was a true Canberran and his story as a southsider going into the city nightclubbing in his

younger years certainly resonated with me. I met with Damian many times and with his many different hats across enterprise bargaining, human resources, public service insourcing and community facilities management. He was always enthusiastic, professional and tremendously helpful. He was truly a friend to all.

Importantly, he was one of those rare people who had the ability to connect the dots and what I mean by that is that he could see how policy reform and implementation would impact various areas of the government and our community. He knew that making one change here would have a profound impact there and he always made sure that his decisions and advice put people first, as the Deputy Chief Minister said.

That is reflected in the ACT public service's working arrangements since we emerged from lockdown, with Damian spearheading reform to provide genuine flexible working arrangements for staff that boosted productivity, but also allowed for more time for the things that matter most, that mattered to Damian, like family and friends and, of course, sport and the beloved ANU Football Club.

My last interaction with Damian was a good one. Running late for a meeting, I had to get lunch and he appeared to be in the same boat. Both of us were time poor when I bumped into him at the banh mi shop across the road. There was discussion about BBQ pork and value for money of getting three dimmies over at that shop, even if you had the stomach for more.

We spoke also about more important matters: the success of insourcing the ACT government's cleaning teams, meaning that these people would now have access to better pay and working conditions. Things like regulated hours, paid annual leave, proper equipment and reasonable rostering. These are the types of people that Damian helped most. Some of those workers now have a stable piece of primary income. With many of them not even speaking English as their first language, they all knew who Damian was. He was the person who got their job and made it even better and as we all know, that is one of the best things you can do for someone.

I walked back to my office thinking "Damian is such a safe pair of hands." That is the kind of confidence that he gave you—not just ministers, but everyone that he worked with. It is true that reforms Damian spearheaded are leaving not only a long-lasting impact on the public service but on the lives of people across Canberra, because as we know, once something as significant as flexible workplace reforms are implemented, they are difficult to undo.

Most of all was his ability to bring people together from all walks of life. Damian could chat with a cleaner and he understood their concerns about workplace conditions. He would also work at the highest levels with unions to get better outcomes for their members and the government. That was reflected in a recent speech at the National Press Club, where their current National Secretary—who joins us in the chamber today—of the CFMEU's Construction & General Division mentioned Damian's passing at the start of his recent keynote speech, such is the acknowledgement of his contribution not only to Canberra but to our nation. I will miss his counsel, his frank and fearless advice and his ability to get the hard things done with such an easy and calm approach.

I only knew Damian from his professional life, where he was a high achiever and was held in great respect, but from the glimpse that I had from his funeral into his personal life and the close relationship with his family and friends, he lived a rich and celebrated life where he was an even higher achiever. My sincere condolences go to his family, Sian, Addey and Henley and his colleagues right across the public service. We will miss you greatly Damian.

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

At 10.26 am, the sitting was suspended until the ringing of the bells.

The bells having been rung, Madam Speaker resumed the chair at 10.32 am.

Petitions

Ministerial responses

The following responses to petitions have been lodged:

Environment—Mount Ainslie Nature Reserve—petitions 12-23 and 16-23

By **Mr Gentleman**, Minister for Planning and Land Management, dated 31 August 2023, in response to a petition lodged by Ms Clay on 6 June 2023 concerning Mount Ainslie Nature Reserve volcanic sites.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

I refer to your letter of 6 June 2023 regarding the petitions 012-23 and 016-23 about the Ainslie Volcanics Sites.

The ACT Government acknowledges the interest of Ms Jo Clay MLA to have the sites incorporated into the Mt Ainslie Nature Reserve. The sites have important ecological and cultural values that require ongoing protection and care. The ACT Government acknowledges the contribution of local volunteers working with the Molonglo Conservation Group and ACT Parks and Conservation Service (PCS) to undertake environmental restoration activities.

Part Block 4 Section 63 Campbell is under the custodianship of the ACT Parks and Conservation Service. The area is managed to maintain the current ecological condition and as a bushfire asset protection zone for Block 1 Section 63 Ainslie. While the investment in the land is less than what would be expended if the land was part of a Nature Reserve, the Government continues to manage the land in a way that controls pest plants and animals and undertakes works for amenity purposes.

While adding this section into the protected areas of Canberra Nature Park could assist to secure ecological improvements, it will require significant additional resourcing to achieve conservation requirements to the level of a Nature Reserve.

Despite the above, conservation can occur across all land tenures. Areas on the blocks that contain conservation values, such as habitat for protected animals or

endangered ecological communities can be managed separately to open space areas that are managed specifically for amenity and recreation values. Conservation zones can be identified with bollards to ensure appropriate management activities and spatially for land managers in planning and ensuring to avoid areas for slashing and mowing and pest plant and animal controls.

This system is underway across other areas of the Territory, such as Kuringa Drive Woodlands (protecting box-gum woodland), around Giralang Ovals (protecting rare plants), and at Lake Tuggeranong in Greenway (protecting Striped legless lizard habitat). There are also productive conversations occurring with conservation groups about ways in which we can provide greater recognition and protection to areas of high ecological value that sit outside the formal reserve system.

Some areas raised in the petitions, in particular Blocks 2 and 3 Section 60, Ainslie, and the grassy section of Block 4 Section 63, Campbell between block 4 Section 38 and Wolseley Drive, are currently managed by Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS). There are some concerns regarding suitability of these sites into the nature reserve due to the fact that they are not directly connected to Canberra Nature Park, the level of ecological degradation on the site and the likely future use by the community as part of the urban open space network.

In consideration of the above matters, the government views that the current land management arrangements provided through PCS and TCCS are adequate to protect the identified values and the site. The site remaining as is will enable protection of ecological values as well as the flexibility for volunteer groups to participate in land management activities, and for future amenity activities to improve the open space for local residents.

The government will continue to support local community groups to also care for these locations through the provision of grants and other assistance. The government also notes that a Heritage Nomination is currently under assessment and consideration by the ACT Heritage Council pursuant to statutory processes.

I trust that the information in this letter is helpful and provides advice on the issues raised in Petitions 12-23 and 16-23.

Callum Brae Nature Reserve—Symonston crematorium—petition 13-23

By **Mr Gentleman**, Minister for Planning and Land Management, dated 31 August 2023, in response to a petition lodged by Ms Clay on 31 May 2023 concerning Callum Brae Nature Reserve and proposed crematorium development.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 31 May 2023 regarding Petition No 013-23, lodged by Ms Jo Clay MLA, concerning the Callum Brae Nature Reserve – threatened by proposed crematorium complex.

The ACT Government notes the matters raised in the petition in relation to Development Application DA-202138789 and the Callum Brae Nature Reserve.

The following provides information addressing each of the matters raised in the petition.

- a) Investigate whether existing capacity of crematoria in the ACT is sufficient.

The ACT Government is committed to ensuring sufficient and equitable availability of publicly owned cremation services and accommodating the faith and cultural needs of the ACT community. Government will continue to consider community needs against the capacity of crematoria available to the ACT community.

This petition relates to a private development proposal which is being assessed through a statutory process.

- b) Advise on projected greenhouse gas emissions from the crematorium, noting the new EIS trigger that applies to greenhouse gas emissions.

The *Planning and Development Act 2007* (the PD Act) and *Planning and Development Regulation 2008* set out that if the annual amount of expected greenhouse gas emissions from operating the development is more than 250 tonnes, the development application must be accompanied by an expected greenhouse gas emissions statement.

In addition, Schedule 4 of the PD Act also outlines a trigger for the impact track assessment where the annual amount of the expected greenhouse gas emissions from operating the development is more than 1 kilotonne. The documentation that was submitted as part of the DA stated that the proposal is below this threshold.

Currently, DA202138789 is still under consideration by the independent planning and land authority (authority) and a decision will be made based on the merits of the proposal after a thorough assessment is undertaken in accordance with the statutory requirements.

This includes consideration to the location, scale and type of development, suitability of the land for the development proposed, and the probable cumulative impacts (including environmental, traffic, noise, amenity of adjacent developments etc.) of the proposal.

- c) Review all licenses and approvals required and advise if these have been provided.

The authority has informed me that prior to the development application being lodged, environmental impact assessments were conducted to understand the potential effects of the development proposal. This resulted in two Environmental Significance Opinions (ESOs) being given for this development.

An ESO was provided by the Conservator of Flora and Fauna on 18 August 2020, stating that provided the works are carried out consistent with a set of conditions outlined in the ESO and the mitigation measures contained in the ESO application, they are unlikely to cause a significant adverse environment impact.

The ACT Heritage Council also granted an ESO for the proposal on 31 August 2020, stating that the development is unlikely to have a significant adverse

impacts on heritage values provided it complies with a set of conditions outlined in the ESO.

The proponent of the subject development also referred the proposal to the now Commonwealth Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW) under application 2019/8595. DCCEEW considered the application in relation to matters of national environmental significance and on 26 May 2020 determined that the development was not a controlled action under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*.

The Authority will review licences and other approvals required, prior to making a determination.

- d) Review whether the proposed crematorium complex complies with NUZ1 broad acre zoning.

The development application (DA202138789) for a privately owned and operated crematorium was lodged with the planning and land authority (the Authority) for Block 1 Section 3 Symonston. DA202138789 is currently being assessed in accordance with the Planning and Development Act 2007, which includes protection for environment and heritage matters.

A crematorium/cemetery is an assessable development in the NUZ1 Broadacre zone under the current Territory Plan and therefore the authority must assess the application through the statutory process. The Authority's assessment and decision will determine whether the proposal complies with the Territory plan requirements for a development in the NUZ1 Broadacre zone.

- e) Incorporate Block 1, Section 3, 99 Mugga Lane (9.27 hectares) into the existing Callum Brae Nature Reserve to protect biodiversity, connectivity and enjoyment by ACT residents and visitors.

As described above, the site is privately owned and not held by the ACT Government. However, The Conservator of Flora and Fauna has advised that from an ecological perspective, Block 1 Section 3 Symonston has values that are consistent with being included in the Callum Brae Nature Reserve. These include areas of Box Gum Woodland endangered ecological community, mature native trees that may provide nesting resources for native fauna and local links providing functional canopy connection between Callum Brae and Mount Mugga Mugga Nature Reserves.

Despite this, managing the site as a nature reserve would have significant challenges and require more resources than most sections of the existing reserve. This is due to a large weed load on the site resulting from past disturbance and likely a significant issue with rabbits.

These challenges would need to be carefully considered against the potential benefits of inclusion in the reserve estate, while also acknowledging that the land is not held by Government. It is therefore not considered appropriate to explore incorporating this site into the existing Callum Brae Nature Reserve at this time.

In addition, the development application for this proposal is a matter for the independent planning and land authority. The authority makes its decisions at arm's length from Ministers and Members of the Legislative Assembly in an independent statutory capacity.

In doing so, the authority takes great care in ensuring proper consideration and assessment of all matters required under the *Planning and Development Act 2007* and its subordinate legislation.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Motion to take note of petitions

Motion (by **MADAM SPEAKER**), pursuant to standing order 98A, agreed to:

That the responses so lodged be noted.

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 33

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (10.33): I present the following report:

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee (Legislative Scrutiny Role)—Scrutiny Report 33, dated 4 September 2023, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

MR CAIN: Scrutiny report No 33 contains the committee's comments on 100 pieces of subordinate legislation. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity—Standing Committee Report 8

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee) (10.34): I present the following report:

Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity—Standing Committee—Report 8—*Inquiry into the waste management of absorbent hygiene products*, dated 6 September 2023, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

Today I rise to present the report by the Standing Committee on Environment, Climate Change and Biodiversity on the inquiry into the waste management of absorbent hygiene products. The committee announced this inquiry on 2 August 2022.

The committee received 19 submissions and held two public hearings, hearing from a number of groups, including the ACT government, the City of Stonnington, the City of Hobart, Kimberly-Clark Australia and community groups and organisations such as the Ainslie Community Pantry and Conder House Laundry and Linen Service.

Australians create 67 million tonnes of waste each year, which equates to about 2.7 tonnes per person. Whilst this simple act of putting something in the bin may not seem like much in our busy daily lives, the fact is that the small decisions we are currently making will manifest as bigger problems for future generations, due to the finite space we have here in our territory and in Australia more broadly.

The report makes 13 recommendations in relation to the waste management of absorbent hygiene products such as nappies, wet wipes, incontinence pads and sanitary products. These include the use of rebates for encouraging the use of re-usable products, the introduction of a cloth nappy library trial and the provision of education and training on the disposal of these products in the community and in associated industries.

On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank everyone who participated or assisted with the inquiry. I would also like to thank my colleagues Ms Clay and Mr Cocks for their support in the inquiry and thank the secretariat for all the work that they have done. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (10.36): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety. At a private meeting on 6 September the committee considered petition 6-23, “A new police station and increased police resources for Gungahlin District”, and the government response from the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, dated 7 August 2023. The committee has decided that it will not be conducting an inquiry into the petition.

Territory Plan 2023

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Manager of Government Business, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (10.37): I seek leave to move a motion concerning the draft Territory Plan.

Leave not granted.

Standing orders—suspension

MR GENTLEMAN: I move:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent Mr Gentleman from moving a motion relating to the interim draft of the Territory Plan 2023.

This is a very important motion to enact the interim Territory Plan for the ACT. The plan has taken quite a lot of consultation over many years, from the site visits to the

online conversations with the public. It has involved the largest ever YourSay consultation that we have seen on any government policy across the ACT for all of the lifetime of this parliament.

It is quite important that we allow this interim Territory Plan to be put forward so that we can refer it to a committee to look at the Territory Plan as it evolves and is enabled. It is quite an important motion that we will have the option to debate, if the parliament allows me to move it. I would ask all members to support the suspension of standing orders to allow me to move the motion.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (10.38): It was put to us just yesterday that this motion would be coming today. Supposedly, it is being treated like a bill, but it is actually a motion by leave. This is indicative; it is the same pattern of disrespect and disorganisation that we keep getting from this government. I will give you a few examples. This is supposedly, as Mr Gentleman has just said, a very important motion for the ACT. If it is so important, why was it not put onto the program in the normal fashion? Why was it not better planned for?

Over the past six months or so, it seems that, at every sitting, the government has sprung something on us without prior consultation or notice. On 30 March there was no notice of the JACS amendment bill being debated. On 9 May they failed to inform us of a change in the order of the bills for debate. On 11 May the schedule of papers that we are supposed to get by 1.30 was sent late. On 8 June the new government sitting program was provided an hour before the sitting. On 26 June the new government sitting program was provided a day before the sitting. On 29 August we had the introduction of the Victims of Crime Amendment Bill without any notice. On 11 September we now have this new executive motion without notice, and they are seeking leave. These are important matters and they should be done in the correct fashion.

I note that the government have had plenty of time to do media on this topic. They have had plenty of time to get their voice out there but not enough time to adhere to the commonly accepted courtesies—and not just the courtesies but the standing orders—which means they have to come in here and seek leave to present this as an executive motion, not as a bill, which may be the normal way of doing things.

What is going on with the government that they cannot do these things in the correct fashion? Why are they so disorganised? Why are they so disrespectful? Why are they, in many ways, deceitful about the way they are going about their business, keeping us in the dark up until the last possible minute? They do not really care about the conventions of this place. They do not really care about democracy. They do not really care about good governance.

All they care about is doing whatever they want, whenever they want, without going through the proper processes. That is why today we are saying no when they seek leave to bring this on in a roundabout fashion and not in the normal way of doing things. They want to treat it like a bill, but it is an executive motion. What is going on with the government? Perhaps they could get their act together and adhere to the usual way of business of this place.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Manager of Government Business, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (10.41), in reply: I thank the opposition for their comments on the motion to suspend standing orders. I will just point out a few things. I think most of the ACT knew that this was coming. We had a bill for debate in the chamber which was debated quite thoroughly and which provided the opportunity to then bring on the interim Territory Plan. The opposition were well briefed on the work that we are doing here. This is a very important topic to get on the agenda to make sure—

Members interjecting—

MR GENTLEMAN: I note the interjections from those opposite, who have been briefed in detail about this. We have done media on it as well, so to say that it has come out of the blue is quite extraordinary. It is important that we debate this motion. Therefore, I seek support from all sides of the parliament to suspend standing orders to allow me to move the motion.

Question put:

That the motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 16

Noes 9

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

Question resolved in the affirmative, with the concurrence of an absolute majority.

Territory Plan 2023

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Manager of Government Business, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (10.48): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the Territory Plan sets out a statutory framework for the future development of the ACT and is primarily used to decide development applications and to make other planning related decisions;

- (b) pursuant to section 46 of the *Planning Act 2023* the object of the Territory Plan is to ensure, in a manner not inconsistent with the National Capital Plan, that the planning and development of the ACT provides the people of the ACT with an attractive, safe and efficient environment in which to live, work and have their recreation;
 - (c) a draft Territory Plan has been made in accordance with Part 20.3, Transitional—territory plan of the *Planning Act 2023*;
 - (d) the draft Territory Plan, as notified under the *Legislation Act 2001*, is being provided to the Assembly for approval as an interim Territory Plan under section 609 of the *Planning Act 2023*;
 - (e) if the draft interim Territory Plan is approved by the Assembly, in accordance with section 609 of the *Planning Act 2023*, it will commence on a day fixed by the Minister for Planning and Land Management by written notice; and
 - (f) the draft Territory Plan has also been provided to the Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services for a decision on whether to conduct an inquiry in accordance with section 608 of the *Planning Act 2023*; and
- (2) approves the draft Territory Plan as an interim Territory Plan under section 609 of the *Planning Act 2023*.

It is my pleasure to commend the new Territory Plan to the Assembly for approval as the interim Territory Plan, in accordance with section 609 of the *Planning Act 2023*. Planning reform is a major priority for the government. The planning reforms that have been underway deliver a more spatially led and outcomes-focused planning system. This means a greater emphasis on strategic planning and spatial direction for the territory at different scales, from the metropolitan to the district and site scales, as well as improved planning and built form outcomes. It also means a clearer connection between strategic planning and the individual development proposals.

The three key elements of the reform planning system are the *Planning Act*, new district strategies and a new Territory Plan. Flowing down from the ACT planning strategy, the new district strategies are both a policy and a strategic planning document. Focusing on each district in Canberra, they seek to identify areas for potential change and growth as the territory's population and economy continue to grow.

Informed by strategic planning, the Territory Plan sets out a statutory framework for future development in the ACT. While the *Planning Act* provides the legislative framework for the reformed planning system, the new Territory Plan is the main statutory mechanism for achieving an outcomes-focused approach. As the Territory Plan is primarily used to decide development applications, it is the key mechanism for delivering on strategic and spatial planning policies.

To provide for a more outcomes-focused planning system, new instruments have been introduced to accompany the Territory Plan. The design guides and planning technical specifications provide important direction, guidance and clarification to deliver a more efficient development assessment process. This enables the decision-making to focus on developing high quality, built form outcomes for Canberra.

In June this year this Assembly agreed to the new Planning Act 2023. The next step in implementing the reformed planning system is the release of the district strategies and the making of the new Territory Plan. I am very pleased today to present the new Territory Plan to the Assembly. I table the following paper:

Planning Act, pursuant to section 45—Territory Plan 2023—Notifiable instrument NI2023-540, dated 5 September 2023.

Two important changes have been made with the new Territory Plan. It has a new structure, and it has, as I mentioned, a new focus on the outcomes to be achieved. By restructuring the components of the plan, introducing design guides and planning technical specifications, and focusing on assessment outcomes and assessment requirements, the focus for development assessment is clearly on the impacts and the outcomes of a proposed development, rather than the metrics-based approach.

The new design guides are a very important addition to the ACT planning system to improve the built form outcomes we see in our city. The three guides being introduced are the *Urban design guide*, the *Housing design guide* and the *Biodiversity Sensitive Urban design guide*. The guides provide direction to assist development proponents in identifying design options and encourage innovation. The design guides also identify where flexibility in design can be considered and matters that must be addressed. Overall, the guides are critical in the design and assessment process.

Although the biggest change being introduced through the Territory Plan is the new structure and focus on outcomes, the new plan also contains policy changes. This includes changes to definitions, uses permitted in zones and planning provision changes. The explanatory report that has been prepared to accompany the new Territory Plan details all these changes.

To provide a summary, the Territory Plan introduces new definitions, such as community housing, drone facility and utility hydrogen production facility, and amends other definitions. It adds uses to zones, such as veterinary clinic to residential zones, data centre to industrial zones and community housing to the community facilities zone. Also, site-specific changes have been made to amend the requirements for the Phillip Swimming and Ice Skating Centre, and to enable the expansion of the Garran Primary School. Changes are also proposed to facilitate four demonstration housing projects in Forrest, Lyneham, O'Connor and Weston.

Changes have been included with the new Territory Plan to implement key government policies and commitments, such as new living infrastructure and urban heat provisions for commercial community-facility zoned land, as well as for new subdivisions; amended vehicle parking requirements to encourage and support active travel, while requiring the provision of infrastructure for electric vehicles; assisting to achieve net zero emissions by prohibiting gas connections in new residential subdivisions; and introducing large battery storage and hydrogen production as permitted uses in the territory.

A key issue facing the Canberra community and communities across the country is housing affordability. Providing for a greater range of housing, such as community housing, as a form of affordable rental will assist. Other changes that will help to

deliver more housing in the ACT include increasing the maximum number of units permitted in a multi-unit development in the RZ2 zone, the zone surrounding local shops and bigger shopping centres in Canberra. Allowing apartments of no more than two storeys in the RZ2 zone will provide more homes for our community. These dwellings will make it easier for residents to age in place.

Relaxation of the overly prescriptive planning provisions in the RZ1 suburban zone and other residential zones will improve the feasibility for multi-unit housing, including dual occupancy, whether unit titled or not. This includes removing the existing mandatory plot ratio rule and replacing it with a mandatory maximum site coverage requirement.

Community consultation formed an important part in the planning review and reform project. Public consultation on the new draft Territory Plan and the draft district strategies was open from 1 November 2022 to 3 March 2023. During this time there were over 30,000 visits to the YourSay website and nearly 81,000 downloads from the YourSay website, and 3,300 pieces of individual feedback were received. During the consultation period for the new Territory Plan, over 400 written submissions were received. All submissions received with publishing permission were uploaded to the YourSay website as a reference for industry groups and individuals.

The engagement activities provided opportunities for the community to influence and provide comment on the new Territory Plan. This included a diverse range of engagement activities that reached a broad cross-section of our community. Views were received from a diverse range of participants, including individuals from the community not often heard from, such as younger Canberrans. In response to both the feedback received during consultation and further internal policy work, changes were made to the new Territory Plan. These changes are detailed in the explanatory report.

To summarise, the new Territory Plan policy documents have been revised to clearly articulate the desired assessment outcomes, as well as grouping them by theme, for ease of use. The planning technical specifications have also been revised and refined. The specifications now clearly link to the relevant assessment outcomes from the Territory Plan policies. They also mirror the themes from the policy documents.

The district policies have been expanded to include the relevant requirements from the current suburb precinct codes. In addition, a new non-urban districts policy and corresponding district specification have been added to include existing area-specific provisions in the non-urban zones. Also, the subdivision assessment outcomes have been amended to better reflect the desired outcomes for new subdivisions and estate development. Provisions for entertainment precincts have been added to the inner north and city district policy and the Gungahlin district policy to protect and encourage appropriate entertainment uses and the night-time economy.

Specific provisions for the internal layout of multi-unit dwellings have been added to reflect the considerations in the *Housing design guide*. This includes a proportion of different-sized units, minimum room widths and ceiling heights, and natural ventilation. These changes seek to improve the living environment for residents. Several technical changes have been made to the wording of provisions to clarify their intent and improve their usability.

The design guides are an important addition and, for particular development types, must be considered as part of demonstrating how a development proposal will meet the Territory Plan assessment outcomes. In addition to the *Housing design guide* and *Urban design guide*, the *Biodiversity sensitive urban design guide* has been added to provide guidance on biodiversity and ecology design matters.

In response to concerns raised during public consultation regarding the supply of appropriate housing in the ACT, the ACT government has introduced a change to the Territory Plan to permit the unit titling of dual occupancy in RZ1 suburban zones. This change enables units to be individually sold where the dual occupancy is on a block of over 800 square metres and where one of the units is no more than 120 square metres in size. This change will provide for greater capacity for new housing in established suburbs. This will assist housing supply by providing landholders with increased flexibility on their own blocks.

I note that this does not mandate development but provides greater supply options for those who wish to increase housing supply by adding an additional dwelling on their block. Examples of this could include allowing development for a smaller structure so that Canberrans can age in place or provide for a dwelling for rent. Other requirements of the Territory Plan will apply to these new developments, such as the mandatory site coverage provision and the requirement for soft landscaping and tree-planting on blocks. The new dual occupancy proposals will also be required to consider the new *Housing design guide*. With these additional controls in place, it is considered that this change to allow dual occupancies to a unit title will provide additional housing for Canberrans without having a negative impact on the surrounding suburb.

The new Territory Plan will positively impact the Canberra community and environment by encouraging innovation and high quality design to achieve the desired outcomes for development in the territory. The Territory Plan completes the new planning system—a system that focuses on good outcomes for the territory and facilitates ecologically sustainable development that is consistent with planning strategies and policies. I am very pleased that I have tabled the new Territory Plan in the Assembly today, in accordance with section 609 of the Planning Act 2023. If it is approved by the Assembly, it will commence by written notice on a day fixed by me, as the Minister for Planning and Land Management. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

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

Appropriation Bill 2023-2024

Detail stage

Schedule 1—Appropriations—Proposed expenditure.

Major Projects Canberra—Part 1.8.

Debate resumed from 31 August 2023.

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (11.02): I seek leave to speak to Justice and Community Safety Directorate—Part 1.7.

Leave granted.

MR HANSON: I thank members. I was absent when the kerfuffle was happening at the end of the JACS debate. I am sad I missed it all. I heard it got quite exciting, but there you go.

It is important to address the Justice and Community Safety Directorate item of the budget because revelations of late about the deceptive manner in which the government pursued their drug reform, which exposes the police to greater vulnerabilities in what they are facing on our streets every day. It also really highlights the way that the government treat our police force with contempt.

We have spoken about their openly deceptive manner—they are boasting about it—and that they deliberately hid their drug reform agenda to decriminalise heroin, meth and other hard drugs from the community. Even the Attorney-General was fooled. He was conned. But what we now know is that the government not only hid this reform from the people of Canberra but hid it from the Chief Police Officer and the directorate, and they hid it by taking it through a private members bills that in their words, helped it with “dealing with the complexity of government”. So they deliberately circumvented engagement with the Chief Police Officer and with the directorate to keep secret their drug reform through an election and then bring it out the other side and deliberately avoid the scrutiny and the sort of complexity that comes from engagement with the police!

How cranky would you be if you were the Chief Police Officer and you knew that Mr Gentleman, Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith and the others had deliberately hidden this reform from you? You are probably used to the Labor Party conning the electorate. They hide things from the electorate; they did that with Calvary pretty successfully. So you are not so surprised that they are going to hide drug reform. There is a bit of a retelling of this story about what they did—and we will remember this, colleagues. There was a motion from Mr Pettersson at the end of last term during a debate around young people at festivals. Mr Pettersson said in that motion—and Mr Rattenbury was there, and he would recall—“Let us have an investigation by the government about simple offence notices.” That is what was said.

The Canberra Liberals said: “Yes; we’re happy with an investigation, but we want to be very clear that there is a whole range of drugs that we would never support, and we’re not signing up to anything yet. But having an investigation is a reasonable thing to do, and let us not politicise that.” Because never in my wildest dreams did I believe that their plan all along was to hide from the people of the ACT the decision to decriminalise heroin and meth! That has landed on the feet of our police, who have to deal with that. As the Federal Police Commissioner has said, it makes it “a more dangerous environment” for his members.

What has been said since—and I note that the police have changed their tune a bit now that they know that they have been conned. Now that our police force know they have been conned and they are having a real look at this, we are getting some more straight-talking, it is fair to say, from them.

Let me see what they said. I will quote from “Coked up capital” from the *Daily Telegraph* in August—

Mr Davis: Well, if it was in the *Tele!*

MR HANSON: It was said in the *Canberra Times* and other articles as well, if you do not like the *Daily Telegraph*. You probably sneer at it, don’t you? You sneer at the *Daily Telegraph* because it is not the *Guardian* or *Pravda* or whatever it is that the Greens read! If you quote from a paper that is actually read by the common man and woman then those colleagues over there on my left are quick to sneer at it.

Let me quote what it says. If you think it is not true what it is saying, then feel free to interject again:

Cops fear impact of the ACT’s relaxed stance on coke, heroin and ice in the capital of soft laws on hard drugs.

Australian Federal Police deputy commissioner Neil Gaughan—the ACT’s own chief police officer—said he expects there will be groups of revellers heading to Canberra when drug laws are relaxed on October 28, as well as opportunistic bikie gangs looking to make money.

Well done, you lot, because that is what we want in Canberra, is it not—lots of bikies coming in to town! The article continues:

“It would be naive not to think people won’t come down, even for a weekend, to get on the coke and not worry about the cops ... it’s a reality we can’t ignore,” Mr Gaughan said.

This is the Chief Police Officer. This is what his members are going to have to deal with—bikies, organised crime, people coming to Canberra to shoot up, to take drugs. That’s the Chief Police Officer saying it. The article goes on to say:

Mr Gaughan agrees the new legislation by the Labor-Greens government could lead to conflict between bikie gangs, increased drug use, a high road toll and long term mental health issues.

“I don’t think it’s a coincidence that the Rebels national run is to Canberra and coincides almost to the day with the introduction of the new laws,” Mr Gaughan said.

Well done—opening up the doors to bikies. The article goes on to say:

“The big difference is if you are caught with coke or meth in Sydney you are charged with a criminal offence and have to go to court. Here you will get a \$100 fine and if you pay, it goes away. You would expect many would just factor in that \$100 as costs,” Mr Gaughan said.

“To be honest we just don’t know what is going to happen ... I think we can presume we are going to see an increase in drug use and to some extent we are creating a more permissive environment.”

An increase in drug use! The Chief Police Officer is saying that there is going to be an increase in drug use. I thought you were all about harm minimisation. How is an increase in drug use a method of harm minimisation? The article goes on:

Mr Gaughan said one of the main concerns was the relaxation of methamphetamine possession, more commonly known as ice.

“Meth is highly addictive ... so the worry is people will go on four or five day meth benders, go out and drive and kill someone.

Here is the architect of it, Mr Pettersson, who has come to take the assistant speaker chair—Mr Four-or-Five-Day-Meth-Bender”. So, when you see those people out on the street, when you see the road carnage and when you see the bikies come into town, you can say, “Thanks, Mr Pettersson.”

Mr Gaughan, the Chief Police Officer, continued:

“Last year we had 18 people die, a 300 per cent increase on the rolling average, and most of those people had meth or cannabis in their system.”

So there are all these people dying on our roads from drug use and the Chief Police Officer is saying that you can presume you are going to see an increase in drug use. You are the architect of this policy, and you hid it from the electorate deliberately.

And here is another quote from the Chief Police Officer—a telling quote:

The vast majority of Canberrans don't know this is happening ... It's unbelievable really.

That is the Chief Police Officer—“It is unbelievable.”

But let me quote from another article. It says:

Decriminalising the personal use of hard drugs and legalising the sale of cannabis does not work and can be disastrous for entire cities, according to one of country's most senior police officers.

AFP deputy police commissioner Neil Gaughan said he had just witnessed the effects of those policies on a fact-finding mission to North American states which had relaxed drug laws.

“From what I saw over there, it is not working,” Mr Gaughan said, in comments which put him at direct loggerheads with the government in the ACT where is also chief police officer.

“In February I toured Portland, San Francisco and Vancouver who have all decriminalised the personal use of hard drugs ... what I saw was not pretty,” Mr Gaughan said.

“I saw in the states people smoking crack in the streets and the cops are turning a blind eye to that usage. Cops are walking around giving people a nudge to make sure they are not dead.”

“A city like San Francisco has entire blocks that are literally no go zones. Whole neighbourhoods are boarded up with people walking around zombified.”

New South Wales are concerned about this as well. Listen to what the New South Wales Police Force are saying. This is an article where a New South Wales drug squad detective is quoted as saying:

You will hear all these left-leaning politicians and some other organisations who think legalising drugs will cure everything. It will not. If the ACT government does not think they are going to be inundated with visitors looking to party on their soft drug laws, they are off their faces.

The fact that we were conned has come out after the budget! We were conned by Mr Petterson, we were conned by Ms Rachel Stephen-Smith and we were conned by the Labor Party, who deliberately cooked this up to hide it from the people of Canberra. It is extraordinary. They hid it from the people of Canberra and they hid it from the Chief Police Officer and took it through Mr Petterson’s bill so it could avoid the complexity of government—so that the Chief Police Officer was not engaged in that.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Petterson): Mr Hanson, could you please resume your seat. You have used the term “conned”, which is unparliamentary language. I ask that you withdraw it.

MR HANSON: Sure. I will withdraw “conned”.

Mr Steel: I rise on a point of order, Mr Assistant Speaker Petterson, in relation to whether Mr Hanson is actually being relevant in relation to the budget. I do not think he has mentioned the budget once in his speech.

MR HANSON: On that point of order, I am talking about police in the ACT and the extra pressure that they are going to be put under. Our police force is already under pressure, and drug policy, according to the Chief Police Officer—

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, please resume your seat. Mr Steel, there is no point of order.

MR HANSON: (*Second speaking period taken.*) It has also become apparent through other reporting that there are great pressures on our police here in the ACT. As we know, PwC has done a report. In an article titled, “‘Act Now’: independent report urges ‘transformation’ of ACT Policing to meet rising pressures on the force,” the PwC report was discussed. The article said:

New challenges in the Territory are threatening the current ACT Policing model, with a warning sounded that changes are needed to allow our officers to rise to these pressures.

An independent report into the Australian Federal Police’s provision of policing services to the ACT has highlighted how demand for both traditional and new policing services is rising in the Territory, finding ACT Policing (ACTP) needs to undergo a complete “transformation” to deliver a “cohesive, reimagined operating model” to respond to the future challenges facing the force.

One area of concern was that the ACT's past and planned "permissive legislative reform" could increase demand for policing services.

So everybody is saying that we do not have enough police, and this secret plan that you took to then decriminalise heroin and meth and other hard drugs is going to increase pressure on an already overstretched police force. It continues:

"[For example] decriminalisation of illicit drugs, which has an overall intent of harm minimisation but may also bring in new users of substance to the ACT and have flow-on effects to the broader crime activity that will require policing support," the report stated.

This is an independent report that is saying this. Your policy that you deliberately hid from the electorate is going to have a result that leads to an increase in users and an increase in organised crime. That is what independent experts are saying.

I always hear the Greens saying, "It is expert advice; evidence-led." What are the experts saying? What is PwC saying? What is the Chief Police Officer saying? What are New South Wales Police saying? Let me tell you what they are saying. They are saying that it is going to lead to an increase in users and it is going to lead to an increase in organised crime.

How is that good for anyone? It is not good for drug users, it is not good for the community and it is certainly not good for police, who are already overstretched and underfunded by the Labor Party and their Greens colleagues. But we would expect that from the Greens because we know that Mr Braddock thinks that an increase in policing leads to an increase in crime. He said that on the record.

The report goes on to say:

Canberra's geographical expansion, increased urban density—driven by Australia's fastest population growth in the past five years—as well as high community expectations of police were also challenges.

The report also highlighted the ACT's changing crime profile: while crime is down overall in the past five years, this was largely due to a reduction in traffic offences, which the authors warned was deceiving.

It masks an upward trajectory in other more serious crime and public safety-related incident types such as sexual assaults, up five per cent over the past three years, and the ACT's homicide rate, which has increased 67 per cent,' the report stated.

Anecdotally, ACT Policing members also report increases in family violence and mental health-related issues. What they illustrate is the increasing threats to community safety, and the complexity and changing nature faced by ACT Policing in responding to community requirements for their services.

Staffing levels stood out as an issue. The report stated ACT Policing was operating "below capacity levels" compared to other jurisdictions and outlined that it would need to "increase capacity over the long-term" to meet the growing population and demand in the territory.

We were saying that for years. We were saying for years that we did not have enough police. How many times did Mr Gentleman and others come into this place and say, “No, no, she will be right; we have enough police,” and that was not true. That was not true, and now everybody says it and it is on the record. The fact that he has had to put in this budget 125 police proves that it was porkies being told in this place for years.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, I ask you to resume your seat. You have said “that is not true”. That is unparliamentary language. I ask that you withdraw it.

MR HANSON: I do not think it is, Mr Assistant Speaker. Saying something is not true is not unparliamentary.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: I have got the precedents in front of me. I ask that you withdraw it.

Ms Cheyne: Mr Assistant Speaker, “porkies” is also unparliamentary and should also be withdrawn.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Give me one second.

MR HANSON: What was the other one—porkies? Mr Assistant Speaker, I am very happy to withdraw “porkies”.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, please resume your seat. Ms Cheyne, thank you for pointing that out. “Porkies” is also unparliamentary language. I ask that you withdraw both, Mr Hanson.

MR HANSON: I withdraw “porkies”, but I will not withdraw saying something is not true, Mr Assistant Speaker. I dissent to your ruling.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: I am going to need to seek some guidance. Members, in the interest of a speedy debate, we will check the *Hansard* on “that is not true”, and I ask that Mr Hanson withdraw “porkies”.

MR HANSON: Mr Assistant Speaker, thank you. I have withdrawn “porkies”, but we have got to be able to say something is not true. You say it all the time. It is a debating point.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, I appreciate your view of the world. It is not for debate across the chamber. This should be through the chair. We will check the *Hansard* on that one and review the previous ruling. Thank you for withdrawing “porkies”. Mr Hanson, you have two minutes 56 remaining.

MR HANSON: Thank you very much, Mr Assistant Speaker. There is no doubt that we do not have enough police. The government was saying for years that we do, and there is a discrepancy, shall we say, between what the government was saying and the facts. The reality is that this is a police force that has been dramatically underfunded for years. We have had that debate many, many times in this place. Mrs Jones led a whole bunch of motions, as have I. We have repeatedly said that this is an underfunded police force.

The statistics bear that out. If you go to *RoGS*, you see that we have the lowest number of police per capita in the country, the lowest spend per capita in the country, the lowest number of guilty convictions in the country, the lowest court finalisations in the country and so on.

We are the only jurisdiction in Australia to receive a net average growth rate and recurrent expenditure in the 2016-17 to 2020-21 period. So they actually had a reduction in funding over a period of years. That actually started when this government cut \$15 million from the policing budget in the 2013 budget.

This government has put additional police in this budget, and I welcome that. I do welcome that because we have been calling for that for years. But the government also in 2019 said there was going to be an extra 70 staff. We have this extraordinary discrepancy where you had a government saying, “We will put extra staff in,” but then you go to *RoGS* and you see that we have actually got fewer police now on the ground than we did a decade ago.

So, somewhere, something is going on where this government keeps coming and saying, “We are putting extra staff in,” but, when you actually look at *RoGS*, they have fewer police on the ground now than they did a decade ago. I just fear that we will have a big hoo-ha and lots of announcements and press releases from the minister, as we did the last time this occurred, and then down the track we find that nothing has happened—because that is exactly what happened last time.

We have grave concerns about the way that this government has resourced police over years. Based on their form, they make a lot of announcements but, when it comes to the reality in what they deliver, there is a massive discrepancy.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (11.22): I have some comments to make on behalf of Ms Lee. As we have recently heard, the government AAA credit rating has been downgraded and, according to S&P, it is due to the government overextending itself on expenses and infrastructure spending.

We have looked at the Labor-Green government’s track record of infrastructure spending over the past five years, and it has been pretty poor. So the financial situation is—it must be—much worse than it appears. On average, this Labor-Greens government routinely only spend about three-quarters of what they promise.

That is because Labor and Greens ministers are incompetent and simply cannot deliver. They also try to blame everyone else for their failures—things like COVID and constrained supply chains. The reality is, however, that they were already in terrible shape in this regard before COVID—both financially and on the project delivery front. For example, in 2017-18, well before COVID, they only spent 64 per cent of budgeted funds. In 2018-19, it was 81 per cent and in 2019-20 it was 67 per cent. So they were already performing poorly before COVID. It is a similar story to the overall budget position.

To make matters worse, when they do actually get project funds out the door, the government are not getting value for money. Let me give you some examples. There is the Campbell Primary School modernisation project, which is, of course, now the

subject of an Integrity Commission inquiry. We have the mismanaged Acton Waterfront procurement, about which the Auditor-General was scathing. We have had the CIT contract scandal, which is also being investigated by the Integrity Commission. We have also had the abandoned HRIMS IT project.

They are just a fraction of what I am sure is a myriad of dodginess, waste and mismanagement due to the sheer incompetence and arrogance of this Labor-Greens government. It is costing Canberra taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars. It is not the government's money; it is the taxpayers who are funding all of this waste, mismanagement and poor value for money.

It is the ministers in this Labor-Greens government, led by Mr Barr, who are responsible for this poor performance and the lack of value in infrastructure procurement and delivery. It is the ministers, led by Mr Barr, who refuse to stand up and take responsibility for their waste, for their mismanagement and for questionable procurement processes.

We put this question to Mr Barr: "How much money does a minister have to waste before their position as a steward of public funds is untenable?" How much is too much? We see literally hundreds of millions of dollars of waste and mismanagement. It is apparently acceptable to Mr Barr. How much is too much? It is a valid question that I am sure we will never get the answer to from Mr Barr and his ministers in this Labor-Greens government.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Skills, Minister for Transport and City Services and Special Minister of State) (11.26): According to the 2021 census, the ACT is the fastest-growing jurisdiction in Australia. We have more people living and working in Canberra, and it is growing, and it is vital that the government finds new ways to efficiently move our larger population around quickly, easily and sustainably to avoid the same problems that other cities face, particularly with congestion.

An integrated public transport system is key to delivering on the ACT government's vision of a connected, sustainable and vibrant city that remains a great place to live. That is why we are making long-term future-focused investments in our city, building Canberra's first ever mass transit system in light rail with stage 1 and expanding on that.

Light Rail Stage 1 from the Gungahlin Town Centre to the city has increased patronage on public transport. It has supported significant urban regeneration along the north to south transit corridor, and the frequent, comfortable and reliable services provided by stage 1 has been embraced by Canberrans.

We want to extend these same benefits to residents on the southside and then continue to deliver our long-term vision of a mass transit system that connects all parts of Canberra.

Extension of the light rail network to Woden will see more people travel to key destinations in Canberra, including employment centres along the central mass transit spine in a single trip. This mass transit spine will be integrated with rapid services and route bus services. With additional light rail lines planned to extend to other town

centres in the future, the Canberra light rail network will ensure a better connected, more sustainable and vibrant city.

Delivering on that commitment to build a better public transport system, the ACT government has been focused on progressing the first critical stage of extending the light rail network to the southside, starting with raising London Circuit and stage 2A. This has seen work commence on utilities works and the raising London Circuit project, key enabling projects that will allow for the extension of the light rail network from its current southern terminus at Alinga Street to a new stop at Commonwealth Park.

Once complete, there will be a new upgrade signalised intersection across London Circuit and Commonwealth Avenue to provide greater accessibility for light rail, vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists between the city and Lake Burley Griffin.

The raising London Circuit project has reached a significant milestone, with the opening of the first Commonwealth Avenue side track across London Circuit. This side track enables two lanes of traffic on Commonwealth Avenue to be maintained in each direction, which minimises the impact to motorists and cyclists as works progress towards demolition of the south bound bridge over London Circuit.

We continue to make significant progress in the delivery of Light Rail Stage 2A which is now approved for construction following the completion of a works approval process with the NCA and a development application process with the ACT's Planning and Land Authority.

In granting works approval for Light Rail Stage 2A, the National Capital Authority's approval came with conditions which include a requirement to trial a green track prototype in addition to ensuring the highest standards of environmental management and compliance.

The ACT government has already commenced early planning activities to trial the design, construction and maintenance of a green track prototype at the National Arboretum Canberra. A separate works approval has been submitted for the green track prototype, which is expected to be approved ahead of planned construction commencing later in 2023. Thereafter, the prototype will be monitored in 2024 to inform the final green track design, construction and maintenance approach that will be used for Light Rail Stage 2A.

The next steps for Light Rail Stage 2A will include advancing negotiations with our delivery partner, Canberra Metro, to have a contract signed as soon as possible so that we can start construction on stage 2A, expected in 2024, on a newly raised London Circuit.

Design works and planning approvals to expand a light rail vehicle depot have also progressed, which allowed construction works to commence on 7 August this year. This is another key enabling project for Light Rail Stage 2A, as the expansion of the light rail depot in Mitchell will provide the space needed to retrofit existing light rail vehicles with new battery technology.

This expansion will also allow the depot to house five new battery-operated light rail vehicles which will be used to service the expanded light rail network to Commonwealth Park. With this new battery-operated technology, the light rail network will be able to run wire free from stage 2A and beyond.

With Light Rail Stage 2A approvals now in place, the ACT government is shifting our focus onto the progression of early design and planning activities for the next stage, Light Rail Stage 2B, from Commonwealth Park to Woden.

The ACT government has committed \$50 million in the 2023-24 ACT budget to progress planning work on Light Rail Stage 2B, reaffirming the previous commitment that we have made to progress Light Rail Stage 2B. This will progress a comprehensive assessment of environmental and heritage impacts through the delivery of an environmental impact statement.

The Light Rail Stage 2B project is complex in nature and will require high-level planning, design and assessment, in addition to robust territory and commonwealth parliamentary approval processes to confirm a final scope, costs and benefits.

We understand a critical part of this process will be continued and collaborative engagement across government and within the community as design for Light Rail Stage 2B progresses. However, noting this is a complex process, a business case will be developed following design and planning approvals.

To maintain the status and liveability of our city, we need public transport solutions that are fit for our city, that is home to a growing population. That is why the ACT government will continue to make balanced, considered and future-focused investments in public transport, roads and active travel.

This budget continues that investment approach. In doing so, we will continue to build the infrastructure that our city needs to support all modes of transport as part of an integrated fit-for-purpose public transport network not just for now but also for the decades ahead.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong—Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services and Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction) (11.33): Like all Australian states and territories, the ACT has been grappling with the issue of buildings with combustible cladding. The government has focused on both remediating buildings that we own as well as providing support to owners of private buildings who may otherwise find it difficult to resolve this issue, such as owners corporations of multistorey apartment buildings.

The Private Buildings Cladding Scheme assists in the testing and remediation of potentially combustible cladding on eligible privately owned buildings. In terms of the private scheme, the government has established a concessional loan scheme to enable eligible owners corporations to undertake works to remediate combustible cladding on higher risk buildings. Loans are being offered for up to 10 years, with a maximum limit of \$15 million per owners corporation, and the loans are administered by an external service provider, Lannock Strata Finance. The loan scheme builds on

the support that the government provided to owners corporations to undertake assessments of the risk posed by potentially combustible cladding on their buildings.

The government has provided \$50 million for the scheme, with the potential of accessing another \$50 million. The budget will provide the additional resourcing to the concessional loan scheme to facilitate the loans approval process and undertake critical stage inspections for cladding remediation works.

Members will recall that, in July 2021, the government announced the scheme which provided these grants to eligible corporations to undertake the testing and assessment of their building's cladding. The scheme assisted owners of eligible apartments, with a rebate of up to 50 per cent of the costs, up to a maximum of \$20,000, to test cladding on their buildings and made available \$1.8 million for the testing and assessment rebate. The grants scheme ran for one year, from July 2021 to July 2022. The loans scheme opened on 29 August 2022 and offers a loan at a low interest rate, with generous terms, to assist owners corporations. Owners corporations will be able to apply for concessional loans until 20 February 2024.

I want to emphasise that there are hardship arrangements available to individual unit owners who are facing financial difficulty. Such owner occupiers are able to seek hardship relief by applying to the Revenue Office. I am pleased to advise that, as at 1 September, 20 applications have been received for the concessional loan, with between 25 and 30 applications expected in total.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (11.36): I just want to say a few words about Major Projects Canberra. I really welcome the increased staffing at Major Projects Canberra. That was an increase from a budgeted 240 staff last year to 263 this year and builds on actual staffing of 206 in 2021-22. This increase is really important. It is essential to deliver the significant infrastructure pipeline for the territory and prevent delays. There are a lot of projects being managed by Major Projects Canberra. It is a huge task that they are working hard on and they need more support.

Light rail stage 2 is an essential public transport and city-shaping project, and any further delays to this project are untenable in a climate crisis. We need to see stage 2B completed by the end of the decade at the latest. It is a real shame that it has been on the cards since 2016 with such little progress, particularly compared to stage 1, which took only seven years to complete, although we do understand the complexities involved in stage 2.

Woden CIT and the interchange are going to deliver good results. They will improve public transport access into the town centre, they will help it become light-rail-ready and they will provide more educational opportunities in Woden. This is really welcome news. That project is also going to have a live music venue and an arts precinct. I am particularly pleased to see those elements come into the project. That was an ACT Greens election initiative and it was part of our Parliamentary and Governing Agreement. I thank Minister Steel for delivering on those.

It is also excellent to see Major Projects Canberra will be working with EPSDD and with other government directorates to deliver electrification upgrades for all of government. This is really essential climate action. We need to do that well and we need to do it quickly.

The Canberra Hospital expansion is progressing at great speed. That is a great outcome and essential for our growing city. It is evident from the huge number of major projects we have, the procurement activities for whole of government and the smaller projects that Major Projects Canberra have that they have a lot on their plate. We need to make sure they are well resourced and well supported to deliver this amount of work. We need to make sure they are resourced well to do it properly and to make sure that we are meeting our milestones.

I will continue advocating for greater capacity for government to deliver these projects on time. That requires really good project management. The development of Major Projects Canberra to run this is really important, but we also need to make sure they have the tools to do their job. The ACT Greens are pleased to support this part of the 2023-24 budget.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (11.39): With regard to Major Projects, my focus is on the smoke and mirrors, as has just been alluded to by Ms Clay, around the tram project. It is a sad state of affairs when the Liberals and the Greens spokespeople on these matters are on the same page on a number of fronts. It is very clear that the government goes to great lengths to hide the facts about this disaster.

I field so many questions from my constituents in Brindabella, who are well and truly awake to the fact that the tram is, to be honest about it, never getting to Tuggeranong. They just want to know exactly where this project is up to. They want to know how much it is going to cost and when it is going to be delivered. When it comes to finding answers to those questions, the last place that you would look is the budget papers. It is the last place.

We have another budget and we still do not really have anything concrete about the long-fabled stage 2B to Woden. Currently, the only cost and time line estimates about stage 2 come from my office, not the minister's office and not the directorate. Indeed, in 2019, Chief Minister Andrew Barr was quoted as saying the tram would arrive in Woden around 2025. The government's own *ACT transport strategy 2020* says:

Stage 2 of light rail to Woden is expected to be operational around the mid-2020s.

Understand that that was an official statement in 2020, in the shadows of the election. In the shadows of the election, that was the promise: "Stage 2 of light rail to Woden is expected to be operational around the mid-2020s." That is obviously completely laughable.

We have recently seen evidence, from what the ACT government presented to the National Capital Authority, that there is no chance that the tram would arrive at Commonwealth Park in 2026. Indeed, their evidence was for it to arrive at Commonwealth Park by 2027-28. Just weeks prior to that, during the budget estimates hearings, which I know you were tuned into, Mr Assistant Speaker Pettersson, Minister Steel was content with reporting to the committee that trams would start arriving at Commonwealth Park in 2026, and yet somehow, in the span of a few weeks, that time line blew out to 2028. Where does it end with this government moving the goal posts? Trams were meant to arrive at Commonwealth Park in 2024.

That was revised to 2026, and now it has been pushed back to 2028. Given this project is estimated to cost upwards of \$3 billion, Canberrans have a right to know when the tram will arrive at Woden, but the government remains silent on this issue.

Where is the business case for stage 2B? There have been numerous motions in this place, yet there is still a refusal from the government to produce that document. This year's budget statements H is not the first budget document to mention the business case for stage 2B. Recently, Sally Barnes, the head of the NCA, said that approval of the preferred State Circle route was not guaranteed, raising the possibility of the Barton dogleg or perhaps some routes that we have not yet explored. The chair of the Public Transport Association of Canberra, Ryan Hemsley, said that, given the uncertainty around the route of the tram to Woden, cancelling it might just provide a nice and decisive end to what has been an exasperating six-year debate. That is fascinating, is it not, coming from PTCBR? Of course, if the Barton dogleg does indeed return, the tram would trundle through Barton at 20 kilometres per hour, increasing the travel time to Woden by no end, yet the government still will not rule out the possibility of this route.

Given the ACT government's belief that trams will not arrive at Commonwealth Park until 2028, representing such a long delay, as was expressed by Ms Clay on this project of just 1.7 kilometres, how behind schedule will the end result be? It cannot arrive at Woden behind schedule because they have not provided a schedule. So, given the current rate of progress, it is safe to assume that the tram will not be arriving at Woden interchange until well into the 2030s, and I think history will show that the Canberra Liberals' estimates of the cost and delivery date are actually extremely conservative.

As previously mentioned, the only cost estimate for the entirety of stage 2 is from my office, and that itself is an outdated estimate. Just how much will this project cost the taxpayer after the government refuses to rule out cancelling the project if the cost exceeds \$4 billion? It has become pretty clear that the government will stop at nothing to pursue this. You can fully understand why Canberrans are extremely concerned about how their money is being spent. I imagine that there would have to be quite a number of property owners who purchased apartments in the Woden Town Centre because they were promised that there would be a tram by 2024. That was the promise when so many of those apartments were built. Instead, it is looking likely that Woden will not be connected to the tram network until at least 2034.

As each budget is handed down, there is an opportunity for the government to join some of the dots, but they refuse to do so. It is becoming increasingly clear that this is a disaster. It is a white elephant. By the point that the population of the Woden Valley has grown by around 20 per cent by 2034, given the significant growth projection in Woden Valley, the government will need to invest significantly in interim transport solutions. This investment in interim transport solutions is true not just in the Woden Valley but in every population centre, as Ms Clay is awake to. We will have a motion in here tomorrow that basically arrives at that concession. That is what Ms Clay's motion will aim to do.

Given the delays, the projected costs, the growing uncertainty around this project, and the lack of clear information from the government, at what point should we rethink

this entire misadventure? It is becoming clear that the tram is not the public transport messiah that people thought it was, and I think that it is time to move on.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Community Services Directorate—Part 1.9.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (11.45): I would like to speak in particular about the appropriation with respect to the multicultural affairs portfolio. We have another budget in the 10th Assembly and we are yet to see the promised venue for multicultural events, festivals and weddings developed. This year, however, we did get an answer that the promised venue will not be developed. The multicultural affairs minister advised me during estimates that the proposed refurbishment of the Fitzroy Pavilion at EPIC would sufficiently fulfil the Labor-Greens government's commitment at the 2020 election for an exclusive multicultural venue in EPIC. This is both a disingenuous and misleading claim, as we now see.

The Parliamentary and Governing Agreement for the 10th Assembly, under the heading of "Multicultural Affairs", outlines that a Labor-Greens government will construct a large multicultural events venue at EPIC for cultural performances and for hire for large private functions. In questions I put to the minister during estimates, she advised me that a minor refurbishment of the Fitzroy Pavilion for an undisclosed amount is, in fact, the \$21 million venue promised for our multicultural community at the 2020 ACT election. The slyness of the Labor-Greens government sank to an all-time low when this comment was made. Did they actually believe they were going to do what they said? There is certainly a question mark around that.

Instead of the promise that was clearly made at the election for an exclusive multicultural events venue catering to weddings, festivals, performances and functions, this is now being downgraded to use of a portion of an existing venue. This is an insult to those in the multicultural community that voted for them under this false pretence. It led our multicultural community to believe that this promised venue would appear. I have had many of the multicultural community leaders in our city express to me personally their extreme disappointment, to say the least, at this broken promise. It is a broken promise and it should be treated as such.

As I was advised, once the refurbishment is complete—at a time we do not know, nor at what cost—the multicultural community will have to compete with profit organisations to use the venue. The facility will be like any other government venue for hire and will be available for all to use. When I asked the Chief Minister about the timing of the completion, I was advised that he did not even know when construction will start. Every week, I meet with multicultural and multifaith organisations and their members from across the community who describe to me the difficulties they face in organising venues for functions and opportunities to congregate.

We are blessed in Canberra to have such a burgeoning population of people hailing from different nations, cultures and religions. Multiculturalism has been interwoven into the very fabric of the ACT, and that is something we can celebrate. We should not treat the community indifferently, as the Labor-Greens government have done. The multicultural affairs minister and the Labor-Greens government will likely stand

up here to rationalise and explain away why the multicultural community will not be getting the facility they were promised. Maybe they will blame COVID, the economy the labour market or inflation, but a broken promise is a broken promise. These will just be excuses and misinformation. If they wanted to build a venue as they promised, then they would do so and they should do so.

In truth, the endemic waste and mismanagement of the government has arguably contributed to the withdrawal of this offer. Wastage and mismanagement have become so grave that I wonder what other promises they will not be able to keep, yet they argue away as though it is not a broken promise at all. The Canberra Liberals continue to fight for our bright and brilliant multicultural community, which is being left behind and disappointed by the Labor-Greens government.

The multicultural community get a mention in the Appropriation Bill. They are forgotten about except when trotted out for the Multicultural Festival. According to the 2021 census, roughly 25 per cent of the population of the ACT were born overseas, yet this portion of society is only mentioned a handful of times in the budget. Multicultural Canberrans not only deserve a government with integrity but also deserve one that is actually competent. They deserve a government that will give them a basic level of respect and dignity and the comprehensive services they so rightly deserve. A Canberra Liberals government led by Elizabeth Lee will be a government that serves the multicultural community more comprehensively and more competently. They could trust that our government would keep our word. A Canberra Liberals government will better support our wonderful multicultural Canberrans.

MR DAVIS (Brindabella) (11.52): I rise to speak on this part of the Appropriation Bill in my capacity as the Greens' spokesperson for the elimination of family and domestic violence and the Greens' spokesperson for young people. I commend the government's investment in services for the elimination of domestic and family violence services, and particularly commend Minister Berry for her consistent and national leadership on this issue. It is no secret that Minister Berry and I like a fierce debate over a number of policy challenges, but I am so pleased that on this issue there appears to be a unity ticket across the governing parties and across the Assembly on the necessary steps this government and city must take to eliminate the scourge of family and domestic violence.

This budget provides continued funding for critical community stakeholders to continue both their advocacy to government and the on-the-ground practical supports necessary for those in our community experiencing family and domestic violence. In particular, this budget increases funding for new and expanded initiatives. This includes the \$9.4 million investment for frontline domestic family and sexual violence services, \$6 million for the continued delivery of the Room4Change program, \$3.6 million for an expanded Health Justice Partnership program, and more than \$1 million for ongoing implementation of the recommendations of the government's Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Steering Committee report, which is another example of this ACT government's nation-leading work in this policy space.

I particularly want to take the time to acknowledge the Room4Change program. It is the kind of intervention that we should be particularly proud of. This program is for men who want to stop their use of violence and controlling behaviour and learn to

build healthier and more respectful relationships. These kinds of programs are absolutely critical if we are to shift the prevalent culture of violence in our society and tackle the systemic issues that lead to it. It goes to the broader justice reinvestment strategy of the ACT government which the ACT Greens support. If we are going to fix deep societal problems like domestic and family violence, then we need to do everything to stop these things happening in the first place, and that must include supporting the perpetrators to change their behaviour so that the behaviour is not perpetrated in the first instance or inherited by the next generation of young men.

Nobody's ambition should be to continue funding services for victims indefinitely. The goal is to not have any victims of this type of violence at all, and, until domestic and family violence is completely eradicated, we all have more work to do. I want to acknowledge that many of these programs are funded through the Safer Families levy, and I note some concerns from stakeholders throughout the sector about the lack of transparency about what exactly happens with the money. The budget forecasts that the levy will raise \$37.5 million over four years to 2026-27—a significant sum of money. I note recommendations 48 and 49 of the select committee on the budget that looked diligently into the 2023-24 budget. They say that the levy should directly offset frontline community services that support people who are at risk of or are victims of domestic and family violence, and that domestic violence training for public servants should be part of the government's core funding, not paid for by the Safer Families levy.

I have valued working with the diligent and hardworking stakeholders in this space so far over this Assembly's term, in particular, the Women's Legal Service and the Domestic Violence Crisis Service. I appreciate their ongoing support. I extend my thanks again to the minister for the opportunities that she has facilitated for me as the Greens' spokesperson for domestic and family violence to engage with the challenges and provide support and solutions in this area.

I move on to the youth affairs policy. I might be younger than most people in this place, or—as I care to remind you, Mr Assistant Speaker Pettersson, the youngest by only a matter of months!—but when I spend time talking to young people, people in their teen years and even younger in this city, I am blown away by their intellect, their empathy and wisdom that is beyond their years. They have a tenacity that I do not remember many of my friends and peers having when I was their age. They are alive to the injustices of this world that they are inheriting, and they are rightly angry about it.

Young people will tell you how worried they are about a changing climate and that they will never be able to afford a home. They will talk about the rising cost of living and the structural inequity they are in, which is so high that they are struggling to support themselves while studying without sacrificing meals and visits to the doctor or the dentist. So many young people lost many of their formative years to the COVID-19 pandemic. There are kids who did their first year of school at home, away from their friends and the formative experiences that the classroom and playground can give them, and kids who did their final year of schooling or their first few years of post-school study from their bedroom because the world had not reopened and restored itself to the vision that they had imagined. We know that this has impacted the mental health of our young people.

Healthcare professionals declared a national emergency in child mental health in 2021. This problem is not limited to the ACT or even Australia. This is a global crisis, and we owe it to every young person to do our very best to fix the world that they are set to inherit. We cannot wait until they are old enough to take our jobs to fix the huge problems that we have created and exacerbated, although I do look forward to the day when this chamber is filled with the people who are now in their teen years. I wholeheartedly believe that they will be brave enough to do things that at this stage we have proven we cannot.

I attended the CareersXpo a few weeks ago and had long conversations with a number of young people about the Greens' proposal to lower the voting age to 16. I met young people who thought it was a bad idea. In particular, one young man cited a peer-reviewed research paper from a university in Moldova that they had read about why teenagers' brains are not developed enough to make decisions like voting. I was struck by the irony and said to them that I could not remember the last time an adult quoted a peer-reviewed research paper to back up their argument while I stood outside the shops, and that they had articulated their thoughts better than most adults I had come to know, so maybe he should be able to vote. He took my point under advisement.

This budget makes some funding commitments to services that support young people that the ACT Greens wholeheartedly welcome. In particular, I would like to commend Minister Emma Davidson for finding \$204,000 for the WOKE program and \$445,208 for the Stepping Stones program, both established and expert programs that support youth mental health here in the ACT. The WOKE program empowers young people struggling with self-harm, alcohol and drugs by teaching them the skills to manage difficult and distressing emotions, communicate their needs and relationships, and change impulsive behaviour patterns. The Stepping Stones program is a free therapeutic service for young people who have experienced trauma. These services are evidence based, and I am assured by their providers that they have saved the lives of Canberra young people.

Other important services funded improved therapeutic residential care for vulnerable people. There is \$10 million for the new services to support raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility, \$2.7 million for redesigning the Childhood Development Service and the Children and Young Person Equipment Loan Scheme, and \$1.3 million for the ongoing delivery of the Indigenous Allied Health Academy for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT.

We owe it to Canberra's young people to ensure that their futures are full of possibilities of happiness and security. I am pleased to see that this budget's investments make some inroads towards these goals—all goals that the ACT Greens support.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Assistant Minister for Economic Development, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Business and Better Regulation, Minister for Human Rights and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (11.59): I rise to speak in my capacity as the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. As you know, Mr Assistant Speaker Pettersson, we have an increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse community, which adds to the fabric of our city and makes it the welcoming place that we are all

fortunate enough to all call our home. There are several important initiatives that support our multicultural community in this budget.

The National Multicultural Festival delivers Australia's largest multicultural event, creates economic benefit for Canberra and enriches Canberra's reputation as a diverse and multicultural community. It is an event that has a special place in the heart of our city: it holds many fond memories for those who have lived in Canberra for many years and creates memories for newcomers and visitors alike. This is obviously not just a government event, and that is one of the things that makes it so special. It is a community-led event—one with extensive consultation and engagement to showcase the many communities that make up our multicultural city. I am proud that the ACT government is investing an additional \$3.3 million in the National Multicultural Festival over the next two years.

Following the resounding success of this year's 25th anniversary festival's increased footprint across the city and into Glebe Park, the ACT government's budget announcement will support the continuation of the expanded event site again in 2024. This funding will also support sustainability and public safety measures appropriate for an event of this scale and profile; additional staff and operational resources; an upgrade of the event's digital platform; and an investment in accessibility. To support community participation, \$200,000 has been allocated for the 2024 National Multicultural Festival grants program. Stalls fees will not increase in 2024, and they have been capped since 2018. In fact, the fee for a one day, three-by-three metre community stall has not increased since 2014: it has remained at \$300 for 10 years.

The event is not just a celebration of our multicultural communities; it also provides significant economic investment. Post-event research found that the 2023 festival generated a total economic benefit of just over \$20.8 million for the ACT economy, a significant increase from the 2020 figure of \$12.2 million. The festival also generated a total of 40,077 visitor nights in the ACT, with the average visitor staying 2.2 nights, nearly doubling the 2020 visitor nights figure of 22,206.

Mr Assistant Speaker, I found it absolutely sad and baffling when Mr Cain sought to diminish the achievements of the National Multicultural Festival, and our government's ongoing—and now enhanced—support for it, in his speech just now. These achievements are owned and celebrated by our entire community, and the result of sheer hard work and support, which has been so warmly welcomed, and that I am proud to have delivered.

The budget also continues refugee, asylum seeker and humanitarian program funding. Cost-of-living pressures continue to have a significant impact on all Australians. Vulnerable members of our community like refugees, asylum seekers and humanitarian program entrants often do not have access to paid employment or commonwealth financial support. The ACT government program funding for the ACT Services Access Card supports these families with essential living costs by facilitating access to a range of ACT government and other services. These include education and library services, public health services and concessional access to public transport.

Mr Assistant Speaker, the government will continue to provide additional funding to the Red Cross family settlement assistance grants program for individuals and

families in Canberra after fleeing global crises. As the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has noted, the global outlook for the displacement of people fleeing unresolved crises and emergencies remains bleak. There continues to be ongoing uncertainty in nations like Afghanistan and Sudan and, of course, Ukraine, which may result in further families and individuals fleeing their homes. The ACT's indicative humanitarian referral rate is 250 individuals, or about 40 families, fleeing global crises per year.

In this budget, the ACT government's continued family settlement assistance grants program funding provides funding for one-off family settlement assistance grants to families and households fleeing their home countries, and a pathway to secure long-term housing options. It contributes to education, and social and economic participation, enriching the lives of all Canberrans. How Mr Cain could possibly describe the community as rating barely a mention in the budget is totally disingenuous, when Mr Cain cannot even bring himself to acknowledge this support of the most vulnerable—not in any speech, not in any question, not in any post. He is more focused on pot shots on performance than genuine support, which this government continues to deliver.

Mr Cain also demonstrates extraordinary persistence when it comes to inexactitudes, and that is on flagrant display again today. Despite three years of knowing that this budget item does not fall under this appropriation, Mr Cain persists—and I am talking about the Fitzroy Pavilion. Despite us making clear in multiple forums what a great initiative the Fitzroy Pavilion refurbishment is—how it will achieve the aim of upgrading catering facilities and amenities and be suitable for hosting larger scale community and multicultural events—and achieving exactly what we have promised, Mr Cain seeks to diminish this of all the things.

Mr Assistant Speaker, our community continues to invest in a vibrant and multicultural Canberra, a place that more people are choosing to call home than anywhere else in the country, and as a government we are proud to support them. I will conclude by taking the opportunity to thank the staff of CSD, who support our multicultural community every day, with countless events and ceremonies, often late at night or on weekends, and regularly, with all hands on deck. In just the few budget initiatives I have highlighted today, the importance of this work cannot be overstated. We thank them.

I commend this part of the budget appropriation to the Assembly.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health) (12.07): It is great to have this opportunity to speak on the new investments in the 2023-24 ACT budget—for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs and the community sector; to support our reform efforts in the child protection and family support systems; and to provide an improved service response for children and young people who are engaged in, or at risk of engaging in, harmful behaviour.

The community sector is one of the most important partners to the ACT government. Community sector organisations provide a range of services that are vital to many disadvantaged members of our community. We often talk about the trust the sector

has built with the community. When we talk about this trust, we are talking about the thousands of individual relationships that community sector workers have built with families, children, young people, older Canberrans, LGBTIQ+ Canberrans, Canberrans with disability and all other Canberrans in our diverse community who are accessing important services through non-government organisations. This is work that deserves fair pay and good conditions, so the government has welcomed successive Fair Work Commission annual wage review decisions to increase award wages for the sector. And we acknowledge the calls from the sector to address funding sustainability.

The 2023-24 budget increases funding to community sector organisations to reflect this year's wage review decision by adjusting the community sector indexation rate to 5.25 per cent. This initiative builds on similar funding increases in recent budgets, including the CSI raise to 4.43 per cent in the 2022-2023 budget and 2.35 per cent in the 2021-2022 budget.

Other measures in this budget that support the community sector include funding for training and specialist homelessness services to help enhance sector capability and capacity to better support people. These initiatives build on sector sustainability funding provided in the 2022-2023 budget review. There is more work to do, and our partnership with the sector, through the sector sustainability project, will continue to explore how funding meets the true costs of service delivery. I thank the sector—and particularly ACTCOSS and its staff, and the sector's staff as represented by their unions, especially the Australian Services Union—for their partnership in this important work.

Mr Assistant Speaker, the statutory child protection and out-of-home care system is one of the most challenging and complex areas of service delivery under the ACT government's responsibility. The Next Steps for Our Kids 2022-2030 strategy for strengthening families and keeping children and young people safe is the ACT's response. Next Steps strengthens our focus on earlier support, ensuring that out-of-home care is only ever a last resort. Next Steps also tasks us with ensuring the experience of child protection engagement is fair, transparent and restorative for children, young people and their families.

This budget includes \$65.4 million over four years to provide therapeutic residential care and to establish the role of the chief practitioner. The procurement process to engage a new provider of enhanced residential care services was completed in early 2023, and a contract was executed with MacKillop Family Services. MacKillop will deliver specialist evidence-based programs which are designed to interrupt the trajectories of children and young people living in residential care, where the adverse effects of child abuse, neglect and unresolved trauma lead to negative outcomes such as drug and alcohol misuse, mental illness, poor physical health, homelessness, juvenile offending and engagement with the justice system. Ultimately, the new model will provide care for children and young people that is relationship-based, healing and culturally safe. Opportunities such as this to implement new models of out-of-home care improve the safety and wellbeing of children and young people in the ACT.

The budget includes a further \$3 million to support the shift to more appropriate housing stock for therapeutic residential care services. This funding builds on

\$3.9 million included in the 2022-2023 budget review for additional properties for therapeutic residential care and will cover necessary renovation costs, ongoing management and maintenance, and rental costs to augment stock where needed. The funding will also support a future accommodation requirement study to undertake detailed planning, design, assessment and costing for appropriate accommodation to support the delivery of therapeutic residential care in the ACT in the longer term.

As I noted earlier, the budget includes funding to support the establishment of a chief practitioner in Child and Youth Protection Services, or CYPS, to oversee practice development, training and quality improvement for the child protection and family support sector in the ACT. This funding aligns with the Next Steps priority initiative to invest in training and restorative and trauma responsive approaches for child and youth protection workers and community partners.

Of course, one of the biggest challenges in child protection systems across the country is the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. The implementation of the recommendations of the Our Booris, Our Way review, under the guidance of the Our Booris, Our Way Implementation Oversight Committee, is key to addressing this challenge. This budget continues our investment in Our Booris, Our Way. The budget includes \$1.9 million over four years to support a new, dedicated, First Nations family support team within Child and Youth Protection Services. The team, which has been established, will improve culturally safe practice and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families engaged in child protection services.

The team will work closely with families before and during their engagement with child and youth protection, partnering with Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and driving improved outcomes for First Nations families engaged in the care and protection system. This represents a new approach to the delivery of the first Our Booris, Our Way recommendation, and I thank the implementation oversight committee for its advocacy and partnership to achieve this strengthened response.

The Next Steps for Our Kids strategy also reflects our commitment to the establishment of an external merits review process for child protection decision-making. Establishing an external merits review process will augment the much improved internal review process for child protection decisions, allowing those who are affected by certain child protection decisions to request an independent external review.

The ACT has made substantial progress towards establishing an external merits review process, including wide consultation with key stakeholders. Funding in this budget, which is offset from existing resources from the Community Services Directorate and the Justice and Community Safety Directorate, will support the establishment of an external merits review process for child protection decisions, enabling external reviews of decisions relating to care plans, placement and a range of other matters.

Mr Assistant Speaker, I have no doubt that Mrs Kikkert will make the point that this has been a long time coming, and she is not wrong. But I am pleased to let her know that final decisions on the shape of this are working their way through the policy

approval process for inclusion in the second stage of the Children and Young People Act changes to be introduced early next year. This reform will help to build trust and transparency in our child protection system in line with the Next Steps strategy and delivers on a commitment under the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement, but no-one should be under any illusion that this is a silver bullet. The child protection system is complex, and its impacts on the lives of the families who become engaged with it is immense. Our reform agenda, encapsulated in Next Steps, is ambitious. This budget represents another step in our journey towards a better system for children, young people, families, carers, child protection staff and the broader service system, including our valued community partners. I commend these elements of the budget to the Assembly.

Mr Assistant Speaker, raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility in a staged way from 10 to 14 is a central commitment of this government. This reform recognises the evidence that most children and young people under the age of 14 will not have the capacity to form criminal intent and that a criminal justice response to harmful behaviour by children this age is likely to be counterproductive. Raising the age recognises that the behaviour that brings these younger people to the attention of police and youth justice systems does not represent inherent criminality but represents the impact of unmet need on a child or young person's life. When these behaviours bring children to the attention of authorities, it is an opportunity to put supports in place that can change the child's life trajectory for the better.

This budget includes \$10.4 million over four years to support our work to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility and to develop an alternative service response to young people who engage in, or are at risk of engaging in, harmful behaviours. Elements of the new service response funded in this budget include funding for an ongoing functional family therapy youth justice program; establishment of a therapeutic support panel; and intensive case management and support services, including accommodation.

The therapeutic support panel represents a new evidence-based approach to addressing the complex needs of children and young people. The panel is similar to the multidisciplinary panel envisaged in the *Review of the service system and implementation requirements for raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility in the Australian Capital Territory* conducted by Emeritus Professor Morag McArthur, Curiyo Proprietary Limited, and Dr Aino Suomi from the Australian National University. The panel will have multidisciplinary expertise and will respond to referrals by working with children and families to explore their needs and to tailor solutions in partnership with service providers. However, the panel is just one element of the new service system. Not all young people will require support from the panel. The panel will only be effective with a range of services that children, young people and families can access that support their needs. The funding in this budget starts our work to build a system around the needs of children and young people who engage in harmful behaviour. This initiative builds on the \$2.77 million for the first stage of service reforms across the 2021-2022 budget and the 2022-2023 budget review.

We are also making new investments across government to continue our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led reform agenda. Our commitments made in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, through the National

Agreement on Closing the Gap, and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement, represent a whole-of-government effort. I thank my colleagues for their commitment to this work and recognise the investments across portfolios that will benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans.

I have already mentioned in the debate on the health appropriation our significant investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health care and the health workforce, including fully funding the construction of the new residential alcohol and drug rehabilitation facility to be delivered in partnership with Winnunga Nimmityjah, new investments in the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm and the continued delivery of the Indigenous Allied Health Australia ACT Health Academy. I have also spoken today of our continued investments guided by the Our Booris, Our Way review. The new investments in this budget represent just some of the work that is underway across government to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and address our commitments under the ACT and national agreements.

In 2022 a whole-of-government review of expenditure on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific programs and activities was conducted. The ACT was one of only two jurisdictions across the country to complete this review in a timely way. And although the methodology will continue to improve, it was an important exercise, and I thank ACT Treasury for its work on this Closing the Gap commitment.

The expenditure review found that in 2020-2021 the government spent \$25.6 million on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs and that grant funding to support outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had increased from \$3.1 million in 2019-2020 to \$8.7 million in 2020-2021. The review also found that the government's work under the ACT government's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Procurement Policy, including efforts to increase the use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander providers for large building projects, is having a real impact.

These investments are only possible because of the expertise, experience, advocacy and generosity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and its partnerships with government. I thank all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations who have contributed to these partnerships and who continue to drive us to invest more.

In summary, this budget demonstrates that our reform ambition is bearing fruit: driving new targeted investment in changing the way we work with children, young people and families facing risk; changing the way we understand and respond to funding pressures in the community sector; and changing the way we partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities to deliver reform. I commend this element of the budget to the Assembly.

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

Sitting suspended from 12.19 to 2 pm.

Questions without notice

Economy—credit rating

MS LEE: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer you have stated in the past that you have ongoing discussions with S&P Global about the territory's credit rating. Treasurer, when and how did you or your office first find out about the ACT's credit rating downgrade?

MR BARR: Standard and Poor's practice is to advise the jurisdiction a few hours before they make their public media release.

MS LEE: Is it my understanding that you had no indication whatsoever before the few hours notice that you received from S&P Global about the ACT losing its AAA credit rating?

MR BARR: Standard and Poor's engage with the government each year after the budget. So I had my usual meeting with them where we discussed the credit rating but their decision, which goes to their full board, is not advised to the jurisdiction until a few hours before it is made public.

MR CAIN: Treasurer, will you table, in the interest of transparency, the latest report from S&P Global on the ACT government credit rating today?

MR BARR: I am not able to Mr Cain. You should go to their website and read the relevant Australian law that prevents me from doing so.

Planning—planning and development system

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Minister for Planning. Minister, can you update the Assembly on changes made under the new planning system to provide more houses for Canberrans?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Pettersson for his interest in our growing city. We have worked very hard to ensure that we plan for Canberra's future in a sustainable and effective way. We know our population is growing, and that each year more and more people look to make Canberra their home. The move to an outcomes-based planning system will result in better design and planning outcomes for Canberra and help us balance the needs of our growing city with the preservation of the elements that make our city very special.

Housing supply, of course, is a key feature of the new planning system, and we have taken important steps to ensure that we are providing more housing choice where Canberrans want to live. The new planning system ensures we are preparing for Canberra's growth through increasing housing supply, while maintaining the elements of the territory that make it an attractive place to live.

Changes in the system include blocks over 800 square metres are now able to accommodate dual-occupancy developments with separate titles—criteria does apply, including that one dwelling must be at least 120 square metres or less; a new structure that contains district and zone policies; introduction of new supporting materials, such

as design guides and planning technical specifications; a focus on the desired outcomes for development by clearly articulating the assessment outcomes that should be achieved; and various policy changes relating to definitions, uses permitted in zones, and of course, the planning requirements.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, can you please provide the Assembly with an update on how you will be supporting industry and the community to understand the new planning system as we deliver more houses?

MR GENTLEMAN: There has been an exceptional amount of work that has gone into the planning reforms, and I am very proud of the progress achieved to date. Both the district strategies and the interim Territory Plan are now live on the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate's website.

Changes have been made to incorporate and respond to the extensive feedback that has been received to date, so I encourage all members of the public and industry to visit the EPSDD's website, where information can be found about the new planning system.

The government has undertaken a range of measures to ensure the resources are available to help the community and industry understand the new system. These include a dedicated hotline to assist with inquiries on the new planning system—the number is 6205 0580; a dedicated email address, which is newplanningsystem@act.gov.au, to respond to inquiries; and publication of information on EPSDD's website.

In addition to this support for the community and industry, a range of training sessions are available as well. These sessions cover a range of subject matter, ranging from training to understand the new planning system more broadly through to specific elements such as the deep dive in the legislation, environmental considerations and the subdivision processes, to name a few.

MS ORR: Minister, how does the new planning system incorporate consideration and protection for the environment?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Orr for her interest in the environment. The new planning system contains a range of protections and considerations for the environment. Whilst we want to see more houses built for Canberrans, we want to do so in a way that is sympathetic to the natural environment and retains the characteristics that make our city special.

Examples of this include retaining elements of the previous living infrastructure requirements under the old Territory Plan and introducing a *Biodiversity sensitive urban design guide*. The *Biodiversity sensitive urban design guide* is one new tool that looks at how new developments can work in harmony with the natural environment. This will help protect and improve biodiversity and ecological connectivity throughout a development's design.

Under the planning strategy, we have also outlined our commitment to ensuring that no more than 30 per cent of new developments will be in those new greenfield sites.

Greenfield development is a necessary element of housing supply, but we are striking a balance with infill as we ensure that we are providing more houses for Canberra as it grows.

Drugs of Dependence (Personal Use) Amendment Act 2022

MR DAVIS: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, we have heard a lot in recent weeks about the approaching implementation of drug decriminalisation, and we know that treating drug use as a health issue instead of a criminal act requires significant new investments in drug diversion pathways and the community sector that supports people suffering with addiction. Why is adequate funding for the AOD and community sector so important to ensure that drug decriminalisation supports better health outcomes for Canberrans?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Davis for the question. Of course, he is exactly right that ongoing increases in investment in our alcohol and other drug treatment sector and in diversion pathways are critically important, not just for the implementation of the Simple Drug Offence Notice and the other elements of the Drugs of Dependence Amendment Bill changes that will come into effect in October, but more broadly, because we want to ensure that people are able to access the health services they need, when and where they need them.

That is exactly why, annual spending on core funding and direct alcohol, tobacco and other drugs services has increased by 30 per cent since 2018-19 from \$20 million to more than \$26 million in 2023-24. It is why the 2023-24 budget allocated \$49 million to deliver the new Watson Health Precinct, which will be the largest capital investment the ACT government has made into community-based residential alcohol and other drug rehabilitation services, and of course includes our partnership with Winnunga Nimmityjah to deliver a purpose-built Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residential rehabilitation facility, as well as a new facility for Ted Noffs.

MR DAVIS: Minister, exactly how much did the ACT government invest in the AOD sector in the 2023-24 budget, and what are some examples of programs funded in the budget?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Davis for the supplementary. The 2023-24 budget includes additional investment in addition to the \$49 million for the Watson Health Precinct of \$1.1 million in funding over four years from 2023-24 for the implementation of the amendments to the Drugs of Dependence Act, including additional resources for Canberra Health Services' alcohol and drug services diversion program, as well as funding to support ACT Policing in implementation and \$5.3 million in 2023-24 in health portfolio resources to continue and expand the Drug and Alcohol Sentencing List.

Of course, this builds on \$13 million that was committed in the 2022-23 budget into the alcohol, tobacco and other drugs sector, including support specifically for methamphetamine treatment and residential rehabilitation services. This included significant growth in frontline community services, with new funding for residential rehabilitation services—the additional funding growing from \$250,000 in the last financial year to \$850,000 this financial year, and then to \$1.2 million each year over the next two years.

The 2022-23 budget was a really significant investment, and then this more recent budget includes those additional investments that I have just talked about, in addition to \$1.2 million in expense funding over two years and \$50,000 in capital funding to continue the CanTEST drug testing facility, and of course \$500,000 in expense funding over four years for a package of measures to support the Drug Strategy Action Plan 2022-2026, including: one full-time equivalent peer support worker employed by one of our fantastic non-government organisations; three cost-of-living scholarships for alcohol, tobacco and other drug peer workers; and the establishment of a peer worker network in the alcohol, tobacco and other drug treatment and resource sector.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, how does this compare to investments in the 2021-22 and 2022-23 budgets in the AOD sector?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Braddock. I have talked a bit about the funding that was committed, particularly in the 2022-23 budget, and we have continued to grow funding over time. In terms of the specific measures that were included in previous budgets, I would of course refer Mr Braddock to the budget papers for those years, but as I said at the beginning, overall what we have seen is a 30 per cent growth in funding for the alcohol, tobacco and other drugs services in the government and non-government sectors, from \$20 million in 2018-19 to more than \$26 million in 2023-24; a 30 per cent increase.

Economy—credit rating

MS LEE: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, regarding the downgrade of the territory's credit rating, have you done any modelling to understand what effect it will have on the government's borrowing capacity?

MR BARR: Yes. It will have no effect on the government's borrowing capacity.

MS LEE: Treasurer, how much more will the territory—or, rather, ACT taxpayers—have to pay in interest costs as a result of the downgrade?

MR BARR: The downgrade does not impact on existing borrowings. So there is no impact in that regard. We will be approaching the market for this year's ACT government bond. We will find out in due course. The advice I have is that it would be negligible, given most semi-governments in the Southern Hemisphere and, indeed, most in the world are AA+ rated. The best advice is that it might be one or two basis points.

MR CAIN: Treasurer, what impact will this increase in interest payments make to the services Canberrans can expect from this government?

MR BARR: I would draw Mr Cain's attention to my answer to the first and second questions. There is no impact on our interest payments in relation to the difference between AAA and AA+ with regard to our existing borrowings. Future borrowings—

Mr Cain: What about service delivery?

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Cain, you have asked your question; allow the answer.

MR BARR: Future borrowings will be subject to prevailing market conditions. The impact, for example, of the Reserve Bank lowering the official cash rate next year would be far greater than anything related to the credit rating.

Taxation—general practice clinics

MS LEE: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, a survey undertaken by the AMA (ACT) last week of 92 Canberra GPs found that one quarter would consider closing and nearly half would consider selling, while 80 per cent would likely increase their fees if they do not receive an exemption from payroll tax. These are disturbing results. Treasurer, will you now listen to the overwhelming majority of Canberra's GP clinics and dump your payroll tax before it wreaks havoc on the primary care system in Canberra?

MR BARR: No, the government will not be acceding to a request from a particular section of the business community, in the economy, to be not taxed. We have already heard the pharmacists saying that, if the GPs do not pay tax, then they will not pay tax either, and it will just continue through the economy. The issue here, as it relates to GP funding, is a federal issue and none of the states and territories are indicating that they are going to exempt a certain section of taxpayers from payroll tax, just as, if I were approached by Coles or Woolworths saying, "We will make food cheaper if you don't tax us," I would not give them a tax break either.

MS LEE: Treasurer, why will you not accept that your proposed limited payroll tax exemption is a recipe for disaster, given that the same survey found only six per cent of GPs will be able to increase their bulk-billing rates to 65 per cent?

MR BARR: The sector has achieved a 65 per cent bulk-billing rate in the last few years.

Ms Lee: During COVID.

MR BARR: No, before COVID and during COVID, and not related to COVID vaccinations. What changes on 1 November is that the incentive to bulk-bill triples.

MS CASTLEY: Treasurer, why are you continuously refusing to listen to the experts when they tell you that this policy will lead to significant damaging impacts on Canberra's primary care?

MR BARR: Tax policy cannot be impacted by sectoral interests like this. You cannot go down that path. I would have no basis on which to deny pharmacists a payroll tax exemption, and every other lobby group that asks for one, if we acceded to this request. We cannot do it. It is an appalling principle to accept that one particular sector of the economy runs a campaign to not pay tax. Would we accept an argument from GPs that they should not pay income tax, or the large corporate entities were they to seek to not pay company tax?

Mrs Kikkert: Wow! Try to justify yourself. Keep telling yourself lies.

MR BARR: Why just payroll tax? Why not rates? Why not no tax at all? We all have obligations as taxpayers to contribute to society.

Members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members! There is a point of order. I imagine it is on the interjections.

Mr Davis: On a point of order: in the interjections, Mrs Kikkert used the word “lie” in reference to the Chief Minister, and I would ask that she withdraw.

MADAM SPEAKER: I did not hear that she did.

Mrs Kikkert: I did not say that, so I cannot withdraw something that I did not say.

Government members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members! I did not hear it. I will try and see if I can pick it up through *Hansard*. Other members claim you did. I would just ask, then, that we reflect on the language we use, please, and cease the interjections.

MR BARR: The very simple point is that we cannot accede to a request to exempt this group, because every other group would ask for the same, and we cannot do that. *(Time expired.)*

Mrs Kikkert interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Kikkert, please!

Taxation—general practice clinics

MS LEE: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, I refer to comments in the *Canberra Times* by Dr Walter Abhayaratna, President of the AMA ACT, and a doctor who has worked in Canberra’s public hospital system over the last 30 years. Dr Abhayaratna said:

The Barr government's decision to impose a new payroll tax on GPs is the latest assault on a primary care sector already on its knees. Ultimately it will worsen the GP shortage in Canberra, make GP care less affordable and push more chronically ill patients onto an already stretched public hospital system.

Dr Abhayaratna also said:

GPs will raise their fees to afford the new tax, and the ACT government will get its revenue.

Treasurer, do you agree with the comments by Dr Abhayaratna, a doctor who has worked in Canberra’s public health system over the last 30 years?

MR BARR: No, I do not agree with that assessment. It is very clear that the accusations and claims that were made by several peak bodies have not turned out to

be the reality. We have seen some GP clinics indicate that they will be seeking to pass on their payroll tax obligations: one has said their fees will increase by \$2; another has said \$5. I stand by the fundamental point that the government, firstly, is not imposing a new tax; payroll tax has been in place for decades—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members! Enough!

MR BARR: There has been no change in the law in the ACT, and GP practices have been given a period of grace: as in, no retrospective activity in relation to any previous payroll tax obligations prior to the commencement of this fiscal year, and a pathway to have no future obligations—for the next two years, anyway—as we transition a number of practices through the payroll tax system. They can, of course, make structural changes to their contracts to abide by the payroll tax laws that are harmonised across the states and the territories.

This is not an ACT issue. We did not commence it. We have not been chasing GPs for payroll back-tax. Equally, we are not going to grant an exemption, because to do so would mean we would have to do the same for pharmacists, and for anyone who asked. The claim “it will just be passed on to consumers” would be the case for anyone paying payroll tax.

MS LEE: Treasurer, are you comfortable with GPs raising their fees so you can get your revenue?

MR BARR: I am comfortable with the fact that, across the economy, people need to pay tax. I am comfortable with the fact that general practice is massively subsidised by taxpayers. That is what bulk-billing is about. The hide of the Liberal Party, who spent 10 years in government freezing the Medicare rebate and starving primary health care of funding, to now come in and suggest that state and territory governments need to give up our limited tax base—

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms Lee: So why are bulk-billing rates so bad in the ACT?

MADAM SPEAKER: Members!

MR BARR: Bulk-billing rates are bad because the Medicare rebate has been frozen for 10 years by your party! And in the most recent federal budget, starting on 1 November, bulk-billing incentives are tripling.

MS CASTLEY: Treasurer, if you are not listening to GPs, clinic owners and doctors about what this will do to primary health care, and the impact on the ED, then who are you listening to?

MR BARR: I am listening to public policy experts who understand that the issue here is reform of the primary healthcare system. It is a move away from fee-based remuneration for doctors. It is an increase in the scope of practice for pharmacists and

registered nurses. It is a move to 60-day prescriptions, to take pressure of GPs. And it is a focus on urgent care clinics and an investment in reform, including a tripling of the bulk-billing rebate.

Waste—circular economy

MS ORR: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, can you provide an update to the Assembly on the ACT government's first circular economy strategy?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Orr for her question and her interest in the circular economy. It has been a big week and a half for the circular economy in the ACT with the ACT government releasing our *ACT circular economy strategy and action plan 2023-2030* which outlines the key priority areas for the government to build a circular economy in Canberra. One that drives innovation, creates local jobs and helps make Canberra a more sustainable city. The new strategy and action plan identifies over 50 different actions which the government either is undertaking, will undertake, or is investigating for further action. These actions cover six key focus areas including food and organics; the built environment; consumer goods; emerging and problematic waste streams; creating space to showcase our commitment to the circular economy; and procurement skills, innovation and governance.

Just over the last day or so we have seen one of those actions already implemented with the release of the new *Urban design guide* by Minister Gentleman and the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate, which has a whole chapter on the circular economy.

The new actions in the final strategy will prioritise procurement skills, innovation and governance. This has come from key community and industry feedback about the need for the government to directly support more circular and sustainable modes of operation by investing in the skills needed and using our purchasing power to support more recyclable content in infrastructure projects.

MS ORR: Minister, how does the new strategy address emerging and problematic waste streams and other consumer goods?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Orr for her supplementary and particularly her advocacy in getting more consumer goods out of landfill, especially textiles. She will be very pleased to know the government has made commitments in this strategy that will tackle textile waste directly, including the scoping of a textiles hub and evaluating the charity bin trial that is underway at Mugga and Mitchell Resource Management Centres to scope future expansion.

The strategy also identifies the importance of advocating nationally for a consumers right to repair and a reform packaging industry that focuses on avoidance and designing out waste in the first place. These are actions which we will continue to support where we can and advocate directly to the Commonwealth for them to undertake at the national level through regulatory actions needed to make a circular economy work effectively across the country.

The new action plan also tackles a big issue for the ACT and that is battery waste. Members will recall the fire at a recycling centre that was caused by a lithium-ion battery according to an investigation. We are committed to supporting better national regulation on battery waste and exploring options for a legislative ban on e-waste to landfill. All of these priority actions will be undertaken with government leadership and partnership with industry and the community as we progress a more circular Canberra.

DR PATERSON: Minister, what steps has the government undertaken already to progress priority actions in the action plan?

MR STEEL: I thank Dr Paterson for her supplementary. I mentioned one of those just in the last few days in relation to the *Urban design guide* that will sit under the planning system and includes design guidance or circular economy principles in construction, including adaptive re-use and upcycling principles. The guide supports our identified priorities in the built environment action plan under the strategy. The government is already progressing several priority actions including the recent introduction of a circular economy bill into this place in the last sitting to deliver on our Parliamentary and Governing Agreement commitment to require separated food organic collections for business and new waste reduction plans. We are also working with industry and community stakeholders on how we can support and foster a circular economy in the ACT. Working together as a community, industry and as a government is critical to making sure that our circular economy can thrive to support more innovation, more local jobs and a more sustainable future for all.

ACT Health—nurses and midwives

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, I refer to reports in the Canberra Times that 90 Calvary staff resigned, retired or took a redundancy. The branch secretary of the ANMF told the Inquiry into the Recovery Plan for Nursing and Midwifery Workers, “Staffing levels are so thin that even the loss of one nurse or midwife has real implications for a ward or clinical unit.”

Now that we understand that around 90—and possibly more—have left the North Canberra Hospital because of your decision to take over Calvary, have there been any significant staffing impacts on any units or wards?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think Ms Castley is aware that there are two particular areas for North Canberra Hospital that were impacted by the decisions of individuals to not transition to Canberra Health Services. One of those was cardiology, where a number of sonographers did not transition. Those positions have already been recruited to. I was advised yesterday that those positions have been filled, and of course cardiology is moving towards a territory-wide service. The other was maternity, where a number of agency midwives have been brought onboard, and the staffing at North Canberra Hospital in terms of midwifery has stabilised.

Now, we do have some challenges right across the board in relation to midwifery, and just last week we held a roundtable with representatives from Canberra Hospital, North Canberra Hospital, ACT Health Directorate with both the Australia Nursing and Midwifery Federation and the Australia College of Midwives to talk about the

challenges that are being faced in midwifery more broadly; and of course the University of Canberra, which is a university that trains midwives in the ACT, so we are certainly aware of some of those challenges.

I would point out that including visiting medical officers, more than 2,000 of the Calvary Public Hospital Bruce staff did choose to transition to Canberra Health Services, including all of the executives. If you look back at Ms Castley's predictions of doom and gloom, that no-one would want to transition and it was all going to be a disaster during the transition period and prior to the acquisition, those predictions did not come true, and North Canberra Hospital is getting on with the job of delivering exceptional care to Canberrans.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, how many staff have left North Canberra Hospital after 3 July this year?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will have to take that question on notice. Like any large organisation, people leave on a regular basis and people are recruited on a regular basis.

MS LEE: Minister, how many midwives have not transitioned from Calvary or left North Canberra Hospital since you announced your takeover?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: My recollection is that it was nine midwives who chose not to transition, and I understand that potentially 11 midwives have left over the period since the acquisition of Calvary Public Hospital Bruce was announced, but I will check those numbers and get back to the Assembly if those are not correct.

But as I indicated in response to Ms Castley's first question, North Canberra Hospital has been both active and successful in recruiting midwives and in recruiting agency midwives. North Canberra Hospital midwifery staffing is actually quite strong at the moment, and North Canberra Hospital maternity is actually currently in a stronger position than Canberra Hospital maternity, where members would be aware there have been some challenges over recent weeks.

Centenary Hospital for Women and Children—staffing

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, the Canberra Liberals understand that a code yellow was initiated at the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children due to unsafe staffing levels within the last two months. Can you confirm whether an internal disaster was initiated in this hospital due to unsafe staffing levels at the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I can confirm, as I just indicated, that a code yellow was in place for some time at the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children as a result of staffing pressures. Calling this code enables emergency measures to be put in place or emergency responses under the enterprise agreement, which then enables staff to be called in with additional supports in place and additional responses.

I am just looking up the response. The code yellow was activated at 1150 hours on 15 August 2023. Staffing pressures and demand at Centenary Hospital for Women

and Children were at amber. The notice I have got open is from Friday 8 September, and were expected to stay at amber over the weekend at that time. The need for nursing and midwifery staff to utilise clause 94 under section K of the ACT Public Service Nursing and Midwifery Enterprise Agreement by that time, however, was no longer required.

I know that Ms Castley likes to make a big deal of code yellows, but actually code yellows are called on a regular basis across Canberra Health Services for a range of reasons. The most recent one was a steampipe ruptured and some people needed to be called in to repair that. It can relate to staffing issues. It can relate to a whole range of maintenance issues: a lift being stuck, a duress alarm not working. Those things are generally addressed very quickly, so while Ms Castley might like to say that a code yellow is rare, it is in fact not rare; it is a standard process under Canberra Hospital's emergency response system.

MS CASTLEY: What impact are unsafe staffing levels having on clinical care in the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children? Are the agency staff being used for this, and what is the cost?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Yes, agency staff are also being used at the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children, and a range of other measures are also being implemented to ensure that staffing and the maternity service is in fact safe. That includes using nursing staff in addition to midwives for some roles. That was one of the subjects of discussion at the midwifery roundtable with the union and the college last week: how do we ensure that those models of care that are being implemented are documented, and that staff are supported to feel safe and to ensure that they have the skills to undertake the tasks that they are being set?

In relation to how much it is costing to employ those agency staff, I will take that part of the question on notice. I do not obviously have that number in front of me, but what I can say is that both hospitals have been very successful in recruiting agency staff, and also, rather than just doing that on a short-term basis, they are actually offering those agency staff longer-term contracts to ensure that they know that they have the staffing in place for the next few months while we work through some of the challenges, which again, are not unique to the ACT in terms of midwifery workforce.

MRS KIKKERT: Why were staff not able to flex across the hospitals, given that this was one of the main reasons you used to justify your takeover of Calvary?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: North Canberra Hospital has been supporting Centenary Hospital, and that has been a regular thing. That is not necessarily in relation to staff flexing across. One of the challenges that Centenary has had is in relation to demand as well, so one of the advantages that we have with a single operator of our two acute public hospitals is that we can actually much more flexibly ensure that patients are able to be treated and supported—and in this case, give birth—in the most appropriate place; when demand surges on one side of the lake, that actually we can manage that by transitioning patients as well as transitioning staff, particularly from Canberra Hospital over to North Canberra Hospital as necessary.

It was part of the agreement with staff who transitioned from Calvary Public Hospital Bruce that they would not be required to take shifts at Canberra Hospital if they did

not want to do so. So from that perspective, moving staff who formerly worked for Calvary Public Hospital Bruce to Canberra Hospital and requiring them to do that is not appropriate; however, what we can do is load-share in a much more flexible way than was possible with Calvary Public Hospital's contract in place.

Calvary Hospital—acquisition

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, documents released under freedom of information reveal that a brief was sent to you on 16 June 2022 to “draft legislation to effect the cessation of Calvary’s current lease over part block 1, section 1 Bruce”.

Your officer’s feedback to this brief said:

The point of getting policy approval for legislative drafting was to commence drafting now, not wait and see. I’m keen to get an early look at what a bill might look like.

Was the legislation discussed in this brief for the compulsory acquisition of Calvary?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will clarify that that was my comment, not my officer’s comment.

It is not a big surprise that this has been described as a revelation. I have been saying since May that Calvary was advised in April 2022 by letter from me that cabinet had agreed to drafting legislation to acquire the land at block 1, section 1, Bruce, in order to ensure that we owned the land to build a new billion dollar public hospital and that hospital would be owned by taxpayers and that that was an option that cabinet had on the table. That was advised to Calvary in April 2022, and it continued to be advised to Calvary through the negotiation process. So, at that time, cabinet had agreed that drafting of the legislation could commence.

In that brief, obviously, I was advised that legislation had not been drafted, and I was keen to see what legislation would look like. It was clear to Calvary from April 2022 that the ACT government was serious about wanting to own the land on which we would be investing \$1 billion to build a new public hospital and that we believed that, in investing that amount in a new public hospital, taxpayers should own that hospital and we should be able to determine the design and use of that hospital.

So that legislation if it had been drafted—which it was not—would have been about the acquisition of the land, as we had advised Calvary.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, have you misled the Senate committee or the Assembly over the time frame of when legislation was drafted for the compulsory acquisition of Calvary?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: No. As was clear in that brief, legislation had not commenced being drafted, as I have advised and as I advised the Senate committee. I was asked a specific question: when did drafting of legislation commence? Drafting of legislation commenced in March 2023.

MS LEE: Minister, did you always have forced acquisition as your preferred option?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: No, and we have been through this so many times. We offered Calvary a 25-year modern services agreement to run the new hospital, but we were clear with them that this hospital should be owned by taxpayers—that, if taxpayers were going to invest a billion dollars in a new state-of-the-art hospital for Canberra’s north side, it should be owned by taxpayers—and it should be operated under a modern services agreement, so that we could in fact manage a single, coordinated health system.

Calvary rejected that offer out of hand. This correspondence is on the public record, and anyone reading it could not see anything in Calvary’s response other than an absolute no.

Waste—product stewardship

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, I was really pleased to see you release your circular economy strategy recently. When I consulted with the community and recycling sector and released *The ACT Greens vision for our circular economy* last year, one of the major issues we identified was a need for mandatory national regulations for product stewardship because the voluntary schemes simply have not worked. Your strategy says you will explore legislative options to encourage product stewardship in the ACT. Will that be mandatory?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. As we have discussed in this place before, it is the view of the ACT government that greater action needs to be taken in relation to product stewardship schemes at the national level, particularly in dealing with some of the new and emerging waste streams that we are seeing—solar PV, larger batteries in particular, and a range of e-waste products as well. We are concerned that, at the national level, current voluntary schemes do not necessarily include the scope of products that are required, and, because they are voluntary, they do not necessarily include some of the free riders—the producers of those products—to make sure that all those products go on to be reused and those resources are retained in the economy. We have certainly outlined that to the commonwealth and, as part of the actions outlined in the strategy and action plan, we have been very clear that we will continue to advocate to make sure that there is further rollout of product stewardship schemes for a wider variety of products as soon as possible, particularly making sure that they are mandated, that they bring in the free riders and that they include a greater scope of products.

We realise that there is a national market for those products. There is commonwealth legislation setting out the process of establishing product stewardship schemes. Whilst commonwealth law says that it does not cover the field in terms of product stewardship, there is always the strong preference that there is national action in relation to regulating what is a national market. Having said that, we have established a strategy and action plan where we are looking at how we can support product stewardship schemes that already exist and, indeed, any that are put forward in the future. The new bill sets a framework to allow us to do that.

MS CLAY: Minister, which products have you identified as needing most urgent targeting for mandatory product stewardship in the ACT?

MR STEEL: In the *ACT circular economy strategy and action plan*, we have set out that we think that e-waste is a particular focus. We have said that we will advocate nationally for regulated product stewardship schemes and opportunities to design for waste of solar PV systems, general electrical appliances, and particularly medium and large batteries, which are not included in an existing product stewardship scheme known as B-cycle. We will continue to advocate nationally. We have also said in the strategy and action plan that we will also explore options for a potential legislative ban on e-waste to landfill. That would be certainly in the case where we can complement an existing scheme to make sure that materials do not go into landfill when they can already be captured through an extended producer responsibility scheme.

The important thing in the strategy is that we have set out that the No 1 objective of the strategy is to grow extended producer responsibility. Extended producer responsibility is a policy approach where producers are given significant responsibility for the treatment of disposable post-consumer products. This incentivises waste prevention at the source and promotes better product design. That has to be, I think, the objective of our circular economy strategy. We recognise that needs to be achieved federally and supported here at the local level as well.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, what mandatory national product stewardship schemes are currently under development?

MR STEEL: There is a range and there is a priority list that the commonwealth have put forward for future schemes. I am happy to provide some more information about the work that they are doing. It is not directly within our responsibility here in the ACT government, but I am certainly happy to provide some more information on notice.

Planning—planning and development system

MR CAIN: My question is to the Minister for Planning. Minister, how many dwellings do you anticipate will be constructed in the first year of your proposed changes to RZ1 blocks?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Cain for his interest in changes to the new planning system. It will be providing, of course, a great opportunity for Canberrans to have more housing opportunities. We do not have a particular number in mind for the growth in this area, but we have identified the availability. There are quite a number in each different district. Central Canberra shows an opportunity for some 50,000. Weston Creek is a very good example of large blocks as well, where you can do dual occupancy. I think this gives the ACT public, and home owners in particular, a great opportunity to think a little bit outside the box and to provide opportunities for lower-cost dwellings where people want to live.

MR CAIN: Minister, why have you imposed a 120-square-metre limit on second the dwelling?

MR GENTLEMAN: It was a cabinet decision.

MS LEE: Minister, exactly how many RZ1 blocks in Canberra are 800 square metres or larger?

MR GENTLEMAN: Approximately 140,000.

Government—procurement

MR CAIN: My question is to the Special Minister of State—how could we leave him out? Minister, recent media reporting indicates that unions are closely involved in deciding which companies win ACT government contracts. Can you confirm this or otherwise please?

MR STEEL: I am not sure exactly what Mr Cain is referring to but we are certainly very focused on transparency in procurements. We think it is a critical part of the procurement process to make sure the territory's funds promote secure and fair employment. My predecessor, Minister Orr, set out a statement of procurement values. Since then we have been taking actions to strengthen our procurement framework based on those values and to make it even more transparent.

Ethical considerations are an important part of our procurement process; how they are handled in comparison to dollar and technical considerations needs to be clear and transparent. That is why in February 2022 the Ethical Treatment of Workers Evaluation Direction that I put in place took effect. That direction provides secure local jobs and labour relations in a tender evaluation process are made independently of tender evaluation teams. Matters concerning a business's secure local jobs compliance and reputation go to the Secure Local Jobs Branch in the first instance. The Secure Local Jobs Branch is part of the Chief Minister's directorate and it makes an independent recommendation against a comprehensive written framework. This means that everyone with an interest; businesses, workers and the whole community, can see clearly how fair and safe employment is considered in procurements and that there is an independent point of contact for raising those issues across government.

MR CAIN: Minister, to what extent, and with some detail I hope, are unions involved in ACT government procurement decisions?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. As I have outlined we have established a fair and transparent process for people to raise issues so that they can be considered and that is part of the two stage procurement process that has been established under the ethical treatment of workers evaluation. Of course, that came from a review of the Secure Local Jobs Code in 2020 and examines secure local jobs compliance as part of that process, rather than necessarily having to rely on the tender evaluation panel.

MR HANSON: Minister, are you satisfied that ACT government contracts are being awarded on a value-for-money basis?

MR STEEL: Yes I am. A territory entity must pursue value for money in undertaking any procurement activity. It is in section 22A of the Government Procurement Act 2001.

Drugs of Dependence (Personal Use) Amendment Act 2022

MR BRADDOCK: My question is for the Minister for Policing. Minister, there have been media reports on the ACT Chief Police Officer's views, where he appears to be talking down the drug law reforms that are coming into effect this month. Minister, do the CPO's views accord with those of the ACT government's?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Braddock for the question. The Chief Police Officer has stated many times that drug addiction should be treated as a health issue with a harm minimisation approach, rather than a criminal justice issue. This is a position I support. The CPO and I also agree regarding the importance of health supports being accessible so that when ACT Policing officers interact with a drug user who needs help, they can be confident the appropriate services will be made available to them. And the CPO and I agree about the importance of ACT Policing and ACT Health working together on matters regarding addiction, including addressing stigma attached to addiction and mental health issues as well.

The CPO and I also want to make it clear that the amendments to this legislation will not legalise drug use. The amendments will, however, change the penalties associated with drug possession. The CPO and I are also in agreement—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, enough.

MR GENTLEMAN: that targeting drug trafficking criminality driven by drug use, including drug driving, will remain an ACT Policing and ACT government responsibility. We are also in agreement that continuing to educate the community about drugs, including changes to the law, is important.

Finally, the CPO and I remain committed to both ensuring the safety of ACT police officers, and this will remain a priority regardless of any legislative reform, including drug criminalisation; as well as ensuring that the ACT police workforce is well-prepared to implement these changes, and I have every confidence in the Chief Police Officer and ACT Policing that they will do so effectively.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, media reports differ on whether more or less police officers will be at Spilt Milk and Summernats. Can you please enlighten us as to what the policing plan will be for these events?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Braddock for the question. It is a matter of routine, I think, that police regularly plan for major events. In doing so, they factor in a range of considerations based on intelligence specific to that event. They normally draw up an operational order. I have done a number of those myself. So naturally, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on or reveal any details of operational police training in advance of a specific event, but the community can rest assured knowing that ACT Police will have an appropriate plan in place, as they do every year for all major events in Canberra.

MR DAVIS: Minister, do you have confidence that our police are ready to fully support the implementation of the drug decriminalisation reforms through this Assembly?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Davis for the question. The CPO has stated publicly that ACT Policing will continue to work in accordance with the legal framework of the ACT, just like they always have and just like all effective police forces do. There is no indication this will be any different with drugs of dependence reforms, and any suggestion to the contrary is misguided.

Transport—London Circuit

DR PATERSON: My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, how is the government progressing with construction on the Raising London Circuit project?

MR STEEL: I thank Dr Paterson for her question. I am very pleased to confirm that works on London Circuit are progressing very well. We have achieved a significant milestone earlier in the month with the opening of Commonwealth Avenue side track, which has enabled the closure of the eastern Commonwealth Avenue Bridge. This side track diverts northbound traffic on Commonwealth onto a temporary road on the west of Commonwealth Avenue for around 200 metres before joining the existing road near Vernon Circle. This allows motorists heading south on Commonwealth Avenue to be diverted onto the existing northbound bridge over London Circuit.

The construction team has done a fantastic job, and I was particularly impressed with how seamlessly the traffic switch was implemented, and I would not be surprised if a few members in this place actually missed the traffic switch during the first time that they used it with the new side track.

The project will move into the next major phase, which is the demolition of the southbound bridge over London Circuit, and once this is completed, more fill will be brought in to build up the new southbound road and another side track on the eastern side of Commonwealth Avenue. Following another traffic switch onto this new side track, the remaining northbound bridge over London Circuit will be demolished.

DR PATERSON: Minister, how does the construction of a side track improve traffic conditions for motorists and cyclists using Commonwealth Avenue?

MR STEEL: The government has been working very hard to minimise the disruption caused by major infrastructure projects, both public and private, and the use of a side track as part of the construction methodology for raising London Circuit has helped to minimise the impact to motorists, as two lanes of traffic on Commonwealth Avenue have been maintained in each direction during the demolition of the bridges over London Circuit.

Two lanes of traffic will continue to be maintained in both directions during peak hours, and wherever possible throughout the remainder of the project. Maintaining access and traffic capacity on Commonwealth Avenue during construction has greatly reduced traffic congestion and disruption impacts experienced by the community.

We have also considered access and traffic conditions for cyclists and walkers. Cyclist lanes have been maintained in both directions following the diverted road traffic lanes, and pedestrian access between Vernon Circle and Commonwealth Park has been maintained with a temporary shared path along the western side track.

While construction is underway, we are asking the community to please be careful when driving, cycling or walking near those construction areas. This is particularly important in the side entrances of Commonwealth Avenue and London Circuit at Edinburgh Avenue and Constitution Avenue.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, what other measures has the government put in place to manage disruption during construction of this project?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Pettersson for his question. In 2021, the ACT Disruption Taskforce was established to minimise the impact of construction on the transport network, commuters and businesses. The taskforce has been undertaking extensive preparation and planning, and has successfully implemented a range of different interventions to manage and reduce the impact of expected traffic congestion while that construction takes place.

We have seen the delivery of intersection upgrades to help reduce congestion and maintain traffic flow. That included traffic lights at Vernon Circle, at Coranderrk Street and the Parkes Way roundabout, which has been working very well. We have also invested in more intelligent transport monitoring technology, so that we have eyes on the street and we understand what is going on in case we need to intervene in real time on the traffic network, whether it be changes to signals, or whether it be making sure that we have got better live updates to motorists, or making sure that we have got responders going to the scene of an accident, for example.

We have implemented a new public transport network with a focus on maintaining service reliability during disruption. We have constructed new park and ride facilities to support people to get onto public transport, particularly at Mawson Oval; we have expanded the e-scooter scheme to all regions of Canberra; and we have rolled out a very prominent behaviour change campaign, which asks Canberrans to rethink their routine, and this calls on Canberrans to consider travelling at different times using different routes or jumping on public transport.

The taskforce is ongoing and will continue to look at how we can support Canberrans during this period of major investment in infrastructure that our government is making to support our growing city.

Mr Barr: Madam Speaker, further questions can be placed on the Notice Paper.

Supplementary answer to question without notice Planning—planning and development system

MR GENTLEMAN: In regard to a question I answered earlier about the number of RZ1 blocks that would be available for dual occupancies of 800 square metres and larger, it is 45,000. I gave the wrong figure earlier on.

Papers

Madam Speaker presented the following papers:

Bills, referred to Committees, pursuant to resolution of the Assembly of 2 December 2020, as amended—Correspondence—

Bills—Not inquired into—

Building (Swimming Pool Safety) Legislation Amendment Bill 2023—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services, dated 11 September 2023.

Circular Economy Bill 2023—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on Planning, Transport and City Services, dated 11 September 2023.

Government Agencies (Campaign Advertising) Act, pursuant to section 20—Independent Reviewer—Report for the period 1 January to 30 June 2023, dated 1 September 2023, prepared by Bill Campbell AO KC.

Legislative Assembly (Members' Superannuation) Act, pursuant to section 11A—Australian Capital Territory Legislative Assembly Members Superannuation Board—Annual Report—2022-2023, dated 5 September 2023.

Standing order 191—Amendment to the Crimes Legislation Amendment Bill 2022, dated 5, 6 and 7 September 2023.

Mr Gentleman presented the following papers:

Cost of Living Pressures in the ACT—Select Committee—Report—Inquiry into Cost of Living Pressures in the ACT—Government response, dated September 2023.

Estimates 2023-2024—Select Committee—Correction to Transcript of Evidence—25 July 2023 Hearing—Statement by Minister for Disability, dated September 2023.

Remuneration Tribunal Act, pursuant to section 10—Determination 9 of 2023—Part-time Public Office Holder—Chair and Members, Law Reform and Sentencing Advisory Council—Part-time Public Office Holder—President and Members, Restricted Medical Treatment Assessment Board, dated 24 August 2023, together with accompanying statement.

Public Sector Management Standards, pursuant to section 56—Engagements of long term Senior Executive Service members—Schedule—1 March to 31 August 2023, dated September 2023.

Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Act, pursuant to section 6A—

Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition (Northern Territory Container Deposit Scheme) Endorsement 2023—Notifiable instrument NI2023-416, dated 14 July 2023.

Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition (Tasmanian Container Deposit Scheme) Endorsement 2023—Notifiable instrument NI2023-415, dated 14 July 2023.

Subordinate legislation (including explanatory statements unless otherwise stated)

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

ACT Teacher Quality Institute Act and Financial Management Act—

ACT Teacher Quality Institute Board Appointment 2023 (No 2)—
Disallowable Instrument DI2023-218 (LR, 31 August 2023).

ACT Teacher Quality Institute Board Appointment 2023 (No 3)—
Disallowable Instrument DI2023-217 (LR, 31 August 2023).

Architects Act—

Architects Board (Commercial Lawyer Member) Appointment 2023—
Disallowable Instrument DI2023-213 (LR, 24 August 2023).

Architects Board (Community Interests Member) Appointment 2023—
Disallowable Instrument DI2023-214 (LR, 24 August 2023).

Architects Board (Registered Architect Member) Appointment 2023—
Disallowable Instrument DI2023-212 (LR, 24 August 2023).

Cemeteries and Crematoria Act—Cemeteries and Crematoria (Immersion of
Cremated Remains in Flowing Water) Code of Practice 2023—Disallowable
Instrument DI2023-215 (LR, 24 August 2023).

Gene Technology (GM Crop Moratorium) Act—

Gene Technology (GM Crop Moratorium) Advisory Council Appointment
Revocation 2023 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-220 (LR,
31 August 2023).

Gene Technology (GM Crop Moratorium) Advisory Council Appointment
Revocation 2023 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-221 (LR,
31 August 2023).

Nature Conservation Act—Nature Conservation (Fees) Determination 2023
(No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-216 (LR, 28 August 2023).

Official Visitor Act—Official Visitor (Corrections Management) Appointment
2023 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-222 (LR, 31 August 2023).

Public Place Names Act—Public Place Names (Denman Prospect)
Determination 2023 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2023-223 (LR,
7 September 2023).

Terrorism (Extraordinary Temporary Powers) Act—Terrorism (Extraordinary
Temporary Powers) Public Interest Monitor Panel Appointment 2023 (No 1)—
Disallowable Instrument DI2023-219 (LR, 31 August 2023).

Work Health and Safety Act—Work Health and Safety Amendment Regulation
2023 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2023-19 (LR, 28 August 2023).

Cost of Living Pressures in the ACT—Select Committee—government response

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) (3.01): Pursuant to standing order 211, I move:

That the Assembly take note of the following paper:

Cost of Living Pressures in the ACT—Select Committee—Report—*Inquiry into Cost of Living Pressures in the ACT*—Government response.

MR DAVIS (Brindabella) (3.01): Canberra is a great place to live unless you are broke. When the cost of living rises, many people in this city can absorb those increases, but for Canberrans who are already living on the margins, the rising cost of living hits harder. This is not a cost-of-living crisis. It is, in fact, a crisis of inequality.

We hear so often that we are a wealthy city, but this rhetoric diminishes the experience of many Canberrans—many Canberrans struggling to put food on the table, see a doctor or pay for their kids to play sport. I understand what it feels like to grow up broke in a rich city. I grew up in public housing. I have been homeless. I have worked multiple minimum wage jobs at one time just to make ends meet, and I have put off medical procedures because I could not afford them.

I want everyone in this city to be supported and enabled by their governments, by this government, to live their best life. We know that more and more people are slipping into precarity. There are people who have never had to ask for help, like accessing support services or discounts, who are now. And the people who were already struggling are now having an even harder time, with the rising cost of regular goods and services skyrocketing. The cost-of-living crisis is an inequality crisis. It is pushing millions of people across the country into poverty, while the rich continue to get richer. It is making people homeless and it is trapping people in debt.

Wage growth, including public sector wages, has stagnated for years. Real wages fell by 4.5 per cent in 2022, the largest fall on record. That means people are having to buy more expensive goods and services with even less money. The COVID pandemic put a huge strain on people, supply chains and our economy. It challenged the mental health of communities across the country. Russia's invasion of Ukraine caused huge spikes in fuel and gas prices. Company profits are driving supply-side inflation, and it is consumers that are being punished for it with record interest rates.

The consumer price index for June 2023 showed that increases for Canberra are consistent with the national average and higher than in Melbourne, Hobart and Perth. Only a few months ago, Canberra was the most expensive place to rent in this country. The CPI shows that rent paid by ACT tenants is still increasing and our advertised rents are still well above the national average. Rents have actually increased by 14 per cent in this city since 2019. In short, this is a really expensive city to live in, particularly if you are not wealthy. If you were doing okay a couple of years ago, that does not mean you are now. Financial security is not set in stone, particularly in these tumultuous times.

The ACT Greens, like Greens around the country, care deeply about inequality and people's struggles with this rising cost of living. So far, in this Assembly we have made huge strides to improve equality and equity of opportunity for everyone in Canberra. My Greens colleague Shane Rattenbury, as Attorney-General, has delivered significant improvements to renters' rights, including banning no-cause evictions. He established the first and second rounds of the Rent Relief Fund, providing real financial supports to tenants who are struggling with being gouged by raising rents. Minister Rattenbury has also led the ACT's commitment to renewable, sustainable and, importantly, affordable renewable energy, with the large-scale feed-in tariff scheme helping to offset the price increases that so many in the rest of the country are experiencing.

My colleague Minister Vassarotti has secured record funding for homelessness services, while Minister Davidson has increased funding for mental health and food security services in budgets throughout this Assembly term. My colleague Mr Braddock put a motion to the Assembly in 2021 calling on the ACT government to develop a social recovery plan to address the social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and to improve targeted assistance measures, including rates concessions, rebates and deferments on fines. My colleague Ms Clay has been advocating for a better planning system that will deliver more homes where people want to live and more equitable transport infrastructure, because owning a car is really expensive and people should be able to get around in a more sustainable and affordable way. But we know that, despite all of these efforts, there remains so much more that we can and must do.

For that reason, I was pleased that this Assembly established the Select Committee on Cost of Living Pressures in the ACT, with tripartisan membership. I was proud to chair the inquiry. We set out to consult with experts, peak stakeholders and communities to understand how the rising cost of living was impacting the everyday lives of Canberrans and what the ACT government could do to better support people. We received 35 submissions and held two full days of public hearings, during which we heard from a range of organisations that support the most vulnerable people in our community.

What impressed me the most was that we heard from real Canberrans who have seen a tangible change in their lived experience over the course of the past two years. We heard from the St Vincent de Paul Society that more people than ever before are coming to them to seek help—people who have never accessed their services previously, and some families in which both parents are working. They say they are witnessing people in the private housing market reaching out for help. More and more young women in particular, they said, are seeking their services.

The ACT Council of Social Service described how the ACT's high average wages hide significant disadvantage and poverty. They put it aptly, noting that the ACT has an overall lower proportion of renters in rental stress compared with other jurisdictions, but that when you look specifically at low income private renters we have the highest rate of rental stress—more than 60 per cent and more than half of commonwealth rent assistance recipients. Additionally, a report by Everybody's Home shows that our rental affordability problem for essential workers far outstrips national results, with aged-care and childcare workers paying more than three-quarters of their income on rent.

ACTCOSS said in the inquiry's public hearings:

Two thirds of organisations have seen an increase in demand over the last year and almost 70 per cent have seen increasing complexity of need amongst the people they serve. About 56 per cent reported higher rates of poverty and disadvantage in the community over the last year.

Member organisations are telling us that the demographics of people coming to them for support are changing, and we are seeing more and more people in full-time work who need help to make ends meet. Half of the organisations in the ACT say the number of clients that they cannot support has increased over the last year.

That is absolutely devastating.

The committee tabled its report to government, with 52 recommendations, with time to ensure that it could inform the development and the funding priorities of the 2023-24 ACT budget. I have been very glad to see so many of the committee's recommendations funded in the budget, from the expansion of the Utilities Concession Scheme to an increased accessibility to the Taxi Subsidy Scheme and providing additional funding to Legal Aid.

The breadth of the report's recommendations is important to highlight because, despite being a wealthy city in a wealthy country, the economic inequalities that are pervasive throughout the ACT are unjust and they hinder us from tackling huge issues like climate change. We will never have a unified community while we are divided on economic terms. Families in this city cannot focus on issues like climate change when they do not know how they are going to feed their kids dinner tonight, tomorrow and next week. People's bandwidth is not without limits.

Everybody in this place is extraordinarily privileged to have a good wage, to be able to spend our days and nights thinking about complex policy and how we can make the world a better place. But not everybody in our city has that luxury. Not everybody can catch the bus instead of driving their car. Not everybody can get solar panels or shop at zero packaging bulk food stores. They will continue struggling to do these things if this inequality crisis continues, if they struggle to pay rent, feed their kids or go to the doctor. It is our responsibility to make sure that people have the option of making choices that are best for their families, the environment and the climate. That means meeting people where they are.

The recommendations of the report go to a huge range of policy areas. I very much look forward to looking closely at the government's response to this report. I deeply hope, and earnestly expect, that the ACT government has understood the importance of every one of the recommendations. I must say that it was very disappointing to see the Deputy Chief Minister, months ago, reject one of the committee's recommendations for community sports programs before the government had even deliberated on the report and formulated its response.

In particular, I expect the government to have made a genuine commitment to improve the management and delivery of programs that are responsible for increasing the size of public housing stock. There are eight recommendations in this report that go specifically to improvements to the Growing and Renewing Public Housing program. I hope the ACT government is taking this opportunity to reflect on that program, increase its investments in public housing and commit to delivering its targets on time.

Of course, there are some things that are outside of the ACT government's control, which is why many of the report's recommendations call on the government to advocate to the federal government for better cost-of-living supports. With almost every seat around the National Cabinet table, I hope that everyday Canberrans and Aussies can actually see some material benefits. Unfortunately, the federal government's most recent budget gave a pittance for people struggling. It was a drop in the ocean, against a backdrop of weak tax reforms and billions of dollars in irresponsible tax cuts.

Commonwealth rent assistance has increased by barely more than \$1 a day—a true insult to everyone who is struggling. JobSeeker has increased by \$2.85 a day. Do not

spend it all at once! Compare that to the \$313 billion stage 3 tax cuts that this federal Labor government refuses to walk away from. The new JobSeeker rate will put an extra \$1,000 a year into the pockets of the most vulnerable people in our communities. It sounds all right, except when you compare it to the government's other priorities. The stage 3 tax cuts will add \$9,000 a year to the pockets of people earning more than \$200,000 and nothing for people on a low income. There is nothing for receptionists, hairdressers or aged and disability carers. Talk about priorities. I do not need a tax cut; nor does anybody else in this room need a tax cut. My constituents on income support need to be brought out of poverty.

The announcement yesterday from the Australian Greens that they have secured \$3 billion for public and affordable housing, in exchange for supporting the federal government's Housing Australia Future Fund, shows what really can be done when you do not back down. In our jurisdiction, Canberrans are savvy enough to understand what can be achieved when Greens hold the balance of power, delivering better outcomes for everybody in our community.

The 52 recommendations in this cost-of-living report received tripartisan support. That means they received endorsement from every party in this chamber. I hope the government's response to the cost of living report will be yet another testament to the endless good that we can achieve for the most vulnerable people in our community when we put aside our partisan differences and focus on what is best for everyone living in this city.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Drugs of Dependence (Personal Use) Amendment Act 2022—proposed delayed commencement

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (3.13): I move:

That this Assembly calls on the Government to delay the commencement and operation of the *Drugs of Dependence (Personal Use) Amendment Act 2022* until December 2024.

Mr Assistant Speaker Cain, at the outset I note your deep interest in this issue, following the chairing of the inquiry into this matter.

Ms Stephen-Smith: There was an inquiry?

MR HANSON: It was an inquiry, not an investigation. Remember? You were ordered by this Assembly to do an investigation and you never did. Thanks for reminding me. I will get back to that later: to the investigation that you never did. They had to be forced to do that select committee.

There are three key things here. Firstly, you have not got a mandate. You do not have a mandate for this reform. Even Mr Rattenbury agrees that you do not have a mandate. You hid it. You hid it, he said. I will quote you later, Mr Rattenbury, as you shake your head mournfully. You deliberately hid it from the people of the ACT. We have got you on tape saying that. You hid it—

Mr Pettersson: “Got you on tape”!

MR HANSON: We do. It is great.

Mr Pettersson: Everyone is on tape.

MR HANSON: We did not get you on tape. I know you were at the back of the room giggling away, Mr Pettersson. But we got the minister on tape. So go back and get yourself a mandate. Get a mandate. The community deserves to have their say.

We also know, secondly, that there are extensive concerns that we are aware of now that we were not then. Border Force made some pretty significant comments and raised concerns, as did ACT Policing. We had some of that debate in question time. We have heard comments like this from the Chief Police Officer:

To be honest we just don't know what is going to happen ...

I think we can presume we are going to see an increase in drug use and to some extent we are creating a more permissive environment.

The Chief Police Officer is saying that we are going to have more drug use. Did we know, Mr Assistant Speaker, when this was all snuck through, that the Labor Party was bringing in a policy that is going to increase drug use—things like heroin and meth? How is that good? How is that harm minimisation? The Chief Police Officer has been overseas and has come back with a slightly different view.

The third point is that there is nothing to stop this being delayed. There is no rush. We know that we have got bikies gearing up to come to this place, organised crime licking their lips. We know that the police are struggling to get ready for this. We know that GPs, for example, are not ready to go. There is no real consequence to delaying this, other than trying to get it in front of an election, because you do not actually want to take it to the people.

If you want to listen to what the minister said, I will go back to the first point, which is that they do not have a mandate. What did she say on tape? She said:

We took it to the election quietly.

It was done through a private member's bill, which means it could be done much more quickly.

... we would have had to deal with all this risk aversion and complexity.

Yes, risk aversion from people like the Chief Police Officer, who might have highlighted the risks of organised crime and increased drug use. You deliberately circumvented government processes and you took it to the election quietly. As the Chief Police Officer has said throughout, not everybody knew about this. The Chief Police Officer said recently:

The vast majority of Canberrans don't know this is happening ... it's unbelievable really.

I agree. It is absolutely unbelievable.

What did Mr Rattenbury say about this, when we raised the issue that this was snuck through? Mr Rattenbury said:

I paid pretty close attention during the last election campaign and I did not hear that matter talked about.

He said that it was surprising. He went on:

... I think in the first week of the parliament, if you're about to turn up with a bill, you might have mentioned it during the election campaign.

I agree. I seldom agree with Mr Rattenbury, but on this we agree that you might have mentioned it during the election campaign. He continued:

If you intend to bring something to this parliament you should have the courage to go to the election and talk about it.

I agree: you should. What we know, Mr Rattenbury, through you, Mr Assistant Speaker, is that they deliberately hid it from the election. This was not some mistake: "Whoops, we forgot to mention that we are going to decriminalise heroin and meth." They did it deliberately. There is no mandate.

Since this has all been revealed, a lot of concerns have been raised. Let me quote from an article entitled "Coked up capital":

... Australian Federal Police deputy commissioner Neil Gaughan—

the ACT's own Chief Police Officer—

said he expects herds of revellers to head to Canberra when drug laws are relaxed on October 28.

This is as well as opportunistic bikies looking to make money. Good on you, Mr Pettersson.

Mr Pettersson: Point of order.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, take a seat. Yes, Mr Pettersson.

Mr Pettersson: I would ask that you direct Mr Hanson to direct his remarks through the chair.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Yes. Please direct them through the chair.

MR HANSON: I will. Through you: well done, Mr Pettersson, for getting those bikies up. I am sure that is a really great outcome. I am speaking ironically, of course, through you, Mr Assistant Speaker.

Mr Pettersson has got his drug reform tote bags that he is selling on the Labor Party website. He is trying to fundraise with those. Drug law reform? He is selling tote bags. Maybe he thinks some of the Rebels might want some of those tote bags. They can take them off to Summernats or to Spilt Milk, whatever it is, get some of Mr Pettersson's tote bags—fundraising off the back of this. Maybe you think that is a good opportunity for him.

The Chief Police Officer said:

It would be naive not to think people won't come down, even for a weekend, to get on the coke and not worry about the cops ... it's a reality we can't ignore ...

Mr Gaughan agrees that the new legislation by the Labor-Greens government could lead to conflict between bikie gangs, increased drug use, a high road toll and long-term mental health issues. Well done. Well done, Labor. Well done, Greens.

The Chief Police Officer said:

I don't think it is a coincidence the Rebels' national run is to Canberra and coincides almost to the day with the introduction of the new laws ...

To be honest we just don't know what is going to happen ...

I think we can presume that we are going to see an increase in drug use and to some extent we are creating a more permissive environment.

That is, supposedly, harm minimisation. It does not sound like it to me. He goes on:

Meth is highly addictive ... so the worry is people will go on four or five day meth benders, go out and drive and kill someone.

Maybe we should have a chat to Mr Tom McLuckie. Sit down with Mr Tom McLuckie, have a chat and see what he thinks about this. The Chief Police Officer goes on:

Last year we had 18 people die, a 300 per cent increase on the rolling average, and most of those people had meth or cannabis in their system.

The Chief Police Officer is saying that people are dying on our roads because of drugs, and he is saying that this legislation is going to lead to increased drug use. Do the maths. It is not that hard. We know it is not going to be effective. Chief Police Officer Commissioner Gaughan said that he had witnessed the effects of these policies on a fact-finding mission to North American states that had relaxed drug laws and "From what I saw over there, it is not working." He has been able to have a look.

I would invite you to have a look at media reporting about Portugal, because you all tout Portugal as the model here. Let me tell you, that is failing. Read what the police are saying about that over there. NSW Police say:

You hear all these left-leaning politicians and some other organisations who think legalising drugs will cure everything. It will not.

If the ACT government doesn't think they are going to be inundated with visitors looking to party on their soft drug laws, they are off their faces.

That is from a New South Wales police officer. They are just some of the serious concerns being raised.

Mr Pettersson interjecting—

I missed his interjection. What was that?

Mr Pettersson: With the \$400 fines in New South Wales for drug possession?

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Members, address the chair, please.

MR HANSON: I am listening to NSW Police. I am listening to ACT Policing. Who do you believe, Mr Pettersson? Are you going to listen to NSW Police?

One of the comments that we heard on the radio from the Chief Police Officer was about them trying to get ready for this. He said:

Making sure of the training to our members ... because there's going to have to be a bit of an attitude change, as well as by my members.

They're going to see things. They're going to see people take a line of coke, where historically they may have intervened. They're probably not going to now.

That is the Chief Police Officer. If people are doing drugs in Canberra, previously the police would have gone over and said, "Hey. You're not doing that. There is a penalty for that." The Chief Police Officer said on the radio, on the ABC, that they are going to see people take a line of coke and, where historically they may have intervened, they are probably not going to now. That is outrageous. That is unbelievable. Basically, the Chief Police Officer is saying, "Take drugs in this town. Do a line of coke. Do whatever you like and the police will not intervene." That is what he said on the radio.

Someone else who was on that same morning show, talking about drugs, was Gwenda, a GP who rang up. She said:

What I do know is that, at the coalface, we have absolutely no chance of getting these people into programs.

Absolutely no chance of getting these people into programs! So the Chief Police Officer is saying that there are going to be a lot more drugs and he is not going to intervene. Bikies are going to come into town. Dr Paterson is having a laugh. She thinks it is funny.

Dr Paterson: Two people you are talking to.

MR HANSON: She thinks it is funny.

Dr Paterson: Two people. There was a whole inquiry, with hundreds of pages of evidence.

MR HANSON: The Chief Police Officer of the ACT.

Dr Paterson: Who also supported harm minimisation in the inquiry.

MR HANSON: The Chief Police Officer of the ACT.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Members, address the chair, please.

MR HANSON: What about the Australian Border Force? What do they say about this? Will they ignore them as well? The *Australian* reported:

The Australian Border Force has cautioned the ACT government against going alone as it prepares to decriminalise possession of small quantities of ice, heroin, cocaine and other drugs from next month, urging a coordinated national approach amid fears Canberra could become a hard drug centre.

The Australian Border Force is raising those concerns. The article continues:

The ABF on Thursday for the first time signalled it had concerns over the potential impact and associated “risks” that could come from decriminalising illicit substances ...

Ahead of the government passing the legislation in October, ACT Policing made it clear that they would prefer a slower, staged approach. This has been revealed as well. The police actually said, “No, we do not want to go straight to heroin and meth. We want a slower, staged approach,” and the government ignored that. The Australian Federal Police have said there is concern that decriminalisation of illicit substances could see an increase in drug trafficking. That is the Australian Federal Police: an increase in drug trafficking. That is what they are saying. Border Force, GPs, the Australian Federal Police and ACT Policing say that it is reckless to push ahead with these laws.

The Chief Police Officer has concerns that this could not come at a worse time. Spilt Milk and Summernats will be a major test of the ACT’s move to decriminalise these drugs. He fears that an increased appetite for illicit substances will bring more organised crime to Canberra. Oh, and they laugh over that side. They think it is pretty funny: the increased drug use and the increased organised crime. They think it is all a bit of a laugh.

Alive to prospects of a bikie turf war, Chief Police Officer Neil Gaughan has also revealed his desire for the ACT to introduce powers that are commonly used to make life tough for bikie members interstate. We do not have any anti-consorting laws here, remember? We do not have the anti-consorting laws that they have in other states. What a wicked brew: we are going to decriminalise drugs, encourage bikies into this jurisdiction, and the Rebels will probably turn up at the border, put their patches on—they are not allowed patches in New South Wales—and drive into town.

No doubt they will have \$100 bills, so they can do any drugs they like. The Chief Police Officer said that they are going to just walk past them, let it go. They just give them a hundred bucks and on they go, and that is what the bikies are going to do. Or if they say, “I am going to go to rehab,” they get nothing. We know that under these

laws you can say, “I am going to rehab,” then you turn up at the first session, sign your name and leave, and that is it; you do not even need to pay your hundred bucks.

So we have got police under pressure and we have the threat of organised crime. We know that this is going to increase drug use, which is terrible for users. We know that the Labor Party hid this at the election. Mr Pettersson moved a motion at the end of last term about the government doing an investigation into simplified offence notices, in the context of a conversation around partying and festivals for young people. That investigation never occurred.

We said categorically that we would not sign up to anything. It is worth having an investigation, but there are some drugs we would never sign up to. Disingenuously, Labor said, “We went quietly because the Liberals said it was okay to.” Well, let me tell you, we were fooled, just as the rest of the community was. We had a reasoned debate about the government doing an investigation, when all along you were going to cook up a bill to decriminalise heroin and meth, and you did not reveal that once. Not once in that debate, not once in the election campaign was that revealed: that you were going to come in here and slap down legislation to decriminalise heroin and meth. What we all agreed to in this place was an investigation by the government, which never occurred.

This is a government that does not have a mandate. This is a government that has been warned by the Chief Police Officer, by the Federal Police, by the Australian Border Force and by GPs that it is not going to work. Why not just delay it? If you are so confident, take it to the people this time. Do not hide this time. Do not hide like you did, and laugh about it and boast about it. Have the guts to take it to the people, as Mr Rattenbury has said. Have the guts to do that. Do not hide, and let’s see if you can get a mandate. Let’s see if the people really want the drugs decriminalised or not.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health) (3.38): I have to say that it has been very disappointing to hear a great deal of hyperbole lately on the drug law reform that Mr Pettersson has championed for many years and that this Assembly voted for last October after a robust select committee process, and on which the ACT government engaged deeply when considering the bill and the feedback from and through the committee. Some members of the committee and the Assembly engaged deeply, as well. Mr Davis, in debating the bill, described his own journey on this matter, saying:

I did the work. I listened to academics. I listened to clinicians. I listened to police. I listened to lawyers and those in the criminal justice system. I listened to corrections officers. I listened to parents who have lost their children to drug addiction. I listened to children who have lost their parents to drug addiction. I listened to young people ...

and so on.

Of course, Mr Davis had plenty of time for these conversations because it was almost two years between when Mr Pettersson released the exposure draft of his bill and when it was debated and passed by the Assembly. It is one thing for a remote national broadsheet to take a few sentences out of a wider context to make an argument that

simply does not hold water. Of course, they were perfectly free to record our session, because, unlike any other party in this place, Labor Party conferences are open to the public. Ours is the only party that actively invites the media to our conferences to witness debates or discussions we have, as the party of ideas. So it is one thing for the national broadsheet, but it is quite another thing for the Canberra Liberals, who participated in Assembly processes over the course of more than two years, discussing and debating these issues, to pretend that none of that process took place and that somehow the government legislated in secret.

Indeed, this is an immense change of tune from Mr Hanson. Only a few short years ago, he said the Canberra Liberals supported the investigation of options to expand the simple offence notice to other illicit drugs beyond cannabis. On 20 August 2020, 58 days before the 2020 election, regarding simple offence notices, Mr Hanson said:

... the evidence ... demonstrated that that was an effective system that achieved a good balance in relation to harm minimisation for cannabis.

Mr Hanson said:

There may be some drugs and some situations where we would never support a simple offence notice being applied. But I can envisage circumstances ... where a simple offence notice may be a better way of proceeding for all concerned.

He stated that the Canberra Liberals were supportive of Mr Pettersson's motion, which called on whoever formed government following the October 2020 election to "investigate the feasibility of a simple offence notice for other drugs of dependence to ascertain the legal, social and health impact". This wording was reflected exactly in ACT Labor's health policy platform for the 2020 election. Do you know what, Mr Assistant Speaker: the ACT government did indeed investigate the feasibility of a simple offence notice for other drugs of dependence to ascertain the legal, social and health impacts. We did this alongside a detailed Assembly process. I would refer Mr Hanson to the government's submission to the inquiry, our evidence and my debate speeches.

Mr Hanson clearly understood that the debate was being conducted in August 2020 in the election context, saying:

We should all resist the temptation—as we proceed with this debate in the lead-up to an election and the temptation is there—for my side of politics to say that Mr Pettersson wants to legalise all drugs and for the Labor Party to say that the Liberals want to roll out Philippines-style drug policy. I do not think that would be helpful. We have found ourselves in those sorts of circumstances before, on both sides; let us not do that.

How things have changed as we lead up to the 2024 election. Mr Hanson is now, once again, very happy to make extraordinary overblown claims. He is not letting the evidence get in the way of a good story. In fact, he is not even bothering with internal consistency. On one hand, he is saying that the change is unnecessary because most people who are found in possession of small amounts of drugs for personal use are already diverted from the criminal justice system; but, at the same time, the sky will fall in and the ACT will be overrun by outlaw motorcycle gangs if we formalise what Mr Hanson says is already happening.

I think Mr Hanson was right in August 2020. I think the Simple Drug Offence Notice will be an effective system that strikes a good balance for harm minimisation for people who use drugs. It is unfortunate that the Canberra Liberals now seem to have completely backflipped on that approach, apparently saying they will repeal the entire SDON change. It is sad to see that they have done so in a way that deliberately stigmatises people who use heroin and methamphetamine in particular. The reality is, and Mr Hanson knows this well, that, in the almost two years between Mr Pettersson releasing his exposure draft of his bill in December 2020 and when the Assembly passed the bill in October 2022, the question of whether heroin and methamphetamine should be included in the list of drugs subject to the SDON was one of the most debated points.

This was not something that was snuck through. It was not a secret. Ultimately, this Assembly decided they should be included. Why? Because, fundamentally, these reforms are about reducing the harm caused by contact with the justice system. They are about prioritising a health response to drug use. They reflect a progressive health-based and harm reduction approach to reduce the number of deaths and lives ruined by illicit drugs. Surely this approach should be extended to those who are most likely to be dependent on highly addictive substances, those who are the most marginalised and those who are least likely to be diverted under the current system?

Mr Pettersson has, of course, led this debate in the community and he summed up his motivation succinctly when closing the debate on his bill, saying:

When you speak to people who have watched people die of an overdose because they were scared to call for help, that stays with you.

It is important to clarify the exact intent behind these drug law reforms. We are not legalising drugs. The government does not condone drug use. It remains risky and dangerous to consume illicit drugs. Supplying drugs, trafficking, dealing or even giving illicit drugs to another person remain subject to substantial criminal penalties. Nothing has changed when it comes to drug driving offences and nor will it.

Our expectation is that police will still confiscate illicit drugs in addition to issuing a Simple Drug Offence Notice. They certainly can and we would expect them to do so, if for no other reason than to determine how much a person has in their possession. But we know that threatening people with heavy punishments has not worked in deterring drug use, and anyone suggesting otherwise is ignoring the evidence. Indeed, people making these arguments will often point to the terrible things that are happening right now, as Mr Hanson did in his speech—things that have not been prevented by our current approach.

What we know right now is that people are going to use drugs, regardless of their legality. We are taking a pragmatic harm reduction approach through initiatives like these amendments and our other programs, such as pill testing at CanTEST, the Needle and Syringe Program, and the Take Home Naloxone program. These harm reduction measures align with the National Drug Strategy and sit alongside the other pillars of harm minimisation: supply reduction and demand reduction. There is no evidence that this change will have any significant impact on either supply or demand, no matter how many times Mr Hanson says otherwise. By treating drug use as a

health issue rather than a criminal one, we will reduce fear and stigma, making it easier for people who use drugs to access health supports, seek help when they need it and get on with their lives.

The latest report on alcohol and other drug treatment services in Australia from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare shows that more Canberrans are accessing treatment services than almost anywhere else in the country. This is a testament to the incredible workforce we have in the alcohol, tobacco and other drug treatment sector in the ACT. Interestingly, the AIHW report showed that alcohol was the most common principal drug of concern for clients. It showed up at more than double the number of episodes compared to the next highest drug of concern for service users. The ACT government has increased investment in the alcohol, tobacco and other drug treatment sector by 30 per cent over the past two years, from \$20 million in 2018-19 to more than \$26 million in 2023-24.

The 2022-23 budget included a \$13 million investment in the alcohol, tobacco and other drug treatment sector, and the 2023-24 budget builds on the significant investments made in every budget since 2019-20, including the largest capital investment the ACT has made in residential alcohol and other drug rehabilitation services. We have also invested in other specialised services to provide accessible and affordable primary care, particularly for those experiencing diversity—such as people experiencing homelessness or alcohol- and drug-related dependencies, and young people at risk—through services like Directions Health Services and The Junction for young people. This funding has delivered targeted vital services to people who need it most, supporting them to engage with health services and consider diversion to obtain access to the support they need.

One of our key stakeholders throughout this entire process has been ACT Policing. The Chief Police Officer, Mr Gaughan, has stated repeatedly, most recently only a few days ago, that ACT Policing supports the position that personal drug use is a health issue that is best dealt with by health professionals rather than the justice system. However, Mr Gaughan and the ACT government are conscious of the important balancing act that police will need to take. As Mr Gaughan said last week:

The harm minimisation issue still needs to be front and centre, and that means ‘People, don’t take drugs. They’re dangerous’.

We agree with that. Mr Gaughan has also said, in relation to his reflection on the ACT’s drug law reform, “I don’t think we have the same challenges here in the territory as they do in North America.” Mr Hanson has ignored that part. Indeed, he is using the CPO’s quotes that are specifically about people affected by fentanyl as if they relate to the drugs that are actually going to be subject to the Simple Drug Offence Notice.

The ACT government consulted extensively on this legislation after it was introduced by Mr Pettersson, who has led the charge on drug law reform in the ACT. The select committee into the bill considered written submissions and public hearings. I do not see how we could have been forced to have a select committee. We have a majority in this place, Mr Hanson. If we had not supported the select committee, there would not have been one. The select committee into the bill considered written submissions and

public hearings, and we worked closely with ACT Policing; the ACT government Analytical Laboratory; Canberra Health Services' alcohol and drug services; community and policy experts; local and national drug and alcohol sector advocates; and service providers.

Over the past 12 months, the ACT Health Directorate has continued to work closely with these stakeholders, especially ACT Policing, on implementation, to ensure they are supportive of these reforms. It is understandable that frontline police have some trepidation. That is to be expected with any report. That is why ACT Policing has been conducting training with its members ahead of commencement. Mr Gaughan said just last week that ACT Policing is ready for these changes to drug laws.

It is an absolute fallacy to state that nobody knew about this policy ahead of the 2020 election. In August 2020, 58 days before the last election, Mr Hanson himself said we should all resist the temptation to sensationalise this matter, as it would not be helpful. I agree with Mr Hanson: this type of commentary is not helpful. Unfortunately, Mr Hanson's subsequent disingenuous commentary during the debate on the bill popped into my head when I was speaking at the ALP National Conference friend event that I organised. In saying that ACT Labor took the policy to explore SDONs to the 2020 election, I did note that we did this quietly, meaning that we did not shout it from the rooftops. It was for two main reasons. As Mr Hanson noted 58 days before the election, trying to have a sensible and evidence-based conversation about drug law reform in the heat of an election campaign is hard, and the risk of harm for people who use drugs and are already subject to stigma is real. That might not even come from the Liberals, but there are other smaller and more extreme parties that will jump at any opportunity to grab a headline.

In addition, this was existing Labor policy. Indeed, we believed that it was tripartisan policy, so we really did not think it was that controversial. We had an entire health policy platform with a lot of detail that we did not talk about, especially when it reflected existing policy and only affected a relatively small proportion of the community. You cannot say everything in an election campaign.

The reality is that the Canberra community overwhelmingly supports treating drug use as a health issue rather than as a criminal issue. This is incremental change. As Mr Pettersson said in 2022, "It is a gradual evolution of our existing laws." It has been well considered by the Assembly, including a proposed amendment from Mr Hanson during the detailed stage of the bill to change the commencement date to December 2024, which was not supported.

The same arguments Mr Hanson is making now about the changes that will take effect in October were made after the ACT government decriminalised personal possession of cannabis: there would be increased harm, more hospitalisations, drug tourism, more crimes perpetrated by people who use drugs, and, generally, that the sky would fall in. I think we can all agree that has not occurred—not in 1992 when the ACT was the second Australian jurisdiction to introduce police diversion for cannabis possession, nor in 2013 when that scheme was expanded; and it did not happen in 2001 when the police diversion program was introduced in the ACT as part of a national diversion measure or in 2020 when penalties were removed entirely for personal possession of cannabis.

I think it is safe to say that the sky will stay firmly in place this time, as well. I suspect that that is actually Mr Hanson's problem. His whole argument will fall apart when it is contradicted by the evidence of lived experience. That is what Mr Hanson is really worried about: the prospect of the Canberra Liberals losing their scare campaign. What will they do then?

MR DAVIS (Brindabella) (3.44): As a non-executive member of this Assembly, I get four, maybe five if I am lucky, opportunities per year to bring private members business to the Assembly. An opportunity to identify a problem in our community and propose a solution. Inevitably there will be debate about whether or not I got the solution right and that is why we have a debate like this. Members move amendments and we try to find a way to push a policy challenge through the Assembly. What an utter waste of time in the limited opportunities that non-executive members have to bring problems and proposed solutions to this Assembly that Mr Hanson has chosen to occupy private members business time with a proposal to do nothing.

Not only a proposal to do nothing but a proposal to do nothing after more than three years of debate and conversation, consultation, collaboration and, indeed, as we saw even on the floor of this Assembly between the Labor Party and the Greens, compromise and a difference of opinion on the detail.

I think that this should scare anybody in this city who is concerned with the current state of drug use, drug harm and drug-related crime. Because whether you agree with Mr Pettersson's proposed solution that the government has now adopted, you have it here in black and white that there is no alternative proposed by the Canberra Liberals.

Today the Canberra Liberals had an opportunity to articulate a different drug policy. A different way of dealing with people who are suffering from addiction. A different way to reduce crime, both for the people suffering and the perpetrators of crime as a consequence of drug use. They had the opportunity to propose a different way to reform our courts and criminal justice system. They had an opportunity to make our city safer. The Canberra Liberals are proving that, in the model of their Liberals federally, deny and delay is their policy *modus operandi*.

I am the first to admit, Mr Assistant Speaker—and I have admitted it in this place before and I will admit it again—as a first term MLA freshly elected, I was not around and did not participate in the debate that has been the subject of Mr Hanson's handwringing in the remainder of the last Assembly term.

What I did was I came into the 10th Assembly and Mr Pettersson proposed a solution to a problem. I have admitted before, although obviously there will be people who find it uncomfortable, that this was an area of policy where, while I am proud to be Green, I was not convinced that we got it right. I know what it feels like to love someone who I wish had just said no. I know what it feels like to live with someone suffering with their drug addiction. What I would give for alternatives to what I have seen and experienced. I would have hoped that an alternative party of government would use this valuable opportunity to propose an alternative.

Nothing. You are happy with the status quo? You are happy with drug users going through our criminal justice system and clogging up our prisons—which do not spit

them out the other side any better than when they came in, usually worse? You are happy with the current rate of drug-related crime? You are happy with the amount of young people dying because they dare to use a pill at Spilt Milk and it was laced with something? Propose an alternative. Contribute to the debate. Be constructive. But do nothing: what a waste!

Mr Pettersson's proposed solution to this problem was one that I was instinctively uncomfortable with, but—call it youthful naivety, call it enthusiasm, call it glutton for punishment—when Mr Pettersson proposed this bill and this Assembly decided to establish a select committee, I put my hand up in my party room to participate in that select committee process: to challenge my preconceptions and my biases. To learn something. To listen to people on all sides of this debate who had actual experience. Some that conflicted with my own and some that devastatingly looked exactly like it. The overwhelming consensus of the people that this Assembly spoke to—a member of each political party for almost a year—the overwhelming consensus was that this was the right thing to do.

And, at the very least, what those even on the other side of the debate could concede is that what we are doing is not working. What we are doing is not helping people. Crime is not going down. People are still dying from drug overdoses and addiction. People are still suffering. What we are doing does not work.

Now, because we have chosen to selectively quote evidence in this place, I would like to run through the list. This is, Mr Assistant Speaker, a list of the 59 submissions that the Select Committee on the Drugs of Dependence (Personal Use) Amendment Bill 2021 heard from: the Ted Noffs Foundation; the Pharmacy Guild of Australia; Human Rights - Justice Action; Civil Liberties Australia; Carers ACT; the National Drug Research Institute at Curtin University; the Salvation Army; Directions Health Services; the Australian Alcohol and other Drugs Council; the Australian National University Drug Research Network; the Canberra Alliance for Harm Reduction and Advocacy; Families and Friends For Drug Law Reform; Unharm; Uniting Church New South Wales & ACT; the Australian Psychedelic Society Canberra Chapter; the Burnet Institute; the Karralika Programs Incorporated; Toora Women; Australian Association of Social Workers; Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Association ACT; the ACT Justice Reform Group; the Council of Social Service; the Drug Policy Modelling Program at the University of New South Wales; the West Australian Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies; the Alcohol and Drug Foundation; the Victorian Alcohol and Drug Association; Queensland Network of Alcohol and Other Drugs; the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine; Harm Reduction Australia; 360Edge; the Law Society; Canberra Community Law; Meridian; and the Health Care Consumers' Association.

The overwhelming consensus from all of these submissions? What we are doing does not work and we need to do something different. Now, one of two things could be true as a consequence of this motion from Mr Hanson today. Either Mr Hanson has read all of these submissions, he watched the public hearings into the inquiry, he met with the parents from Families and Friends For Drug Law Reform and has concluded to ignore all of that evidence and commit to the status quo. Alternatively, Mr Hanson has chosen not to participate in the transfer of knowledge that this Assembly has tried to conduct for years.

I understand that, in politics, it is not easy to admit you have changed your mind; but I think this community in particular respect politicians who are able to do that—can listen to a conversation, can hear people out and can go on a journey. I cannot tell you, Mr Assistant Speaker, the number of conversations I have had with my constituents in Brindabella over the past year, some of whom are particularly hostile, some of whom are particularly angry, about this reform because they had gotten their news from some questionable places, like Mr Hanson's Facebook feed.

Fortunately, I had an overwhelming bevy of evidence to direct my constituents to. Engaged, learned and sophisticated individuals who wanted to hear what was working, what was not and how we proposed to fix it. And do you know what the consequence of those conversations have been, Mr Assistant Speaker? One of two things: either somebody who had changed their mind and come to the view that this was the appropriate reform or, at the very least, people who I could not agree with, who respected the work of this Assembly to try to figure it out and who could definitely accept that what we are doing is not working.

How I wish Ms Castley was in the room right now because every sitting week we get a health-based motion from Ms Castley, which I, as the Greens spokesperson for health, inevitably have to respond to. To Ms Castley's credit, she usually proposes a problem and a solution. We get to talk about competing pots of evidence, we get to talk about different ways of fixing the problem and we get to talk about different ways of identifying the problem.

But the audacity to come into this place and say, implicitly, "There is no problem. Keep doing what you're doing. Everything looks great." Well, it does not look great for the young people who have died at a music festival because they had the audacity to try an illicit substance. It does not look good for all the families that I have met at the Remembrance Day ceremonies conducted by the Families and Friends For Drug Law Reform. It does not look good for every young person currently locked up in a remand centre or at the AMC because they dared to use drugs at one point or another in their life and it does not look good for any of their families.

It does not look good for the genuine victims of crime who Mr Hanson speaks of. I do not think anybody in this place would wish that hell on anybody, and our ambition in this place is to try to make sure that nobody is the victim or perpetrator of crime. The instances of heartache and grief that Mr Hanson has pointed to, that break the hearts of everybody in this room, happened under our current legal framework.

The status quo has done this to people. The status quo cannot be good enough. We have to do something different.

Mr Parton: You okay, John?

MR DAVIS: No, I am not, Mr Parton. I am not okay because your colleagues have chosen to waste this Assembly's time prosecuting policy challenges that have already been prosecuted ad nauseam, in the form of a select committee inquiry in which Mr Assistant Speaker was represented, and in the form of the substantive legislative debate in this Assembly, where Mr Hanson has already had a crack at this very question and was not able to get the support of a majority of members.

This has been prosecuted and, in the meantime, delaying this for as long as you want to delay it, is subjecting more Canberrans who use drugs, their families, their friends, their colleagues, to the risk of a life of criminality, clogging up the criminal justice system, ruining their lives and upsetting the lives of their family. I just cannot accept that the way we have been doing it in this country works.

Mr Parton: Why not sit down and talk about it?

MR ASSISTANT CHAIR: Thank you, Mr Parton.

MR DAVIS: Mr Parton, I do not think this is a joke.

Mr Parton: No, neither do I.

MR DAVIS: I actually love, because I am a glutton for punishment, coming into this place and performing a bit with you, Mr Parton—through you, Mr Assistant Speaker—on potholes or nature strips. I love a light rail motion.

Mr Parton: Same!

MR DAVIS: But this is about people's lives. This is genuinely about life and death.

Mr Parton: Exactly.

MR DAVIS: And I just cannot fathom how any reasonable person can look at the current legal settings for drug use in this city and in this country and think that the status quo is acceptable. It has helped no-one. It has hurt people. It has killed people. It has cost us a crapload of money and it has fixed zip.

So I am prepared to listen to the evidence presented by all of the people that I mentioned before—victims of crime; victims of the criminal justice system; people who provide support services to people who use alcohol and other drugs; peak organisations; lobby groups; the Law Society; and people who represent people through the criminal justice system—the overwhelming bulk of evidence, all from very different sides of the political debate, Mr Assistant Speaker. Do not let it be known that this is some sort of lefty-cabal. I do not think organisations like the Law Society, for example, would describe themselves as that.

I am proud to admit—although it is not often favourable in the nature of our political debate—that I got it wrong; that before I was elected, I had a conservative approach to both the use of drugs and the legal framework around drugs. Because I, like many people who have loved someone with a drug addiction, was hurting and that hurt can take you to a conservative place, and I empathise with that.

I do not think I can convince Mr Hanson, because I am not convinced that Mr Hanson is persuadable for so long as there is a portion of the electorate who can become radicalised through this rhetoric. But I am convinced that most Canberrans are good people who can work through policy challenges, who can understand evidence, who can think about it and, like so many of my constituents who still to this day may

disagree with the policy solution, can at least agree that what we are doing is not working and it is time to listen to some experts and try an alternative approach.

The young people that we are set to lose to drugs if we do not change our ways deserve nothing less.

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) (3.58): The Canberra Liberals want to keep drugs illegal. Do not worry about academic research, do not even bother talking to any health experts. Drugs should be illegal. Addiction is bad, cops are good, vote Liberal. Have I got it right? I do not know. Maybe I have.

A member comes into this chamber this week with a bad faith motion on addiction, when he and his mates in the Labor Party had voted down a Greens budget amendment just last week to stop \$41 million of public money going to the gambling industry. Addiction is a criminal issue for the Canberra Liberals, but they are not looking to make alcohol illegal, the drug strongly associated with domestic violence in this country. Addiction is a criminal issue for the Canberra Liberals, but they will sure as hell keep on taking donations from the gambling industry and coming into the chamber to do their bidding, ruining lives in the process.

As a government minister in this place, I say to the opposition very clearly: addiction is a health issue. Harm minimisation saves lives, and shame on anyone who stands in the way. Drug decriminalisation is just one of the so-called radical reforms that we are making, so put your seatbelts on 2CC, because this might get a bit rough for you.

Harm minimisation does not start nor end with decriminalisation. People take drugs. People take drugs regardless of their legality. It really should not require a private member's bill for someone to inform the Canberra Liberals of that. While the member was having a tantrum last year, this government installed Australia's first pill-testing site. Almost one in five people discard their drugs at the clinic when they learn what is in it but the Canberra Liberals do not support that. Instead, they prefer to put people's lives at greater risk by denying them access to pill testing or a confidential chat with a health expert.

This member does not support pill testing at festivals either. I do not know if he has ever attended one before but people take drugs there. Young people take drugs there, and that is why we support pill testing at festivals. The Canberra Liberals object to that, too. The Canberra Liberals would prefer to see more police at festivals instead, causing young people to panic at the sight of them and their sniffer dogs and increasing the likelihood of overdose when people take all their drugs at once.

When this chamber finally agrees to a safe injecting room, and I hope that that will happen soon, I guarantee that this member will come back for another half-baked attempt at trying to control other people's lives, because he does not want people who use injected drugs to have clean needles in a controlled environment either. This member and his conservative political party have absolutely no regard for the wellbeing of people who use drugs or for the family and friends who love and care for them.

Criminalising drug use prevents people from seeking support. The Canberra Liberals know this. Here is something that the Canberra Liberals should also know. Drug users are going to use drugs in the ACT regardless of any laws that pass through this chamber. The way to address addiction is through a health lens. The war on drugs is over, Jeremy, and you lost.

Every accidental overdose death is avoidable. We need to destigmatise addiction. We need to fund health services, not police and prison cells. Harm minimisation works and shame on anyone who stands in the way. I learned that within less than a year of moving to this city when 16-year-old Bindi Calder, almost as old as I was at the time, died from an overdose in an underpass across the road from the Centrelink office where I worked. Had heroin use been treated as a health issue instead of a criminal issue, maybe it would not have cost her life.

The Greens fought for drug reform. We took it to the 2020 election proudly and we went from two to six seats in this place in that election. Canberrans are sick of conservatives pretending that more cops and more court dates and more prison cells are the answer to everything. We will make these reforms and we will save lives by doing so because these reforms come with increased funding for alcohol and other drug addiction services, and we Greens would like to make it even easier to access these support services with more funding in future.

So in closing, through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, I say to the opposition, “Grab a box of naloxone and get over it.”

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi) (4.03): I was always told the best way to start a speech is with some humour. This week I came to the chamber expecting to debate the privilege motion that was circulated in the last sitting week. Unfortunately, that is not what we are debating here today. It appears the Canberra Liberals have concocted something else. That proposed motion from last week is important because it goes to where this idea started.

This idea was not solely my idea. Ms Lawder wrote to the Speaker recently alleging that:

... the ACT Government colluded with Mr Michael Pettersson MLA, as chair of a Legislative Assembly committee, to ensure a recommendation was included in the final Committee report, which would then give authority for the government to implement their drugs reform agenda.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I was the chair of that committee inquiry, and I think that is well-known. What is often glossed over is that that was a majority Liberal committee. That was a majority Liberal committee. Now, members, I would like to think that I am persuasive, but I am not that persuasive that I can convince the Canberra Liberals to vote for things that they do not like. If that were the case, we would probably not be here today having this debate.

I know no-one in this chamber is going to go away and look into that report, because we are all busy people, but for those members that were not here last term, I want to read a few sections very briefly:

3.15 The Committee heard evidence from parents who wanted their child's comorbid mental health and substance abuse conditions treated but found themselves channelled towards the criminal justice system. ...

3.16 Families and Friends for Drug Law Reform suggest that the prevalence of comorbid mental health and substance abuse disorders could be 'ameliorated by less stigmatising and less punitive drug policies that give primacy to a health approach.'

3.17 The Committee inquired as to what reforms are required to improve outcomes for young people suffering from these co-occurring diagnoses.

Well, the short answer that I would give is to get the criminal law off the back of these young people who are really suffering. It just provides an impediment to their reintegration with their families and the rest of society. It forms a barrier.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I am persuasive but I am not that persuasive. A lot of people have glossed over the committee comment included in that report, which was agreed to by all committee members. The allegation that Ms Lawder made recently was that I had somehow been able to trick the Canberra Liberals into voting for something they did not agree with. I do not think that is even slightly true, Mr Deputy Speaker. I have a lot of respect for my colleagues and I see how diligent they are in their committee work. All members of that committee agreed to the recommendation and the committee comment:

COMMITTEE COMMENT

3.18 The Committee acknowledges that substance abuse is a health issue and believes youth suffering from such disorders should be treated in the health system, allowing for diversion from the criminal justice system. As raised in the Justice section in the previous chapter, there is a risk of a significant power imbalance for those under 25 suffering a mental illness if they are required to go through the court system. To enable such diversion and improvement of outcomes for Canberra's youth, one option may be to investigate the implementation of a simple drug offence notice. This would be similar to the simple cannabis offence notices that currently exist for minors but could be considered for extension to some other drugs.

It was followed by a recommendation to that extent. I know that all members of that committee supported that recommendation, and if they did not, they would not have voted for it.

That was the start of the Simple Drug Offence Notice in this Assembly. I was very excited by it. It is very rare that I speak to committee reports, as a lot of members in this place would know. I only speak to committee reports when I think there is something I can add to it above and beyond what is in the report. I said to the chamber that day how excited I was by this recommendation. I thought it was a good thing that should be progressed, which is why I came back one week later, on 20 August, two months before the upcoming ACT election. It was, for the record, the second-last sitting day of the last parliament. Now, for anyone to say that we were not in the midst of an election is delusional. I want to repeat some of the things I said in closing that motion, because to me it is humorous now how wrong I was. My closing remarks, members:

I thank all the members that have contributed to this debate. It has been a sensible debate and I think it is very revealing of where this Assembly has moved to. That all three parties could talk in such a way about harm minimisation and decriminalisation of these illicit substances is very telling about the future of ACT politics. That gives me some hope.

When you think about decriminalisation and those in the community who say this is a radical proposition, it is not. If you look at the approval rating for decriminalising ecstasy you will see it has a high level of support from the Labor Party and the Liberal Party combined. This is not radical; this is common sense and the community supports it. That is why I am so encouraged today that we have all come together to support this motion.

Many people in the community will attack members in this place that have raised this as an issue and have spoken in favour of this. I have no doubt that people will seek to use this as political ammunition in the coming weeks. But this is not a minor or fringe issue: 11.2 per cent of us have used ecstasy in our lifetime—they are all criminals; nine per cent of us have used cocaine—they are criminals; and 6.3 per cent of us have used meth or an amphetamine—they are all criminals. It is time that our laws reflect our values, which is why I support the decriminalisation of these substances and Canberra taking the next sensible step.

Members, I was not shy about my beliefs. I was not shy about where I thought the next Assembly was going. The people that spoke in the debate that day, I believed, shared those values. The motion that day, most notably 3(d):

investigate the feasibility of a simple offence notice for other drugs of dependence to ascertain the legal, social and health impacts

I thought was a good part of my motion. Mr Hanson that day, fully aware of that section, made remarks in this chamber such as:

We should all resist the temptation—as we proceed with this debate in the lead-up to an election and the temptation is there—for my side of politics to say that Mr Pettersson wants to legalise all drugs and for the Labor Party to say that the Liberals want to roll out Philippines-style drug policy. I do not think that would be helpful ... Should the government change in October, we will be happy to continue to look into this issue to see whether the simple offence notice is something that we can broaden and apply to limited numbers of illicit drugs in certain circumstances.

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Mr Hanson!

MR PETTERSSON: Mr Deputy Speaker, I never thought I would say this but I miss Mr Coe. The Canberra Liberals under Alistair Coe were far more sensible than the Canberra Liberals here today. Mr Coe was a conservative, but he was acting like a moderate. Ms Lee is a moderate, but she is acting like a conservative, and it shows in the actions from the Canberra Liberals in this place.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members, can we let Mr Pettersson speak.

MR PETTERSSON: The second part of that motion that day that I think is worthy of including was an amendment that was agreed to by the Labor Party, proposed by the Green political party. Their proposed amendment was that the government explore a pill testing facility pilot in the city. I thought that was a good amendment. The Labor Party thought that was a good amendment. That is why it was supported.

Mr Rattenbury made some comments recently that he was not aware of this debate in the midst of the election. I just want to put on the record once again Mr Rattenbury's contributions. For the record, I do this because I have always viewed Mr Rattenbury as a keen supporter of drug law reform, and overwhelmingly he has been very helpful and supportive of these reforms. I thank him for that. Mr Rattenbury said:

I was pleased to see a particular discussion about the notion of having simple offence notices. I think that this is, again, an effective way of keeping people out of the criminal justice system, of breaking down some of those inequalities that we see, those social injustices that occur at the moment where different sectors of the community get treated in different ways. Having a system more like this means that those inequalities will be ironed out, at least to some extent and at least in this regard. We certainly support that finding that came from the committee and has been reflected in Mr Pettersson's motion and speech today.

I thank Mr Rattenbury for that contribution and I also thank him for his amendment. The Canberra Liberals have made much hay of the idea of the terminology "investigation", as that was not a mandate. I think it is funny because the terminology "explore" was taken as sacrosanct. Now, the proposal for a pill testing site—and to quote the Greens—Mr Deputy Speaker, I seek leave for an extension of time.

(Extension of time granted.)

For the amendment that said to "explore" something, the terminology adopted by the Greens for what they had proposed—and I thank them for that amendment; it was a good one—the Greens statement was, "The ACT Greens have today secured a commitment for a regular pill testing facility in Civic, and the graphic says, "Pill testing pilot starting in Civic this summer." Further, the very next day, the Greens described their amendment as "breaking": "Pill testing in Civic every weekend coming soon." The reason I highlight those posts and that terminology—and there is a media release that says something similar:

The ACT Greens are pleased today to have secured a commitment from our Government colleagues to extend pill-testing from only music festivals to a more regular weekend service in the city, this Summer, informed by expert health advice.

—is not to diminish that amendment or their support or advocacy in this space, but simply to point out that for one policy in this space, that terminology was acceptable, but seemingly for this proposal and at this time, the Canberra Liberals have turned on a dime and it is unacceptable.

That was in the final sitting week of the last parliament. We of course wrapped up, caretaking commenced soon after, but before that, the ACT Labor Party released its

election commitments, the Health Policy Position Statement. This was publicly available. It was given to journalists. It was put online. People who suggest that this was hidden from them could not be further from the truth. This is a publicly available document and heavily scrutinised. I would put that the reason no-one paid much attention to it is because the Canberra Liberals never raised any concerns with the proposal.

Going back to the terminology of “investigate” and “explore.” In the ACT Labor election platform, ACT Labor says:

... we will explore the establishment of a pill testing pilot in the city entertainment area during the busy summer period.

That was taken as sacrosanct Labor policy. When we said we would explore something, everyone jumped and said, “Labor has got an ironclad commitment to do something.” In the very next line of the policy document, we say we are about to investigate doing something and everyone said, “That does not count.” Mr Deputy Speaker, it is hard to keep up when people are not consistent.

I have to say that the timeline for the bill then progressing through this place was a very slow one. For members to say that they did not have chances to be engaged in that process, or that the government somehow has cabinet processes and just passes things without due process, is also laughable. I released an exposure draft in December 2020; February 2021, the bill was introduced in the Assembly; February 2021, the select committee is established; September 2021, select committee reporting date is extended; November 2021, select committee hands down its report; June 2022, the ACT government response to the committee report is tabled; August 2022, debate on the bill commences; October 2022, final debate concludes, and the bill passes.

Mr Deputy Speaker, being a nonexecutive member of the government is filled with frustrations. It is a constant critique in this place by members of the Canberra Liberals that the Labor backbench should not even exist. The questions we ask in question time are boring, they are useless, they do not do anything.

Opposition members interjecting—

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members. Members!

MR PETTERSSON: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

When members of the Labor Party sit on committees, we are considered stooges of the government. But when a member of the Labor Party comes forward, tries to push the agenda forward on something, then the Canberra Liberals come out and attack them: “How dare you not follow the government processes? Do you not know your place? You should sit there and do nothing.”

The way that the Labor Party works is that we have a very respectful and collegiate approach. We support nonexecutive members trying to advocate for issues that they care about, and that is what I have done. I have never been shy about my duties in this space, and I have pushed this agenda forward.

Very quickly in closing—this took a lot longer than I thought it would—I had to reflect very quickly on some of the recent contributions by Neil Gaughan in his role. Cannabis usage in the ACT has fluctuated in recent times. We have gone through COVID and I would implore everyone to look at cannabis usage across the country. To draw inferences about cannabis use in the ACT in relation to law changes in the ACT while ignoring what happened to other jurisdictions is not sensible.

For the very last point I would make— (*Time expired.*)

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (4.18): I rise to speak in strong support of Mr Hanson’s motion. As Mr Hanson has already clearly explained, there are several important reasons why this piece of legislation should have its commencement delayed to December 2024. I wish to focus on just one of these.

Three years ago, I was approached by several families whose loved ones desperately needed to access drug treatment services but who were wasting away on long waiting lists. These Canberra families asked me to sponsor a petition on their behalf. That petition attracted 699 signatures in just two months. The petition emphasised:

Specialist alcohol, tobacco and other drug services can no longer meet demand, with waiting lists growing even longer.

This petition led to an inquiry, which was then superseded by an inquiry into the Drugs of Dependence Bill. The report of that inquiry confirmed the concerns expressed in the petition, concluding that Canberra has “a significant lack of availability of drug and alcohol services”.

Without adequate treatment services in place, however, this law is doomed to fail. Lawyer Adrian McKenna made this exact point in an opinion piece published in the *Canberra Times* two weekends ago. Mr McKenna, who is a member of the ACT Law Society’s Criminal Law Committee, wrote specifically to voice his strong support for decriminalisation, but included the following statement:

The ACT will have to complement decriminalisation with treatment and drug counselling services that receive sufficient long-term funding. One is not effective without the other.

Despite Minister Stephen-Smith’s attempt in question time earlier today to obscure the size of the problem, we know that the territory does not have sufficient treatment and drug counselling services to meet existing demand and, if demand increases even slightly, the outcome will be even worse.

The real size of the problem was highlighted in the 2023-24 budget submission from the territory’s Alcohol, Tobacco and other Drug Association, or ATODA. In this submission, ATODA pointed out that recent funding increases from the government have fallen well short of the organisation’s conservative recommendations.

According to this expert submission, the sector is at capacity. Current waiting times for some programs are long and service providers are, at times, able to provide only low-intensity treatment options to clients assessed as needing high-intensity treatment.

In fact, service climbing modelling reveals that up to 4,750 people require treatment in Canberra than are currently being treated through existing services, with an investment gap of approximately \$24 million per annum.

In addition, the Watson Health Precinct, earlier referenced by the minister as part of the solution, is very much a work in progress. The precinct's residential drug and alcohol treatment facility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is not due to be completed until the end of next year, assuming that it is completed on time in December 2024.

When this legislation was debated nearly one year ago, I stated that it was an outrage that Labor and Greens were willing to make such radical changes without first making sure that the missing services are in place. I stand by that statement.

This is a slap in the face to those who struggle with addiction, to their families and also to their loved ones. I know an Aboriginal family here in Canberra whose son and brother spent months on a waiting list for a residential drug treatment program. The family was told that a spot had finally become available for this man a few weeks after drugs took his life.

Insisting that this law will somehow help people access treatment when existing treatment services are overwhelmed is a blind, cruel and twisted sick joke.

I conclude by repeating what was said by Gwenda, a Canberra GP, who rang into ABC radio five days ago to share her perspective. She said:

What I do know is that, at the coalface, we have absolutely no chance of getting these people into programs, even if they are very motivated to have support for their drug or alcohol problems. So that is where the system will let these people down. They may not end up with a criminal record, but they also will not have a system in the ACT that supports their treatment for this.

The only hope we have of averting this disaster is to delay the implementation of this rushed legislation until adequate supports, such as the new treatment facility in Watson, are in place.

The ACT Labor-Greens government has a long and troubling history of introducing nice-sounding reforms without first establishing or funding the supports necessary for those reforms to have any chance of succeeding, and it needs to stop.

Why are the Labor and the Greens implementing a law that decriminalises the use of drugs on the basis of people's health, yet have no chance of getting these people into programs. It is a blind, immature and irresponsible move.

It is doomed to fail because this government is not interested in the health of people taking drugs. If they were, they would have the support ready when it is needed. They would have the support right now, when it is needed. But it is not ready and the increase of support will not be ready until next year, in December. They are not interested in people's health. They are more interested in getting high on drugs and bringing others along with them in an irresponsible way, with no increase in support systems.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.26): I thank Mr Hanson for his motion and also his acknowledgement of my work on this select committee some time ago. I want to remind members about my own conclusions. I will do this briefly. This was in November 2021. My first concern—and Mrs Kikkert has touched on it very forcefully—is that the bill fails to offer a whole-of-government approach to this complex policy area. Where is the additional support? Where is the extra resourcing to accompany this law change? Where is it?

In November 2021 I expressed my concern about this—and obviously there is more content in my dissenting report. What extra has the government done? It is pretty obvious that it has done nothing extra. We are hearing from support agencies today who are looking at this coming change and saying, “We are not ready now with what we have to cope with. How will we be ready with more referrals?” This is a real sign of negligence on behalf of this government.

During the select committee hearings—and Mr Pettersson and Mr Davis touched on who made submissions—there was almost universal agreement that the support is not available. And that was back then. That was nearly two years ago. The support for those caught up in these terrible substances is not adequate. Nothing seems to have changed, because this government really has a low commitment to extra resourcing where these things are actually needed.

I also mentioned that the bill fails to consider the risks and unintended consequences involved in decriminalisation, including the elevated risks of attracting drug tourism, further investment by drug producers and suppliers, and increased trafficking. It sounds like a very familiar set of words coming from the head of ACT Policing, which Mr Hanson thoroughly touched on earlier. Have these risks been addressed? ACT Policing is very concerned.

It further recognised that criminalising possession is, for many, a deterrent to adopting such behaviour. I know that that might be a bit too subtle for some members here—but my goodness! I was very fortunate that I did not have to deal with substance abuse issues when it came to my children’s interest in this area—not that I am aware of, but certainly the consequences are not there. I was very happy to tell them, “Do not do drugs; it is a crime.” I am glad that I could get to them as early as possible and that I was disincentivising them to even consider taking these horrible substances.

Members interjecting—

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

MR CAIN: I am not a great parent either, Mr Davis. I was just a fortunate parent. I recognise that diversion is already working reasonably well, so let’s work with what we have got and make it better. Quite seriously, there is nothing wrong with trying to stop these substances from coming in, with more police resourcing in the territory. Whether you want to call that a war on drugs—I do not care what you call it—there is nothing wrong with stopping these things from being manufactured here and imported here, even under the current legislation. It is a well-known fact that this is a very under-resourced area as far as policing is concerned in the ACT. The bill has not

satisfactorily resolved issues around the conflict with commonwealth law. We will see where that will lead, because under the commonwealth law it will remain an offence.

I want to touch on something really obvious that I do not think any of the government speakers have really addressed, and that is: what is Mr Hanson's motion actually calling for? Why did he pick this particular date, I wonder? I wonder why he picked December 2024. I wonder why he picked that, government members? He picked it because this is such a crucial issue that surely the electorate should have a say. They were not presented with this in 2020. They were not presented with this, as government policy, leading up to the last election. Does the government not respect the electorate enough to take this pretty significant change to the next election? Do they not want to hear from the electorate? That is what this motion is calling for. Let's put this to the electorate and let them make their position known.

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (4.31), in reply: I thank everybody for their contributions. It is always good to have a lively debate in here, is it not? I acknowledge my colleagues who have spoken and thank them for their support. Obviously, I disagree with some comments. The minister tried to conflate what was clearly a deliberate intent to go quietly on an issue in the lead-up to the election with what was a debate about having a government investigation into the use of simple offence notices, when all along the plan was to slap down a private member's bill that goes all the way to decriminalising heroin and meth. We never supported that.

Government members interjecting—

MR HANSON: Interjections probably do not help. The reality is that the minister tried to conflate that. She was told that it was the will of this Assembly to do a government investigation and she deliberately did not do that. Instead, there was Mr Pettersson's private member's bill and there was no government investigation, and she has conflated the two. She has said that the government investigation was the committee inquiry.

Government members interjecting—

MR HANSON: You said it in answer to a question in question time. I can bring that back in, because I researched that matter when we were looking at privileges last week. I am aware that that is what you have done.

What you have said, though, is that the penalties do not deter drug use and that there is no evidence that what you are doing will increase supply or demand. That flies in the face of what the Chief Police Officer is saying. The Chief Police Officer is saying, "To be honest, we just do not know what is going to happen. I think we can presume we are going to see an increase in drug use," and he has also warned of people coming from New South Wales to use drugs.

The minister is saying, "No, it is not going to increase supply and it is not going to increase demand," and the reverse is the advice from the Chief Police Officer, from the Federal Police, from Australian Border Force and from the Australian Federal Police Association, who are all saying exactly the opposite. Where is the basis for the

minister's argument that removing penalties will not lead to a supply and demand increase, when all of those professional agencies are saying the exact opposite?

You can go to any one of Mr Gaughan's quotes. He said that one of his main concerns was the relaxation of the possession of methamphetamine or ice. If it is not going to lead to an increase in supply and demand, why is he so concerned? He is concerned because, if you reduce the penalties down to being non-existent, as we know from what the Chief Police Officer said, his members are just going to basically ignore it or people will pay a \$100 fine or say they are going to go to rehab but will not. Of course it is going to lead to an increase.

Are we ready for that increase? Thank you, Mrs Kikkert and Mr Cain, for what you said there. We are not ready. GPs are ringing in to radio programs, saying that those at the coalface have absolutely no chance of getting these people into programs, even if those people are very motivated and they have support for doing their drug or alcohol programs. That is where the system will let these people down. Again, the minister seems to think that she knows better than the frontline GPs, the Chief Police Officer, the Australian Border Force, New South Wales Police and the Australian Federal Police Association.

I have had a number of people contact me—I am running a petition—who are ex-drug users, who have said, "No. This is terrible policy that they are proposing because, if you reduce the penalties, it just makes it so much easier to get addicted to these terrible substances." Again, to the point the minister makes—that it is not going to increase usage—the Chief Police Officer is saying it would be naive to think that people will not come down even for a weekend to get on the coke and not worry about the cops. It is a reality we cannot ignore.

The government is saying that there is not going to be an increase in supply and demand but the Chief Police Officer is saying that there will be, that he is very worried about it and that you are going to see an influx of people coming in from New South Wales. They are contradictory statements. You cannot have a minister saying, "No increase; nothing to see here," and the Chief Police Officer saying he is very worried about it because there is going to be an influx of usage, not just by people in the ACT but also by people coming from interstate. Border Force and the Australian Federal Police have also raised their concerns. I will quote from the Australian Federal Police. They said:

The potential for increased transnational serious organised crime activity in response to any increased demand stemming from decriminalisation is concerning. Any decriminalisation efforts must not inadvertently make it easier for drug traffickers, growers or manufacturers to exploit vulnerable elements of the community.

That is what we have been warned about by the experts.

The minister also said, "The Chief Police Officer said that the problem in America is only fentanyl." No, it is not. Let me quote again from the Chief Police Officer, who keeps getting misquoted and verbed by those opposite. The Deputy Commissioner and Chief Police Officer, Neil Gaughan, said that he had just witnessed the effects of

these policies on a fact-finding mission to North American states which had relaxed drugs laws. He said:

“From what I saw over there, it is not working,” Mr Gaughan said, in comments which put him at direct loggerheads with the government in the ACT where he is also chief police officer.

“In February I toured Portland, San Francisco and Vancouver who have all decriminalised the personal use of hard drugs ... what I saw was not pretty,” Mr Gaughan said.

“I saw in the states people smoking crack in the streets and the cops are turning a blind eye to that usage. Cops are walking around giving people a nudge to make sure they are not dead.”

He does not even mention fentanyl in that extract. Yes, there are unique problems with specific drugs that are available, like fentanyl, which is a scourge. But, if you think that that is the only thing causing the problems with that policy that has been rolled out in America, that is not the case. As I said in my earlier speech, have a look at the latest media reporting from Portugal. It is not going the way you have all explained that it would. It is not working the way you thought it would.

As the Chief Police Officer said, I do not think it is a coincidence that the Rebels' national run into Canberra coincides, to the day, with the introduction of these new laws. This is not some scare campaign from the Canberra Liberals; the Chief Police Officer is saying it is not a coincidence that a bikie gang is coming into this town as a consequence of your policy.

What is going to happen with the Rebels coming into this town? Currently, the Comancheros are the dominant gang. We have seen the bikie wars here before. Mr Davis was saying, “This is all a big scare campaign.” In 2009 I warned that if you do not introduce anti-consorting laws there will be a consequence. There will be a consequence, because if you create a vacuum bikies will come. That is why we went from one gang to four gangs and we had a bikie war that lasted a decade. We had shootings. We had fire bombings. We had terror in a whole bunch of our suburbs.

You are creating the same situation here where you have one set of rules in the ACT and a different set of rules down the road in the western suburbs of Sydney. As the Chief Police Officer is saying, people are going to come from Sydney to use drugs and to sell drugs, and he is saying that it is not a coincidence that a bikie gang is just about to roll into town. That is a direct consequence of this reform. That is what the Chief Police Officer is saying. It is not just something you are hearing from the Canberra Liberals; you are hearing it from your own Chief Police Officer.

It is desperately disappointing that this did not go to the electorate. You should have been very open and said, “What we are going to do is decriminalise heroin and meth and every single hard drug that is available.” Then that would have been something that the ACT community could have had a debate about and had a think about, and they would have been able to say whether that was a good idea.

We could have had the comments from the Chief Police Officer and from the experts, in the lead-up to the campaign, saying that it was going to lead to people coming from

Sydney to use drugs and that we were going to have a rollout of bikies coming into town to sell drugs. We could have had an open and honest debate. Of course, this mob did not want that debate. They did not want the truth being told or exposed by the Chief Police Officer, by the Federal Police Association, by Australian Border Force, by the Federal Police and by GPs in the lead-up to the election, because they knew it would not go well.

Let us have the debate. If you are so confident about these reforms, delay it and allow GPs and the drug services and the police time to get themselves in order. That is not going to cause any problems. Let us have that debate at the election. Come on; let us do it. I dare you. See if you have the guts to do it. Do you have other sneaky policies that you are going to take this time—and hoodwink the election, just like you did with Calvary and you did with drugs?

Question put:

That the motion be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 8

Noes 15

Mr Cain

Ms Castley

Mr Cocks

Mr Hanson

Mrs Kikkert

Ms Lee

Mr Milligan

Mr Parton

Ms Berry

Mr Braddock

Ms Burch

Ms Cheyne

Ms Clay

Ms Davidson

Mr Davis

Mr Gentleman

Ms Orr

Dr Paterson

Mr Pettersson

Mr Rattenbury

Mr Steel

Ms Stephen-Smith

Ms Vassarotti

Question resolved in the negative.

Waramanga—street names

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee) (4.46): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the ACT Government currently operates ACTmapi, a search tool that collaborates with the community to offer information about the origins and importance of place names in the ACT. These names encompass various aspects, including Australian flora and fauna, prominent figures like writers and artists, scientists, and words from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander vocabulary;
- (b) the names of suburbs, streets, and places in the ACT pay tribute to Australia's remarkable people, geography, heritage and history. These names honour a diverse array of individuals, both well-known figures and those whose achievements might have been less publicised. They collectively embody our Indigenous heritage, national treasures, and

captivating stories, which are beautifully reflected in the names of our national capital;

- (c) each suburb in the ACT follows a distinct theme for naming its streets and significant places, often related to nature reserves or parks. For instance, Throsby's theme revolves around native fauna, while Reid's theme incorporates Aboriginal words;
 - (d) dating back to 1927, the ACT has maintained a longstanding policy governing the naming of streets and suburbs. This policy was established by a committee tasked with naming the streets and suburbs of the ACT;
 - (e) Waramanga, situated in the ACT's Weston Creek district, was established in the late 1960s. As per the ACT Government, the name Waramanga pays tribute to the Warumungu Aboriginal people in the Tennant Creek region of the Northern Territory;
 - (f) ACTmapi provides brief historical and significant descriptions for each street name in a suburb to preserve the city's cultural identity. However, in the case of Waramanga, it only mentions the suburb's theme;
 - (g) new Canberra suburbs receive more comprehensive coverage with a wealth of information. For instance, even a small cul-de-sac like Elphick Street in Bonner, boasts a 200-word biography of its namesake. This discrepancy is concerning, especially considering that Bonner shares a similar theme with Waramanga, focusing on Aboriginal cultural groups;
 - (h) a nearby southside suburb, Red Hill, with its theme of ships and explorers, includes detailed descriptions of Captain Cook's second in command and various colonial ships in the street names;
 - (i) Waramanga's residents could benefit significantly from active engagement with the Government to promote their local history and place names. Sharing information about street names can inspire community involvement in preserving and celebrating Waramanga's rich history and culture;
 - (j) street names offer valuable context for urban planning and development decisions. An understanding of the historical and cultural significance of street names can influence choices related to infrastructure, landscaping, and community development; and
 - (k) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander street names in the ACT recognise the cultural significance, extensive history, traditions, and profound connection to the land of Indigenous communities and their people. Proper recognition serves as a heartfelt acknowledgment and respect for this cultural heritage; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) engage in stakeholder collaboration (including consultation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies) to incorporate pertinent details regarding the street names in Waramanga;
 - (b) consider implementing a comprehensive evaluation of the content provided on ACTmapi as a measure to enhance and bolster the cultural identity of the ACT; and

- (c) report back to the Assembly by June 2024 to provide an update on progress.

I am pleased to present my motion to recognise the Indigenous culture and history of one Canberra's oldest districts, Weston Creek. The ACT can be proud of its incorporation of Indigenous place names into the roads, suburbs and reserves, and I hope we see more of this into the future. I was very proud to introduce and have passed the Public Place Names Amendment Bill in 2021 that saw the recognition of famous people in Australia in our street names. We removed the recognition of colonisers and inserted the word "reconciliation" to recognise those in Australia who are famous for reconciliation.

There has been work in this space. As a city, the increasing wealth of Indigenous leaders, cultural groups and languages should be and can be found on our street signs, landmarks and parks. It is an important part of recognising the 65,000 years of Indigenous culture that precedes us on the land on which we live.

Through the ACT government's mapping service, ACTmapi, you will find publicly available information on the origin, significance and theme behind each of Canberra's street names. This is critical in preserving the rich community heritage of Canberra's streets and is a vital source of information for those curious enough to investigate the history of their suburb. You can see heritage listings, sport field locations and Canberra's historic plans, among many other useful mapping features.

One of the great tools of this database is the place names feature, where you can search for a description of the history and significance of the name of any street in the ACT. However, there is a notable discrepancy in the level of detail provided for the suburb of Waramanga in Weston Creek, my home suburb. There is an obvious administrative oversight that I would like to correct. Waramanga streets are named after Aboriginal tribal groups. However, unlike other street names in ACTmapi, there is a lack of comprehensive detail and descriptions for Waramanga street names.

Waramanga is a suburb named after the Warumungu tribal group, who speak a language close to Warlpiri and predominately live in the area surrounding Tennant Creek in the Northern Territory. The lands of the Warumungu people were first mapped by Norman Tindale AO, one of Australia's most prominent anthropologists, who recorded their extended land of some 55,000 square kilometres in the Northern Territory.

In the 1870s, early white explorers described the Warumungu as a flourishing nation. However, by 1915, invasion and reprisal had brought them to the brink of starvation. In 1934, a reserve that had been set aside for the Warumungu people in 1892 was revoked in order to clear way for gold prospecting. By the 1960s, the Warumungu had been entirely removed from their traditional lands. Street names in Waramanga include Nemarang, Tiwi, Alawa and Nangor, but, when you search for these street names, it just says "Aboriginal Tribal Group". ACTmapi lists no history or significance behind these street names, failing to recognise the immense cultural, social and linguistic history of Aboriginal groups in the ACT and Australia more broadly.

I hope that the ACT government may engage with AIATSIS, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, as well as relevant stakeholders in the ACT, such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body—both are significant resources in our Canberra community—to work on providing the detail. I would suggest that this task may not be quite as easy as it seems. I believe that some of the names have been Europeanised, including the name of Waramanga itself. I would also be very interested in the advice that was provided in the late 1960s to pick these particular groups and names.

Just across from Waramanga is the neighbouring suburb of Fisher, where you will find street names named after mining towns in Western Australia. On ACTmapi, you will find a short description of the connection between the street and the namesake; similarly in neighbouring Weston Creek suburbs.

Newer suburbs include more comprehensive detail, however. The streets for Bonner, for example, are named after Indigenous leaders and their supporters. An example is Elphick Place, a cul-de-sac of just 10 residences, which is given a short 300-word biography of its namesake—a beautiful and meaningful tribute to Gladys Elphick, an Indigenous campaigner who fought for Aboriginal women and land rights in the 1960s.

At a time when there is fierce public debate leading up to the Voice referendum, I think it is constructive to engage with our local heritage here in the ACT. In May 1967, Australians overwhelmingly voted to change the Constitution so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people would be counted as part of the population. Literally a year later, in June 1968, the suburb of Waramanga was gazetted and the suburb and streets were named after Aboriginal tribal groups. I would suggest that the naming of Waramanga was very much riding on the national momentum for change, for recognition and for equality stemming from the 1967 referendum.

Sharing information about street names can inspire community involvement in preserving and celebrating our suburbs—in this case, Waramanga's rich and progressive history. By improving understanding and accessibility to this information, hopefully local residents will become more engaged in their understanding of their local heritage, and in Canberra this allows us to connect more broadly with our Australian heritage.

While this motion is small in its calls on the ACT government, it highlights the importance of these moments in our history. We see from the yes vote in the 1967 referendum a flow-on of positive effects embracing constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Today, as we embrace another referendum, it is worth amplifying our rich ACT heritage and how it sits alongside and embraces Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage, and how a yes vote can make the most quiet and subtle differences for grassroots change.

I call on the ACT government to amend the ACTmapi tool and to work with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies to research and publish a full description for each street name in Waramanga so the community can better recognise the tens of thousands of years of Indigenous culture that Waramanga's streets seek to reflect.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.54): Clearly, we will not oppose this motion, because better quality information from the government would be nice to have and the ACT mapping system could certainly do with some improving, although, in fairness, the problems I hear about most frequently are on things like slow response times and a somewhat tired interface. I do not really hear that many complaints about the lack of information to do with street names. Maybe that is because it is not a commonly used tool for that purpose. Indeed, if Dr Paterson has people asking about the meaning of street names in Waramanga, or any suburb in the electorate for that matter, I am happy to help. If Dr Paterson visits one of the Lifeline Book Fairs held every year in Canberra, I have no doubt she could find a copy of *Canberra's Suburbs and Street Names: Woden Valley & Weston Creek*. I was looking at my copy today. I was tempted to read the section on Waramanga into the *Hansard* just to help Dr Paterson, but I think she can probably afford her own copy.

I have to say that this is a bit of a strange motion to bring forward today in this place and in this way. After all, a matter as small as this could presumably be dealt with by a government backbencher simply writing to or calling or knocking on the door of the relevant minister. The information is available. Presumably, it would be a very small investment of time to update the entries in the database, and presumably it could be done without having to debate it here today.

It is strange that we are doing that, because the things we debate in this place send a message to the community about the things we believe are important and what people in the community care about. With only 4½ sitting weeks left this year, what Labor thinks is important enough to take up our very limited debate time is whether a barely-used component of a rarely-used and less-than-perfect IT system includes enough information about the origin of the street names in one suburb in our electorate. There are so many important issues that need attention in the ACT, and especially in our electorate.

If you actually speak to people across Waramanga, you will hear what they are really worried about. From my discussions—and I have had a few—there is a long list. People care about our health system. People in Waramanga are worried about this government's hostile takeover of Calvary hospital. People in Waramanga are worried about doctors and nurses who feel that this government does not have their backs, and they are worried about the likelihood of losing their local GPs—and it is a real possibility—because the government will not back down over their “sick tax”. In fact, the government does not even want to debate an alternative.

People in Waramanga are worried about congestion through the suburb, and they are worried in particular about trying to get out onto Hindmarsh Drive and Namatjira Drive, particularly during peak hours. The most frequent bus service I hear about from many people is one called “out of service”! Potholes in the suburb become so bad that they become memes. People are worried about crumbling local infrastructure, from paths to footpaths, and they are really worried about the lack of sporting infrastructure. They are worried about the lack of police and increasing crime rates. In particular, I note the vandalism in the local area and the attack on the Village Cafe, which is a truly valued local meeting place. They are worried about deep failures in the criminal justice system which have fundamentally failed the victims of crime, and, sadly,

I have heard deeply disturbing stories about the impact of that justice system on those who have been victims of sexual assault.

Many people's rates and valuations have increased by almost 65 per cent in Waramanga. In just two years that happened, and rates and rental taxes have been increasing by far more than people's incomes for years. People in Waramanga are worried about unaffordable housing. Too many people feel stuck in rental accommodation and have given up on owning their own home. They are worried about blowing billions of dollars on a tram that should be spent on looking after the things that matter to our territory. They are worried about millions of dollars blown on IT, with nothing to show for it.

People in Waramanga care, and they care that this government should be paying better attention to the things that matter to them, but clearly, when I speak to them, what they are telling me is that they feel that this government has been in place for so long that it has become complacent. They feel that this government stopped listening to them years ago. They feel that this government has become completely and utterly out of touch, and the prioritisation of this motion today proves it.

MS DAVIDSON (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Seniors, Veterans, Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health and Minister for Mental Health) (4.59): We are on stolen land. We should be aware of that as a government, as a parliament, and as an institution which exists because of genocide and dispossession, and so I thank Dr Paterson for bringing this motion forward today.

Truth-telling is important. Providing people with information about street names is, of course, something to be supportive of. ACTmapi is a great resource. Streets and places with First Nations names like Waramanga in my electorate of Murrumbidgee should have relevant information accessible to anyone who is interested in hearing about it.

We cannot tell a 65,000-year-old story through street signs, but the Greens will support this motion as we support truth-telling, treaty-making and the Voice. I would like to see more places in Canberra with First Nations names, but, of course, we Greens support greater urban infill rather than unsustainable greenfield development, which is historically how we have made more streets to name. So maybe we should rethink a few existing names.

There is a street in a suburb named after a man who ordered a massacre of Aboriginal adults and children on 17 April 1816. Lachlan Macquarie is responsible for the Appin massacre. There is a suburb in Canberra's inner south that is named after the originator of the White Australia policy. Charles Kingston laid the foundation for the policies of forced assimilation that would see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children removed from their families to erase First Nations' cultural heritage. Also responsible for the design and implementation of forced assimilation and the removal of First Nations' kids through the White Australia policy were Edmund Barton and Alfred Deakin.

I believe First Nations people living on this stolen land in the only Commonwealth country still without a treaty should not have to see street addresses, statues, monuments or institutions named after colonisers: Captain Cook Crescent, Captain Cook Memorial Jet, Captain Cook Memorial “ugly ball of metal”. I think we have had enough. If we are talking about symbolism, let us talk about it properly.

Let us do more than talk about place names, as this private member’s motion aims to do. We Greens have driven justice reform. We are legislating to raise the age of criminal responsibility to 14 and getting First Nations children out of prison. We are deeply disappointed that Labor demanded carve-outs to these reforms—exceptions to raising the minimum age. I remind Labor governments around this country that we need to stop locking up First Nations children. If you are a government in a human rights jurisdiction like Queensland, stop suspending the Human Rights Act and locking up even more children in adult watch houses, where they should never be.

As the Minister for Mental Health and the Minister for Justice Health, I have ensured funding for a new nation-leading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention intervention, postvention and after-care service that, in the spirit of self-determination, is designed, led and delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through an Aboriginal community-controlled health organisation. I have increased funding to Winnunga Nimmityjah for the delivery of health and mental health services in the AMC. We are committed to better understanding what kind of mental health services can better support our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community here in Canberra, with that analysis work now underway. We are working with the community on a youth-at-risk trauma service, and we are very supportive of increased government funding and support for Aboriginal community-controlled organisations working with people seeking help for alcohol and other drug use.

When intergenerational trauma shows up, too often it does so in the form of mental health or drug and alcohol issues. We have to be honest about our history as a nation and where that pain comes from. Supporting self-determination means listening to, understanding and supporting First Nations people with doors, not just words, in creating a better path forward. We Greens do not shy away from treaty. It is what this country needs. It was a promise from a Labor Prime Minister three decades ago, but people are still waiting. People are still dying and governments are still not listening. We support the Voice and we implore the government to listen to it.

Our street signs will not tell more than 65,000 years of history, but we will support this motion, as well as any other step towards truth, treaty and justice that is brought into this place.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.04): I want to refer to some of the background to Dr Paterson’s motion and the issues supporting it. The motion seems to be inspired by the lack of detailed information about the suburb of Waramanga in contrast with two others that are listed in the body of the motion—for example, the suburb of Bonner, Dr Paterson says has received more comprehensive coverage; and the nearby southside suburb of Red Hill seems to have more information about it than the suburb of Waramanga.

Basically, what Dr Paterson's motion is highlighting—and I thank her for that part, and for speaking out for one of her electorates as well—is that the government is not administering the street name information consistently across the whole of Canberra. Why is that? I am speaking in my shadow planning capacity here: why is it that the planning minister is not ensuring that all suburbs are treated equally with the amount of detailed information about the theme of the suburb and the theme of the streets? Why is there detailed information in some places, but not in others, of the origin of the name and why it was chosen for that particular part of Canberra? Basically, the motion is supportable, and, in fact, it may well be supportable for many other suburbs in Canberra, because the government does not seem to be administering the simplest of things in this case.

Mr Cocks spoke about some of the glaring incompetencies of this government, which have been particularly highlighted in the last few months; but how hard is it to have a consistent level of information about street names across all of Canberra's suburbs? Is that really a hard technical job? I notice the City Services minister does not want to hear the rest of this. How hard is it to do that very simple task? I do not think it is very hard at all!

Again, it just highlights the lack of commitment this government has to serving the community comprehensively, competently and fairly—in this case, by treating all of our wonderful suburbs equally with matching information on the suburb, the street names and why the theme has been chosen. I want to thank Dr Paterson for pointing out the maladministration of the government in one of the simplest tasks it has to do: providing information about the street names in our suburbs in a fair and equitable manner.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee) (5.07), in reply: I would like to thank Minister Davidson for her words, and other members. I have to say I am incredibly disappointed in Mr Cocks's representation of my local suburb of Waramanga. I feel it was a shameful representation, and unlike Mr Cocks I live in the suburb of Waramanga, and I live in the electorate, so I feel I have a very good understanding of what is going on there. Highlighted in Mr Cocks's speech and Mr Cain's is the complete disregard and complete failure to acknowledge the importance of the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I do not know how they have missed in the current debate the importance of recognising our heritage and recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

I think the place names issue is a very small one, but I brought this motion to the Assembly because it makes a broader point: that suburb was named in 1968, with street names of tribal groups from around Australia, following on from the 90 per cent "yes" vote in the 1967 referendum. The Canberra Liberals ignore that history and that heritage that recognises our 65,000-year history and heritage. I feel sad for the Canberra Liberals that they live in such a deep pothole—of lack of culture, of history, of pride in their community. I thank the Assembly for its support of this motion, but I feel very sad that half the chamber has a complete failure of recognition of the importance of recognising these place names.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Appropriation Bill 2023-2024

Detail stage

Schedule 1—Appropriations—Proposed expenditure.

Community Services Directorate—Part 1.9.

Debate resumed.

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) (5.10): I am happy to take the opportunity today to talk about some of the government's movements in the Community Services Directorate, and commend 1.9 to the Assembly today. I am proud to speak of some of the significant contributions in this budget for women and for the prevention of domestic and family violence.

This budget includes critical investments to encourage cultural change, to prevent future violence, to build better justice responses and to support victim-survivors. Victim-survivors are at the centre of this government's work to prevent violence in our homes and in our communities. I am happy that we are also getting stuck into the consent education campaign. More than just informing the community about the recent changes to consent laws, this campaign aims to build a shared understanding of consent across our community. The budget allocates \$100,000 for some market research to identify the best strategies to effectively communicate and inform Canberrans on the subject of consent, and I look forward to seeing the outcome of this research.

All of us here today understand that sexual violence and assault is completely unacceptable anywhere. It is criminal behaviour that has long-lasting consequences for victim-survivors, as well as a range of community impacts. We also know that the criminal justice system can be challenging to navigate and potentially re-traumatising for victim-survivors. There are limited pathways to justice for victim-survivors, but a timely response can facilitate accountability in a formal setting without them having to engage with the criminal justice system.

The government understands that it needs to provide alternative mechanisms for victim-survivors to access justice and to hold perpetrators to account. In response to recommendation 13 of the sexual assault prevention and response report, the government has provided \$100,000 to investigate these really important options to expand access to restorative justice processes and alternative civil justice pathways. These pathways need to be rigorous, and they need to be timely. They need to offer outcomes that promote accountability and reduce the risk of recidivism.

Because the justice and health systems can be difficult to navigate, the government has also committed to funding and establishing a multidisciplinary centre. This work is in response to recommendation 3 of the sexual assault prevention and response report, which recommended better integration, collaboration and case coordination

between response services. This government has undertaken preliminary work to identify best practice models for a multidisciplinary centre. This includes consulting with existing multidisciplinary centre services across Australia and internationally so that we can integrate best practice into a model for the ACT.

This project has two parts, and I am pleased to say that we are already well underway. The first phase in establishing the multidisciplinary centre is to reinstate the wraparound response services and employ independent sexual and violence advisers. Wraparound is an integrated service model that ensures key criminal justice and sexual violence agencies are coordinated in their service responses. Phase 1 lays the groundwork to support victim-survivors navigating service options initially in out-of-reach capacity.

The second phase is a major design project to establish the long-term centre, which we expect to be co-located with a range of other services. This year the government has committed an additional \$512,000 to support the interim accommodation for the multidisciplinary centre for two years, and \$200,000 to undertake feasibility studies for the long-term accommodation design of the multidisciplinary centre. I look forward to working with the Canberra service providers to determine how to best deliver this for our town, taking advantage of the expertise in service delivery that already exists here in the ACT.

Frontline services are the mainstay of the response to domestic, family and sexual violence, and I want to acknowledge and thank them for all the work that they do. This important work could not be done without the many committed frontline workers, whether they are in government or across our community services. The ACT government and our community know the value of these frontline workers. We are committed to programs and services needed to ensure victim-survivor safety and wellbeing, with more than \$9 million set aside for frontline domestic, family and sexual violence services, and a further \$8 million of that going directly to community service providers.

We know that the frontline programs have faced increasing demand in the last few years. That is why in this budget we have invested \$1.9 million to domestic violence crisis services to meet increased operational demands; \$1.4 million will enable the continued delivery of the Room4Change program, supporting men to reduce their use of violence; and another of our key frontline services, the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre, has received \$1.5 million for three additional staff for mainstream services, and an additional staff member to support male survivors of sexual assault. Doris Women's Refuge will receive over \$400,000 to employ a children's worker. We know that children leaving domestic and family violence have unique needs, so this dedicated children's worker will help address some of these.

These are just a few of the many services that are being funded through this year's budget now and into the future, and I look forward to continuing the important work in this space. We all know that there is much more to do, but these programs will have an impact and will reduce domestic, family, and sexual violence and assault in our territory.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (5.16): Talking of the area of disability in this portfolio, here in Canberra at least one in five Canberrans is reported as living with a physical or mental disability, and the growing incidents of depression and anxiety raises this number, with some sources saying the figure can be as high as one in four in our population living with a disability in the ACT.

Yet, despite these overwhelming numbers, this government, as demonstrated in this year's budget, still appears to lack any clear direction. After 20-plus years, you would think they would have got this right by now. Despite all their listening reports, they still do not appear to be hearing what the community is saying, especially when it comes to the disability strategies—the key documents this government uses to set the direction for this area of social need.

Let me quote what some of the community have said in response to this year's budget. In a joint media release, Advocacy for Inclusion, ACT Down Syndrome Association, Mental Health Community Coalition and Women with Disabilities say that the lack of disability strategy funds makes for a disappointing budget. They go on to say:

Canberra organisations representing people with disability have said the failure to deliver funding for disability strategies, especially the disability health strategy, means that this is a disappointing budget for people with a disability.

Why, when the government has already released its draft health strategy, has it not communicated any budget or allocated any budget for its implementation?

The health strategy is an interesting one, as it falls more with health. When asked during estimates if the lack of funding will be put off for another year, the minister said no. Yet, each of her responses to subsequent questions indicated that, yes, it would be put off for another year, as it would be considered as part of future budget processes. Disability justice sits in JACS, and disability education within Education. And, yes, I can see the point of having the various areas sit within their respective portfolios, but where is the oversight? Where is the simple point of contact that gives those living with a disability some clear direction? It is very much missing.

Let me give you an example of what happens when there is no oversight or direction. Just recently, my office was contacted by a constituent complaining that the Chief Minister had indicated in the *Our CBR* newsletter that an accessibility service was available for those needing that service, but the irony is that the print used to advertise that service was in eight point. How someone, particularly with a vision impairment, would be able to read that information is beyond me.

When my constituent contacted the number listed, it took him to Access Canberra, who were, in his words, completely unaware of the accessibility service. When I checked the website, sure enough, no large-print formats were available. There is the lack of a disability strategy; the lack of oversight; the lack of actual listening to the community—not just saying you are listening, but doing something in education, in housing, in health, in justice. Even just having a large-print format for something like a newsletter seems like a small matter, but it is a huge matter to those who are vulnerable in our community.

There is no money in this budget. There has not been since I stepped into the role as the shadow minister for disability just two years ago. This government is all about talk, but very little real action or change actually happens. All our community gets are promises for the next budget cycle. Considering the less than stellar amounts available for disability services here in the ACT, how much change will be made? There are some major gaps in the disability services in education, health, justice and housing.

I was glad to see that the budget for the Office for Disability has not been decreased this year, unlike last year, and has gone up by \$236,000; but considering the many and chronic needs due to systemic underfunding, this seems a pittance. All in all, I would have to concur with the advocacy groups that this budget is a disappointing one for people living with a disability in the ACT.

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) (5.22): With three Greens at the cabinet table, we have made a real difference to people's everyday lives and secured record levels of investment that will improve access to the things people need as they grow older to manage disability, as carers, as veterans, as young people in difficult circumstances and as people struggling with the cost of living. This is how we build a better future for all Canberrans.

With the ministerial responsibilities I hold across mental and justice health and social services, I spend almost all my time talking about people. This budget invests more in people, as it should, because that is who we represent, and it is who we are as Canberrans. We look out for each other and we make sure that people have the things that they need to live a fulfilling life. If this were the script for an episode of *Neighbours*, I would like the last page of the budget papers to read "to be continued", because this budget requires the next one to build on the foundation poured this year, to continue the story of years of progressive work by Greens working in this Assembly and alongside our community.

The ACT government is investing \$10.4 million over four years as part of a better alternative to the justice system for children aged 10 to 13 years who engage in or are at risk of engaging in harmful behaviours. This investment is part of delivering on a commitment in the parliamentary agreement for the Tenth Legislative Assembly to raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility as a legislative priority for the ACT. I am on the public record as being a strong advocate for a minimum age of criminal responsibility of 14 years, with no exceptions. I look forward to debating this matter in a future sitting week.

It is important to recognise that amending legislation is a crucial step, but that is all it does—it amends legislation. If we are going to see better outcomes for young people and a safer community for everyone, we need health and social services that address people's needs. We do not need a policy environment that effectively punishes disadvantage and responds to problematic behaviours with criminal sanctions that lead to a lifetime of involvement with the criminal justice system. We need a therapeutic response that changes behaviour and makes our community safer for everyone.

This budget will fund several components to support raising the age to 14 years: an ongoing functional family therapy youth justice program, informed by what we learned from the pilot program; establishing a therapeutic support panel, with a range of experts across different health and social services areas who can assess the needs of the young person and advise on the kinds of therapeutic services that will help; intensive case management support, making it easier for young people and their families to stay engaged with the therapeutic supports they need; and wraparound support services, including accommodation. With these supports in place, raising the age will mean transformational intergenerational change for young people and their families.

This budget also improves support for veterans and their families. Canberra's veteran population is both large and diverse. Around 22,225 veterans were counted in the 2021 census, which is 5.8 per cent of the total population and more than double the national per capita rate. Veterans' families are part of this community as well. Around 11.2 per cent of Canberra households include a veteran, compared to 5.3 per cent nationally. Veterans are at increased risk of a range of negative health and wellbeing outcomes. The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide is continuing to highlight the unique challenges facing veterans. Veterans need services to ensure that they do not fall through gaps, especially when transitioning from military to civilian life.

That is why this budget includes funding to develop a wellbeing framework for veterans, as part of a comprehensive cross-portfolio commitment to the wellbeing of veterans and their families. This framework will help us to better understand the needs of veterans and their families, and it means we can develop approaches to building services for veterans and their families that are both strategic and connected. The result will be ACT government programs that are well informed and target the areas that we know will best benefit from additional services.

Importantly, the strategic framework will ensure a coordinated response to the royal commission's final recommendations. The evidence provided already to the royal commission has been deeply confronting. The courage of those who have spoken up about their experiences, and those of their loved ones, is a call to action for governments at all levels to better support veterans and their families. We are committed to ensuring that Canberra's services honour the bravery of those who have shared their stories by filling the gaps in service that they have exposed. These improvements will be made in step with other states, including New South Wales, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, all of which have similar frameworks in place or are working towards the development of such frameworks.

We know that it is critically important to make sure that veterans and their families are well connected to services that meet their needs. That is why the funding will also be used to hold an expo event for veterans and their families. The expo will bring together veteran support organisations, mainstream organisations and private industry with the veteran community to drive connection and help build a more coordinated and connected service system in the ACT to support our local veteran community. I would like to thank the Ministerial Advisory Council for Veterans and their Families, in particular Kimberly Hicks, for all the work that they are putting into this.

This budget also includes measures to ensure that Canberrans are prepared for emergencies and crises through better planning for social recovery responses. In our

long-term recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, we have an opportunity to reflect on how we can better prepare for future crises, and what we can do now for those most at risk in our community. Particularly with the cost of living growing beyond the means of so many, and with the looming risks of the upcoming bushfire and storm season, we need to act now to ensure that we continue to support pandemic recovery while also preparing for future events, which we know will occur more frequently and with greater intensity, due to the impacts of climate change.

The cost-of-living crisis in the ACT is an ongoing challenge. We know that families are struggling to put food on the table in so many households across Canberra and that making ends meet has become increasingly difficult. Canberra's community have led the way for decades now, providing food relief for people in need, but they cannot do this without government support. That is why we have increased the funding in this budget for community-based, volunteer-led food pantries across Canberra to source supplies to give to those who need them the most.

The ACT government has committed an additional \$389,000 in this budget for food services. This builds on existing funding, with \$230,000 in additional funding for the Food Assistance Program. Of this funding, \$180,000 is for freight costs to provide Foodbank NSW & ACT supplies from Sydney to Canberra, a figure which was negotiated with Foodbank and recognises that freight costs have fluctuated by 150 per cent or more over the past year.

The remaining funding is for food rescue and delivery services by OzHarvest Canberra, which delivers to over 73 agencies across the ACT, including community food pantries. This additional funding will strengthen the network of food pantries across Canberra at a time when they are under substantially increased pressure. The additional funding will also increase OzHarvest Canberra's capacity to rescue and deliver essential food items directly to food pantries.

This funding is not set up as a one-off, standalone program; we are setting the funding up with the aim of improving the longer term resilience of the food pantry network in Canberra. For example, the Community Services Directorate has also entered into a direct agreement with Foodbank NSW & ACT to manage the freight subsidy and has been providing them with increased support to maintain their service under the Food Assistance Program. This direct relationship will allow CSD to monitor expenditure of the freight subsidy and ensure that there are no further periods of uncertainty.

This government also supported the establishment and running of a food assistance working group, where community food pantries, Foodbank and St Vincent de Paul met regularly to explore cost-saving measures and possible program improvements and efficiencies. This included discussions on improving local food rescue to reduce pantries' need to increase Foodbank orders.

Thanks to funding in last year's budget, VolunteeringACT has been able to bring together key community sector, government and industry stakeholders in a food relief network. The ACT government also funded the development of a food relief database, managed by VolunteeringACT, to support evidence-based planning for the network. The network meets monthly to share information and plan for a streamlined response to food security challenges now and into the future.

By helping food pantries and their suppliers to work together to share their knowledge and resources, we are funding a more efficient and sustainable sector that is better placed to support social recovery throughout Canberra. Community-led and government-supported social recovery is not just an obligation; it is an opportunity. Well planned and properly funded social recovery is an opportunity for us to build a more resilient, kind, connected and compassionate community. Through this budget we are ensuring that our recovery from crises is measured not just by how we bounce back economically but by the wellbeing of every one of us.

I am excited that this budget invests in our older Canberrans in so many positive and inclusive ways. We are investing \$260,000 to develop and deliver Australia's first dedicated seniors arts festival, inspired by Scotland's Luminare festival. The festival will be developed by older people for older people, to dismantle barriers to creative and artistic expression.

This initiative takes a strengths-based approach to supporting older people, in recognising that creative expression contributes to the wellbeing of older people and that the festival itself will also contribute to improved wellbeing through facilitating social connection. Whilst the festival will be aimed at older Canberrans, it also provides an opportunity for intergenerational learning. I encourage everyone, of all ages, to get involved.

This budget also invests in another intergenerational learning initiative, through \$100,000 for the ACT's first dedicated intergenerational live-in program for aged care, called the Gold Soul Program, which supports allied health students to live in, through a residential placement in an aged-care facility. Building on the existing Sydney-based program, this pilot program opens up the world of ageing and aged care and highlights the value of working with older people for students building their careers in allied health.

The budget further supports the social inclusion of older Canberrans through an investment of \$130,000 for Australia's first dedicated program of dementia-friendly film screenings, building on the success of a dementia-friendly film screening for people with dementia and their carers in the ACT last year.

Bringing dedicated dementia-friendly events into the mainstream will not only support the growing community of people with dementia in the ACT, including younger people; it will also raise awareness and reduce stigma. This initiative will also ensure that key ACT events are accessible, through investment in dementia audits, to allow people in our community with dementia to take part in more of what our city has to offer. I would like to thank the Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing for their work in developing these ideas and their strong advocacy for older people in our community.

We are investing in the disability portfolio in this year's budget by providing \$553,000 over two years for disability liaison officers to be available to assist people with a disability who are victims of crime, including family violence, through the Disability Justice Strategy, building on previous investments.

We also continue to work alongside the community on an ambitious ACT Disability Strategy for the next 10 years, and first action plan, that reflect what the community

told us through the very extensive consultations on the ACT Disability Strategy in the previous year. It is being drafted right now, and I very much value the ongoing engagement we have with the disability community as we get closer to finalising the strategy.

I know that the Chief Minister is also looking forward to demonstrating this government's commitment to supporting the human rights of people with disability, and ensuring that Canberra continues to be an ever more inclusive and accessible community. I look forward to discussing the funding of the ACT Disability Strategy with him when it has been completed, over the coming months.

I will fight tooth and nail—in a peaceful and non-violent way, of course—for more justice reinvestment funding and support for young people to engage in the community and create a fulfilling life ahead; for building resilience and strengthening community connections as part of our social recovery preparations; for support for veterans and their families; and for an age-friendly city where growing older is a joyful experience. I will not let the disability community down, after so much effort has been put into crafting the Disability Strategy listening report.

With the recommendations of the NDIS review and the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability both due to provide their recommendations for change soon, we are ready for a national conversation about who we are as a community. We have an opportunity to commit to a social model of disability and to recognise that the diversity of ways in which bodies and minds work is part of the normal range of human experience. We have an opportunity to commit to the changes we need to make if we want to be an accessible, inclusive community where people with disability have choice and control to live the life they should have.

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (5.36): When ACT Labor and the Greens really want to get something done, they stop at nothing to make it happen or make it happen fast. Earlier this year, Minister Stephen-Smith announced that her government would forcibly acquire Calvary hospital and then tabled legislation authorising this extreme move. Three weeks later, the bill was passed. Normally this would be impossible. Standing orders 174 and 175 require that proposed legislation be referred for possible public inquiry and that debate on the bill be suspended until the committee has reported. This is an essential element of the democratic process in Canberra, where we have no upper house to check government power.

But did this Labor-Greens government let democratic safeguards slow their agenda? No. Immediately after Ms Stephen-Smith tabled her bill, Mr Gentleman moved to suspend standing orders to allow the bill to be debated and passed before an inquiry could be completed. He said:

These measures will allow a more swift passage of the bill ...

Then Mr Gentleman assured us that it was not his intention to block public scrutiny of the Calvary takeover. "An inquiry could go ahead," he said. Of course, when he made that assurance, he almost certainly knew there would be no inquiry. When, as a chair of the public accounts committee to which the bill was referred, I sought to launch the

inquiry, both Labor and Greens members of the committee voted to block all scrutiny. One month later, the ACT government took control of Calvary hospital.

Another example of the determination of ACT Labor and the Greens to pursue their agenda has recently come to light. Speaking at the ALP National Conference in August, Minister Stephen-Smith boasted about carefully plotting to rush the decriminalisation of the dangerous drugs in the territory. She said:

We took it to the election quietly ... so that after the election we were able to work on it quickly.

The process was then sped up by strategically choosing to go through a private member instead of a minister. She bragged:

If the government had tried to do it, I tell you what, it would have taken two years to develop the legislation, and ... we would have had to deal with all this risk aversion and complexity.

This boast was revealing. When it comes to dangerous drugs, Ms Stephen-Smith was unwilling to let complexity slow her down. When they want to, those opposite can steamroll right over a complex situation.

As a shadow minister for the past seven years, I have repeatedly urged ministers Stephen-Smith, Berry and now Davidson to pursue important reforms and I have repeatedly asked questions about their progress. As the record shows, many times the response has been: "I do not understand the complexity of being in government and implementing reforms."

One example is that this budget includes \$697,000 to establish external merits review for child protection decisions. It is an essential human rights safeguard for a family to be able to ask that the decision to forcibly remove their children be reviewed on its merits. The first time the ACT Labor government was advised to address this issue was back in the 2004 Vardon report. Then the 2016 Glanfield inquiry specifically recommended that a review be undertaken of what decisions should be subjected to internal and external merits review. Concerned that I could see no progress in 2017, I moved a motion calling on the government to acknowledge the importance of external merits reviews and noted that the ACT was falling behind other jurisdictions. In response, Ms Stephen-Smith cut both statements, although she did confirm that the review had started in December 2016—almost seven years ago.

That review was completed four years ago and a discussion paper was released. In a submission to that paper, the Human Rights Commissioner stated that external merits review of child protection decisions is essential for achieving full compliance with the ACT's human rights obligations. Three months later, the chair of the commission told the media:

The ACT must step into line with other jurisdictions and provide for external review of child protection decisions.

That fully validated the points that Minister Stephen-Smith had refused to endorse in my motion two years earlier.

A final report recommending a specific model was due in September last year. I was told in November's annual reports hearings that it was not done but would be released publicly. In estimates hearings last month, I again sought an update. The minister said the report had been finalised but not released. When I asked when an external merits review would finally be implemented, I was told it would be sometime before next year's election.

After years of prodding the government, I am relieved to see funding in this budget for external merits review, and I genuinely hope it will happen. As I have learnt from this government's foot-dragging over the past seven years, however, one has to wait and see. What is clear at this point is that this much-needed reform has not been as important to the minister as the takeover of Calvary hospital or the intentionally silent decriminalisation of dangerous drugs.

This appears to be the same when it comes to implementing the 36 recommendations from the Our Booris, Our Way review into an alarmingly high rate of removals of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from families. The Indigenous steering committee first met in February 2018 and by August had already delivered four recommendations. They asked the Labor-Greens government to implement these four early recommendations immediately to accelerate improvements to the child protection system so that the community may see change during the review. That was five years ago. As at May 2023, not one of those first recommendations has been fully implemented. In fact, the implementation oversight committee only considers two of the 36 recommendations—Nos 7 and 15—to have been completed, with one more that has moved to the monitoring stage.

In her foreword to the latest update, the minister acknowledged that “some recommendations are taking longer than others to progress”. She also acknowledged the frustration conveyed by the committee. Who would not be frustrated? Common sense suggests that a government that knows how to forcibly acquire a hospital in a matter of weeks, while blocking all democratic scrutiny, should be able to fully implement four commonsense recommendations that were made more than five years ago.

Lest those opposite dismiss my words as a political stunt, as is their habit, the chair of the Our Booris, Our Way Implementation Oversight Committee has described the government's performance over the past five years as:

... ferocious indifference when it came to a commitment to action to implement the recommendations.

She added:

We did see this coming, as throughout the review many attempts were made to diminish our voices and decisions.

“Things may finally be starting to improve,” she has said, but, demonstrably, this has not been a priority for ACT Labor or the Greens, despite what they may say.

I have faced similar government foot-dragging with youth justice. For many years, I have raised concerns about the lack of diversionary programs, as well as throughcare

for young people exiting detention. This government loves to talk about diverting at-risk youth from being locked up, but that requires having somewhere to divert them. For years we have had had a long waiting list for young offenders to get help and almost nowhere for them to go, putting both young people and the community at risk.

After many years of failing families, this budget finally introduces funding for the Functional Family Therapy—Youth Justice program. Only time will tell if it will launch when promised. Concerned by this government’s pattern of announcing new initiatives and then woefully underfunding them, I asked in estimates if this program would have the capacity to prevent young people in trouble from spending months on a waiting list. I was told yes, but I will believe it when I see it. *(Second speaking period taken.)*

The history of throughcare for youths exiting detention further illustrates how this Labor-Greens government operates. The Human Rights Commission recommended a transition unit in 2011, but five years later the government shut it down. In 2019 the Human Rights Commission identified this as a major issue and again called for a systemic program of throughcare at Bimberi, similar to that previously offered. The government agreed, but nothing had changed by 2020, when the Inspector of Correctional Services told the government to take urgent action regarding a systemic program of throughcare at Bimberi.

Reflecting this government’s sense of urgency when it comes to the wellbeing of young people, three years later, and seven years after ACT Labor and the Greens shut down the transition unit at Bimberi, this budget finally includes \$200,000, not to actually reopen the unit but to design something new. I was told it might be ready by the middle of next year, but who knows? Clearly, this has not been at the top of the government’s priority list.

In the area of childhood development, I note that recommendation 42 in the estimates committee report is for the government to urgently address autism assessment for young people over the age of 12. This significant reform would bring the ACT into line with Tasmania, Western Australia, Queensland, South Australia and the Northern Territory, all of which publicly support autism assessments for young people.

Two years ago, I called on the government to do the same thing and also to track data in order to measure delayed diagnosis and its causes so that we can improve early diagnosis. My motion was unanimously rejected by both Labor and the Greens. Minister Berry has stated that the government is collecting no data, and in estimates hearings I confirmed with her that this budget includes no support for expanding publicly funded assessments. Whilst the government has agreed in principle to this recommendation, no reasonable person expects to see its implementation. This is simply not a priority for this government.

As clarified during estimates, food security is another important area that is not a high priority for this government. Since 2011 a small grant has been given each year to help pay for the cost of bringing discounted food and other essentials from Sydney to Canberra to stock community food pantries. As Minister Davidson confirmed, the value of this grant in 2016-17 and again in 2017-18 was \$84,539.49. Rotary in Canberra administered this grant, topping it up with their own funds. Then, in 2018,

the government switched the grant for freight costs to St Vincent de Paul. At the time, Minister Stephen-Smith stated that “the refreshed emergency relief program will deliver better services for Canberrans in need”. Sounds great. What she did not say was that the value of the government’s grant had been slashed by one-third, from \$85,000 to \$56,000.

Like Rotary, Vinnies supplemented freight costs from their own funds for four years, but last year this all fell apart. Huge cost-of-living increases created increased demand on community food pantries, while freight costs soared, and the grant was exhausted within just four months. The government finally responded to repeated public calls for assistance, but not before months of panic and, as confirmed by food pantry managers, disruptions to supplies. What an awful ordeal to impose on vulnerable Canberrans and those who support them.

Imagine how different things could have been if the government had been checking on food pantry agencies or keeping an eye on soaring freight costs. A government that has spent months carefully plotting how to bypass the risk aversion and complexity associated with decriminalising hard drugs could have spent a bit of time tracking the emerging situation and planning how to avert a crisis. Instead, the focus of this Labor-Greens government was somewhere else last year and, instead, we got months of what the minister mistakenly labelled “periods of uncertainty” for those struggling to feed themselves and their families. Demonstratively, such people are not a priority for this government, despite what those opposite may say.

Neither are victims of domestic violence or those who seek to help them. On this topic, I feel that I give the same speech year after year, although, as the years go by, the problems increase in number and severity. Refuges and other frontline services supporting victims of domestic violence remain underfunded while demand continues to increase well beyond the capacity of service providers.

In the meantime, millions of dollars of the Safer Families levy are spent on training ACT public servants instead. Next year, the Safer Families levy will increase to \$50 per household, yet the ACT government has purposely obscured how much of the levy is spent on frontline community services by using the levy to offset a range of different initiatives, making it impossible to differentiate the funding invested in the domestic violence portfolio as a whole. I have regularly questioned the government on the use of the Safer Families levy since it was first established in 2016, and I will continue to advocate for it to be spent directly on frontline community services that support people who are at risk of or are victims of domestic violence, and for greater transparency.

I support policies that support victims of domestic violence. I welcome the anticipated design and implementation of several pilots that have been announced—namely, the Victim Survivor Consultation Program, the multidisciplinary centre for specialist sexual violence responses and services, the policy and program designed by domestic violence victim-survivors and, lastly, early intervention response programs for children and young people, which is something I have been advocating for since I was first elected.

Too many of these policies and initiatives have not come fast enough. For example, new initiatives related to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, as

well as children and young people, who have experienced domestic violence were included in the *We don't shoot our wounded* report, released in 2009 by the then ACT Victims of Crime Coordinator, in collaboration with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. It contains 12 recommendations. Surprisingly, all 12 were completely ignored by the ACT government, which sat on the report and did nothing about it for 10 years. Fourteen years after the report was released, we are just beginning to see some of its recommendations in the planning stages in this budget. Demonstratively implementing these important reforms has not been a government priority.

I note that ACTCOSS, in its budget submission, expressed hope that this budget would finally be the one to fund a board of inquiry into over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system. The unanimous request for this board of inquiry was first made by Indigenous community leaders in March 2021 and has been repeated many times between then and now. In ignoring this request, the government has, amongst other things, claimed that it would cost too much and take too long. The reality is that this inquiry is not something that ACT Labor and the Greens want. If they did, it would have happened by now.

This government, after all, has demonstrated that we can commission and fund a board of inquiry when doing so suits its agenda. A board of inquiry into the handling of the Bruce Lehrmann case was announced in December last year and by February the government had provided \$4.3 million to fund it. Why have First Nations community leaders been waiting more than two years for the inquiry they have asked for? Demonstratively, they and their concerns are not a priority for this government. They are all talk, saying yes to impress, and yet they show a strong yes for no action in First Nations issues.

In conclusion, I wish to express my gratitude for the work that all committed community service providers do to help build, protect and support the most vulnerable amongst us. It is quite clear from this budget, however, along with prior budgets and cumulative decisions by this government, that community services are not its top priority. Labor and the Greens repeatedly say the right things about supporting our communities and at-risk Canberrans before dragging out delays, excuses, inaction, lack of funding and refusal to genuinely listen to community members and frontline service providers. I would suggest otherwise. (*Time expired.*)

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (5.56): I rise today to speak on behalf of Ms Lawder, regarding the Appropriation Bill 2023-2024 as it relates to her shadow portfolio of seniors. In her words, once again older Canberrans have been disappointed by a neglectful and disinterested Labor-Greens government. Sadly, it is no big surprise that this budget, like many in recent years, offers no new initiatives to support our ageing community in the ACT.

There are so many issues which affect our older population. It is so important that the wider community supports seniors, and the government must take the lead. We need better management of the seniors card program, including better communication of the concessions that seniors card holders are entitled to. In this cost-of-living crisis it is essential that the government effectively raise awareness of the support that is offered to vulnerable Canberrans, including some of those in the senior community.

The cost-of-living crisis is hurting the hip pockets of individual Canberrans first and foremost, but this pain is also felt by the community organisations which provide crucial services for our territory. Among these community organisations feeling the pinch are seniors groups like the ACT Retirement Village Residents Association. Ms Lawder points out that many older Canberrans would like to see these groups receive more government support. The government must ensure that these community organisations stay afloat during these difficult times.

While we are speaking about senior-oriented community organisations, I would like to commend the work of the Council on the Ageing for their advocacy. COTA's ACT Seniors Expo will take place on Thursday, 21 September. I know Ms Lawder is looking forward to attending and speaking to older Canberrans about the support, or lack thereof, that the government is providing to them. I know that, as the shadow minister for seniors, Ms Lawder is reminded daily of this government's neglect of the older population, often through complaints to her office, and often via my office, regarding the accessibility of our city and its services.

While the appalling state of Canberra's footpaths and roads poses a hazard to all residents, it is particularly dangerous for older Canberrans, who may live with mobility issues or be at greater risk of injury. It is well past time that the Labor-Greens government addressed their most basic and expected responsibility: providing effective municipal services and maintaining our city and suburbs. Canberra absolutely has the potential to be a city where older people can live and thrive without the worries and difficulties that are constantly being brought to our attention.

Today I have the privilege of joining Ms Lawder's call for the government to step up and make Canberra an age-friendly city. I am sure that I join with all senior Canberrans in hoping that next year's budget might include provisions to ensure that this long overdue action is taken. I know Ms Lawder genuinely looks forward to continuing to advocate for the issues and wellbeing of older Canberrans, to ensure that they are given a fair go to live and thrive in our nation's capital.

Ms Lawder is also our shadow minister for women. As per usual, the ACT government failed to deliver a proper women's budget statement. A proper women's budget statement would include analysis of each individual budget initiative and how it impacts women and girls in the ACT differently. This was exactly what was recommended by the estimates committee in their report, under recommendation 47. Unsurprisingly, the ACT government noted this recommendation, which has become their convenient way of acknowledging something but committing to nothing.

As Ms Clay rightly noted during the hearings, the Pegasus report was scathing regarding the gender lens applied by the ACT government in the budget process and concluded that the wellbeing indicators used were not effective. Other jurisdictions can deliver adequate women's budget statements; why can't the ACT? Also from the estimates report, recommendation 46 states:

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government accelerate the action plans under the ACT Women's Plan so that they are formalised and made publicly available prior to the years specified for each consecutive plan.

Shockingly, this recommendation was also merely noted by the government. However, this recommendation could not be more relevant, given that we are currently in late August 2023 and the most current plan available covers the 2020-22 period. What is the point of having these action plans if we cannot even get them out prior to the period which they are supposed to cover? The third action plan has not even gone to cabinet yet. When on earth will it be publicly available for Canberra women to view?

Perhaps most alarmingly, since the release of the ACT budget we have seen the release of the Sofronoff report. Extraordinarily, upon the release of this incredibly serious report, the Chief Minister chose to spend his time during the press conference ridiculing the actions of the inquiry chair, rather than outlining and addressing the important recommendations in the report—recommendations that could impact and improve our criminal and justice system for victim-survivors of sexual assault seeking justice in the ACT, victim-survivors who we know are overwhelmingly women.

In the words of Ms Lawder: how insulting to Canberra women. There is nothing new or innovative in this budget for women. It could not be more apparent that what women in the ACT need is a change of government.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (6.03): The Greens seek to create a safe space for communities, irrespective of their cultural background. Everyone is entitled to feel a sense of belonging and no-one should be confronted with barriers in our community. The multicultural space is dynamic. It is growing and it is diversifying. No community is the same, and culturally and linguistically diverse communities offer unique contributions to our city. We must ensure that marginalised communities do not face barriers to participation in our community. We also must empower CALD communities to have the choice to decide what their community requires.

Financial support is integral to grassroots organisations to continue their advocacy on the issues and areas that matter to them. This gives CALD communities the power to continue with their activities in the community and allow emerging communities to get involved. I stress that it is emerging communities that need prioritisation for government support, due to the intersectional challenges that they so frequently encounter.

Promoting language learning can enhance communication and our ability to connect with each other. Languages hold a deep connection to culture, to being. To create better inclusion, we must invest in intercultural education and language training. When we have conversations about multiculturalism, it is integral not to cluster groups as one entity. The multicultural space is dynamic and growth is accompanied by diversity and disproportionality in capacity, engagement and opportunities. As such, we must not be complacent towards the existing structures. It is our responsibility to ensure that emerging communities can access services and advocate for their rights and representation.

We must reach out to those emerging communities to consolidate pathways of information and strengthen our relationships with them. This can be done through physical action, such as attending community events and visiting places of congregation, and digitally through local media or emails expressing that the government is interested in listening to what the communities have to say. To do so, we must continually expand our information networks in order to connect with these communities.

The Multicultural Festival is an important celebration of the diversity in our community and is to be applauded. Celebrations are important to creating a more inclusive and welcoming community, but celebrations on their own are not enough to address the scourge of racism. Celebrations on their own risk becoming tokenistic unless we ensure that we have done the hard work to actively address racism.

Whilst we should promote community events to showcase culture, it is also essential to create tangible change. Greater representation in media and leadership is fundamental to empowering CALD individuals. Providing them with opportunities through workshops, forums, leadership development, skills development and training will give tangible power to these marginalised communities. It is also vital to extend invitations and outreach to under-represented groups in the multicultural community. This will in turn strengthen social cohesion and promote genuine inclusion in Canberra.

I look forward to the continued implementation of the multicultural charter and its ability to drive real change through the ACT government and the ACT community. The goals introduced are vital as a concept to setting targets and will allow us to shift from short-term thinking and to begin to mobilise effective action. I also look forward to further improvements in how the ACT government and the ACT public service attract, recruit, train, develop and promote diversity within their ranks so as to reflect the Canberra community that we all serve. Thank you.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Superannuation Provision Account—Part 1.10.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Housing ACT—Part 1.11.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (6.08): There are more than 20,000 residents in public housing dependent upon this appropriation, so it is a pretty important one for those people. In the course of this budget you would also hope that a number of homeless people would be joining those ranks from emergency accommodation and given a more permanent roof over their heads. I know that the minister present in the room would be hopeful of that, so let us hope that that occurs. The drama that we are seeing playing out in the current growth and renewal program could very well slow things down for some time, but I sincerely hope that that is not the case.

I reflected in an earlier debate—not today but in an earlier week—that this is such an important portfolio space because the money that is spent in this area and the services that are provided pertain to where people live 24/7. This is about the nitty-gritty of the lives of these thousands of individuals. When I look at the \$214 million for public housing in this year's appropriation, I do hope it is really well spent, that it is spent wisely and that it is spent in the best interests of the policy targets it aims to achieve, but there are some disturbing signs to the contrary.

If I look back on the 2022-23 budget I see that controlled recurrent payments for 2023-24 have dropped by around \$4 million, but we do not know what this means for

accommodating the people living on the margins. Back at the time of the 2022-23 budget, the total public housing waiting list was more than 3,000 and well up from the level prevailing a few years before. If we fast-forward to the 2023-24 budget, the waiting list is approaching 3,200.

Again, harking back to the previous budget, 2022-23, the minister announced an additional \$57 million for public housing repairs and maintenance, which I welcomed with much anticipation. I naively hoped that the pleas for help that I received from public housing tenants would subside considerably. They have not. I still get a continuous stream of tenants pleading for help, so I do not know whether the \$57 million was spent. I do not know what it was spent on or whether it was spent on the right things, or whether the systems that we have in place are just not delivering. The tenant experiences conveyed to me suggest that it has not had the desired result.

Hopefully, there is a line somewhere in the 2023-24 budget that will fix the repair backlog and the unhealthy living conditions endured by many public housing tenants. Given that the controlled recurrent payment figure in the budget is a bit less than the estimated outcome for 2022-23, I have got my doubts. I can assure tenants who reach out to me for help on housing repairs and other matters pertaining to housing that I will continue to do my best to advocate for them and, hopefully, bring about some positive outcomes.

As I have highlighted through several other channels, the projected public housing stock for 2023-24 seems a bit of a disappointment. Since the inception of the first public housing renewal program, this government will have spent at least \$700 million or \$800 million from its capital budget on housing stock by the time the current growth and renewal program is completed. This now is highly speculative. Total capital expenditure on public housing supply could pan out at \$1.2 billion or so.

What have we got for this? That is the question. Between mid-2018 and the 2023-24 budget projection, the total social housing stock will have actually declined by more than 300 dwellings. Channelling sales proceeds from the first renewal program into the Gungahlin to Civic tram certainly could not have helped the minister's housing stock strategy, by any means. To make matters worse, with threats of litigation, the current growth program could very well turn into a bit of a fiasco. I really fear that the whole housing restock process could almost go into suspended animation for some time. Let's hope that is not the case.

On the surface, the minister's aspirations for a well-managed budget look quite reasonable. Even back in 2022-23 her budget papers said, "Housing ACT is committed to excellence and the highest ethical standards in dealing with clients and other stakeholders." That was the quote. But if we have a look at the minister's track record here, in the public housing space, we have got all sorts of examples which point to a completely different picture. I am not going to mention all of them here, but let's pluck a few out.

We have got the multimillion-dollar block of units in Lowanna Street, Braddon, sitting vacant for seven years or so. We have got Condamine Court standing there as a living nightmare. We have got instances of housing complexes where vulnerable tenants are not game to leave their properties for fear of intimidation or assault.

I know that this is the case because I am constantly asking for the minister's intervention. When you backtrack to that statement that "Housing ACT is committed to excellence and the highest ethical standards in dealing with clients and other stakeholders," I do not know whether we are actually arriving at that point.

I would like to turn to the coalition nature of this government for a moment, the Greens-Labor parliamentary agreement. It is supposed to be the holy grail. It is the real deal that binds both parties to irrefutable deliverables to keep them in power. In the public housing space, the public housing stock growth target of 400 additional dwellings by 2025 was a centrepiece of this compact. But now we find the 2023-24 budget papers saying that this will not be achieved until 2026-27—maybe.

During estimates committee hearings I certainly sensed a degree of frustration coming from Mr Davis. I am sure that the minister—and when I speak of the minister I speak of Minister Berry—sensed a degree of frustration coming from Mr Davis when he probed the circumstances of the delay and how he felt the agreement had been breached. But this might only be the beginning of Mr Davis's frustration, with the potential for tenant protests on relocations forcing this target even further. Who knows? I guess we will find out.

We have an elephant in the room and it is a very large and ugly beast indeed. We are facing the prospect of the growth and renewal program, which is currently in suspended animation, possibly needing a ground-up rethink, but we are not really sure. The threat of a major litigation process could very well nullify the massive capital budgets contained in this Appropriation Bill. And we do not know what effect this might have on the stock of public housing and the government's ability to cope with the growing waiting list.

We can only speculate on whether this government has got itself way too deep into an intractable swamp, and that it may struggle to dig itself out. Maybe we have to confront our doubts right now and ask difficult questions. For example, is the minister's portfolio expanse too much? There are only so many hours in the day. Are Housing ACT's skills and resourcing up to the job? Is the replacement program simply too big and complicated for an agency that cannot even meet tenants' safety and repair needs? Is the repair and maintenance contract based on a flawed delivery model? Should a dedicated agency be set up to run the growth and renewal program? Is the Territory Plan helping or hindering the target set by the minister, who is, incidentally, responsible for the Suburban Land Agency? Maybe it is the case that, if this budget is to preserve any veracity in the public housing domain, the minister will need to have a serious rethink of her raft of problems in this space.

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) (6.16): This budget contains \$345 million for housing in the ACT—\$345 million to improve the quality of, and access to, a range of affordable housing options. For low income households and Canberrans experiencing disadvantage, this budget will make a difference by investing in new public housing and repairs, maintenance and upgrades of existing public housing.

Significantly, this budget also features a \$60 million affordable housing project fund—the first of its kind in the ACT. This fund is set to support community housing providers to develop and deliver new social and affordable housing across the territory. Already, community housing providers manage more than 2,000 social and affordable rentals in the ACT. They are an essential part of the affordable rental and supported housing market. We expect the \$60 million affordable housing project fund to deliver around 180 new managed affordable rentals provided by community housing.

Nearly 60 per cent of households in the ACT are supported by public housing. That is more than double the national rate. With the growing population and escalating costs of living, the demand for housing is only increasing. That is what makes these investments in this year's budget such a meaningful addition to the ACT government's long-term and ever-adapting suite of housing supports. The Growing and Renewing Public Housing program is one of the ways the government has been continuing to expand and improve its public housing stock. The budget contains \$55 million to deliver 140 new public housing dwellings as part of the program. This program is a cornerstone of the government's housing mission. That mission is, in essence, that every Canberran has a safe and comfortable place to live, so that they have the same chance at happiness as everyone else.

Last month I visited 30 new public housing dwellings in Calwell. They were delivered as part of the Growing and Renewing Public Housing program. Seeing those homes completed, and seeing how fantastic they really were, was a real moment of pride for Housing ACT and for me. With features that include backyards, private garages, energy-efficient split air conditioners and double-glazed windows, these two and three-bedroom townhouses will make wonderful homes for our tenants. Adaptability and accessibility were also front of mind in the design and construction of these homes, with wide doorways and hallways and adjustable height sinks and benchtops. Flat entrances and exits make these properties even more accessible.

These homes are the embodiment of the ACT government's commitment to public housing properties that match how people want to live and where they want to live—homes with enough spaces for pets, the right number of bedrooms for all the kids, and the fit-out needed so that tenants can live their lives easily and with as much as dignity as possible; homes in places where people want to live, whether that is close to friends and family, preferred schools and services, public transport options, shops and recreational spaces. These are the kinds of things that enable convenience and equality of life, but also wellbeing. We know that those 30 homes are not enough, and we have not taken our foot off the pedal. We will continue to work to deliver even more homes and better homes for people who need them most. We will be able to do that now with the Housing Australia Future Fund set to pass the federal parliament later this fortnight. That will make a huge difference to providing affordable homes in the ACT for people who need them most.

At this point I want to take the chance to remind everybody in this place again that, under the previous growth and renewal program, the Canberra Liberals protested against new homes being built, which would have led to around 100 people and their families continuing to wait for better homes that met their needs. I accept that the Canberra Liberals will always have a negative view about the work of the ACT government, but let's remember who was stopping public housing from being built in

the first place. I also want to acknowledge some of the questions that Mr Parton asked in his speech today, and—for the third time, I believe—I again offer him a briefing on the growth and renewal program as it evolves so that we can continue to meet the needs of people within our community who desperately need a place to call home.

This budget also includes \$177 million for Housing ACT operations, repairs and maintenance over the next four years. In 2023-24 that means \$51 million for planned maintenance and upgrades, and \$14 million for responsive repairs. This government is unwavering in its commitment to ensuring that homes are well maintained. In the last financial year, approximately 55,000 proactive and reactive work orders at Housing ACT properties were carried out. This included 277 kitchen upgrades, 393 wet area upgrades, 677 internal or external paint jobs, six multi-unit properties painted, 526 domestic violence security upgrades, 713 vacant property upgrades and 264 disability modifications, ranging from lever taps to ramps and major bathroom modifications. It also included more than 27,000 responses—that is right; 27,000 responses—to tenant requests for urgent work repairs and other works.

Further, as a model social landlord, Housing ACT goes above and beyond what is required under the Residential Tenancies Act, because the people who work in public housing in Housing ACT care deeply about making sure that tenants get the right response at the right time, and that their needs are met. This includes undertaking upgrades that many private landlords do not carry out, such as security upgrades required in cases of domestic and family violence, and property modifications required to support the ageing in place of tenants with a disability. This government believes that public housing is about more than just putting a roof over people's heads and calling the job done. That is why we continue to make repairs and maintenance to existing public housing properties as a top priority. Public housing tenants deserve a decent place to call home, just like the rest of us.

The \$60 million affordable housing project fund will support and grow the community housing sector to provide quality and affordable homes for low income or special needs households. Like eligibility for public housing, eligibility for community housing is means and needs-tested. Community housing, however, is operated, or owned and operated, by private providers—usually not-for-profit ones. It is an important part of the housing spectrum, offering secure, often supported, tenancies for people unable to rent in the private market. It is this government's conviction that supporting the community housing sector will increase the range of affordable rental options, especially for Canberrans experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage.

One of the projects supported to the tune of \$4.5 million by the affordable housing project fund is the Ginninderry women's housing initiative. This pilot build-to-rent-to-buy program will deliver up to 22 affordable rental properties in Strathnairn for low income women to transition from renting to home ownership. Alongside public housing, the community housing sector can help to address the growing need for stable, quality and affordable rentals.

The Chief Minister's work on encouraging developers to build dwellings for rent instead of sale will also make a difference in this space. We have required developers

to sell a certain number of dwellings at an affordable price for a number of years; however, this year we are now allowing those developers to instead convert those dwellings into affordable rentals. The dwellings have to be managed by a registered community housing provider and remain a rental for a minimum of 10 years. We believe build-to-rent will play a key role in the future of housing in the ACT.

This government is acting decisively to encourage the expansion of our affordable rental market. This government has a wide lens on the housing challenge. That is why we are coming to it from so many fronts. The new planning system being implemented by Minister Gentleman will, among other things, facilitate more development in the missing middle of the market. Likewise, the tax reforms—including reductions to stamp duty and land tax exemptions—that the Chief Minister continues to champion will help with the affordable purchase end of the market. This will take pressure off the rental market. Of the 185,000 homes in the ACT, some 55,000 are rented to tenants.

Many of us feel the impacts of the current housing crisis, whether it is directly through our own mortgage payments or rent, or by seeing loved ones struggle. But everyone is someone's loved one, and that is why the government will always invest in public and affordable housing, as we have done in this budget. I commend this line item to the Assembly.

MS VASSAROTTI (Kurrajong—Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services and Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction) (6.26): Housing instability and homelessness are symptoms of the lack of appropriate, affordable housing that allows people the agency and choice of a living situation that is suited to their needs. While the ACT government works to supply more social and public housing to address homelessness with a long-term outlook, it is essential, now, to make sure that people experiencing homelessness do not slip through the cracks.

Amid a cost-of-living and housing crisis, direct funding to homelessness services is needed more than ever. Ensuring that the specialist homelessness sector is well funded and supported has been a priority of mine ever since I was honoured to take on the portfolio responsibility for homelessness and housing services. We continue to pursue our ambitious vision of a decent home for all and to eliminate homelessness—which is to mean that homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring. In the midst of a housing and inequality crisis, we still have a lot of work to do to reach this vision, but we are working across all of our portfolios to reach this vision.

We know that we will not eliminate homelessness by work in the homelessness sector. This is a sector that needs to respond to homelessness after it has happened or when it is about to happen. It is vital that this sector is resourced in a manner that allows it to provide a safe place to sleep but also supports a pathway to a safe and permanent home. This is what I have been working to achieve since my election.

As Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services, I am really pleased to announce that in the 2023-24 ACT budget we have once again made significant increased investment into the homelessness services sector. Working in partnership with the specialist homelessness sector, this funding will continue to deliver accommodation

and support services for those experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, homelessness in the ACT. It demonstrates our ongoing commitment to ensuring that we provide support to those in need.

Over the past four years, the government has invested almost \$120 million in homelessness services. In every budget of this term of government, increased investment has aimed to ensure that the services that are on the front line of responding to our current housing and inequality crisis are supported, valued and able to do their job. This funding includes the additional investment of \$80 million, as outlined in the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement, to expand existing specialist homelessness service capacity and to support those at risk of or experiencing homelessness, particularly through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Using this funding, the government has supported the establishment of important supported accommodation—namely, Mackillop House in Lyneham for women and children; Ainslie Lodge, which was formerly known as the Winter Lodge, for men experiencing or at risk of homelessness; and the Axial Housing program, which uses a housing-first strategy to assist people in finding long-term accommodation. This funding has also allowed the Early Morning Centre, a community hub that provides access to essential services, support and community activities for people experiencing homelessness, to open their doors all seven days of the week.

At 6.30 pm, in accordance with standing order 34, the debate was interrupted. The motion for the adjournment of the Assembly having been put and negatived, the debate was resumed.

MS VASSAROTTI: The commissioning process to deliver a fit-for-purpose human services system has revealed gaps in the homelessness service sector. In last year's budget, over \$1.5 million was allocated to support homelessness service system enhancements, including developing a whole-of-sector practice framework and shared assessment tools, and enhancing the specialist homelessness information platform known as SHIP.

In this year's budget, the ACT government has invested approximately \$133 million over four years. This includes a further \$16.3 million of additional initiatives for the sector. A further \$3.7 million will be provisioned in 2026-27. This funding continues the increased baseline funding of \$14.28 million over four years, ensuring that specialist homelessness services in the ACT can continue their vital work in an environment of increased cost pressures. This budget provides \$2.8 million over two years to supported accommodation such as Ainslie Lodge, Mackillop House and Axial Housing, as well as allowing the Early Morning Centre to continue its seven-day service. It also provides greater funding, through the OneLink central intake service, for emergency accommodation.

With \$1.2 million in 2023-24 to continue funding of the rough sleeper program and the client support fund, and another \$120,000 in 2023-24 for hotel brokerage coordinated by OneLink and the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, this budget provides support for essential services for the safety and wellbeing of people experiencing homelessness.

There is a clear link between homelessness and trauma, with research showing that people experiencing homelessness may experience rates of complex trauma as high as 90 per cent and PTSD at 73 per cent, compared to general population rates of below five per cent. The homelessness sector must be equipped to navigate this complexity in a way that is client supportive. This budget provides \$461,000 in additional investment to assist in responding to the complexity faced by people who are accessing services.

We have all experienced the increases to the costs of living, and this challenge is well known to the services that provide food to people at risk and to those who are experiencing homelessness. To enable food services to respond to increased demand and rising cost pressures, this budget provides \$389,000 in 2023-24 to increase their capacity to continue their crucial work.

Ensuring that workers in the specialist homelessness services sector are equipped with the appropriate skills enables them to provide quality support for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness to achieve their desired outcomes. To this end, this budget provides \$256,000 for development and training initiatives in the sector over the next year.

We continue to work with our valued community partners in a commissioning process, which aims to reshape our relationship with those working on the front line of service delivery and ensure that our service delivery is informed by those working in the sector every day. It draws on the expertise of our community partners and enables us to work together to ensure that the homelessness sector is responding to existing and emerging needs. The investments in this budget draw on the findings of the commissioning and engagement process that was held with the homelessness sector in 2022 to ensure the delivery of a sustainable and a strong service system offering targeted, client-focused and flexible support for Canberrans experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness.

Further co-design work is being undertaken to inform future investment decisions in relation to people with high and complex needs, food and engagement services, and exploring the centralised intake and referral that is required for people in crisis. There continues to be work to increase the capacity of homelessness services and to ensure a transition from crisis accommodation to a longer term arrangement. There is more work to be done, but the money provided in this budget, going directly to the homelessness service sector, is a big start.

I remain committed to a vision where homelessness is rare, brief and non-recurring. I remain committed to working with community partners to ensure that the homelessness sector is well resourced, responsive and able to support people's immediate needs and to support people to have a decent home on an ongoing basis. We know that this is the basis of a good life. We look forward to the continued collaboration and engagement with the sector as we work together to ensure that Canberrans continue to receive the support they need.

Finally, I would like to reflect on the work of Housing ACT staff, who continue to deliver great service in an extremely challenging environment. Minister Berry has

outlined the significant investments that are going into public housing. These are vital. As has been noted by other speakers, repairs and maintenance are key to ensuring that public housing residents have the foundations of a good life. I would like to thank staff who work every day to ensure that the needs of existing and future tenants are being responded to. Thank you for your ongoing commitment and your professional work. It is hard work and you do not often get thanked. You are dealing with complexity, and you are dealing with people's lives. Thank you for your ongoing work.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate—Part 1.12.

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

Adjournment

Motion (by **Mr Gentleman**) agreed to:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.37 pm.