



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

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23 September 2025

This is an **EDITED PROOF TRANSCRIPT** of proceedings that is subject to further checking. Members' suggested corrections for the official *Weekly Hansard* should be lodged in writing with the Hansard office no later than **Wednesday, 8 October 2025**.

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MR SPEAKER (Mr Parton) (10.00): Members:

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

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

This is Ngunnawal country.
Today we are all meeting on Ngunnawal country.
We always pay respect to Elders, female and male.

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

Coronial inquest into the death of Peter Hanisch Ministerial statement

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.01): I rise this morning to table Coroner Ken Archer's report on the inquest into the death of Peter Hanisch and present the ACT government response to Coroner Archer's report.

I would like to start by acknowledging Mr Hanisch's family and, on behalf of the ACT government, I extend our sincere condolences and apologise for the identified deficiencies in Peter's care. In particular, I say to Peter's wife, Julia, who is in the gallery today, that I recognise the significant impact of Peter's death and express my deepest sympathies.

Peter Hanisch collapsed after a sudden onset of chest discomfort. An ambulance was called, and he was transported to Calvary Public Hospital Bruce. Doctors identified that his collapse might be due to one of several conditions, including aortic dissection. A computed tomography, or CT, angiogram was conducted on the date of his admission, which showed the presence of a thoracic aneurysm and a dilated aortic root. The radiologist who reported the CT scan did not identify that the aortic aneurysm had started to dissect. At around 5:45 pm on 22 August 2021, Peter Hanisch was declared deceased.

Peter's death was referred to the coroner on the day he died due to uncertainty about the cause of his death. This report has taken considerable time, and I join the coroner in acknowledging the impact this has had on those involved, including Peter's family. I was pleased to note, however, that Julia has expressed her gratitude to Simone and the team in the coroner's office for the way they have engaged with her throughout and for their empathetic and professional approach.

Coroner Archer found that if there had been timely treatment of the aortic dissection, there were reasonable prospects of saving Peter Hanisch's life.

As a result of the inquest, Coroner Archer made one recommendation, which was for Canberra Health Services to develop and publish guidance as to peer review systems and procedures for imaging services provided within CHS and by private providers providing such services on behalf of CHS.

The government has accepted the recommendation and CHS has commenced drafting a medical imaging peer review procedure, which establishes a standardised peer review process for medical imaging reports to ensure diagnostic accuracy, maintain quality standards and promote continuous professional development within the radiology department.

The procedure will apply to all CHS radiologists, radiology registrars and imaging reports generated within the department, including but not limited to diagnostic radiology reports, interventional radiology procedures, and nuclear medicine studies.

CHS will continue collaboration and engagement with QScan and Everlight for quality assurance of diagnostic imaging reports. As part of a service agreement with North Canberra Hospital, QScan is contracted to report medical imaging. This includes undertaking peer review of two per cent of all cases on a weekly basis for magnetic resonance imaging, or MRI, CT, ultrasound and X-ray imaging.

Everlight Radiology is also contracted to report on images performed at North Canberra Hospital, as well as some performed at Canberra Hospital. Everlight has a peer review program which involves peer review of a minimum of five per cent of all reported cases.

I want to again acknowledge the grief that Peter Hanisch's family has experienced. Patients and their families should expect the very best health care from the ACT's public health system, and that will always be the focus of my commitment to improve health care in the ACT.

A lack of formal quality assurance in place at the time of Peter's presentation let him and his family down. I again acknowledge and apologise for the identified deficiencies in Peter's care.

The ACT government is committed to improving the healthcare system to ensure our clinicians are supported to provide the highest standard of care. This is something patients and their families rightly expect from the ACT health system, and that we are committed to delivering.

I present the following papers:

Coroners Act, pursuant to subsection 57(4)—Report of Coroner—Inquest into the death of Peter Hanisch—

Report, dated 9 April 2025.

Government response, dated September 2025.

Inquest into the death of Peter Hanisch—Ministerial statement, 23 September 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the statement.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Alexander Maconochie Centre—Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander detainees—update Ministerial statement

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (10.06): This ministerial statement is the ACT government's response to the resolution passed in the Legislative Assembly on 7 May 2025. That resolution called on the government to commence a board of inquiry to thoroughly investigate a range of issues relating to the treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander detainees at the Alexander Maconochie Centre—AMC—following recent deaths in custody. The resolution required me to report back to the Assembly on the last sitting day of September 2025 with the date that the inquiry will commence, the date on which it will provide its report and any other relevant information.

Firstly, on behalf of the ACT government, I want to acknowledge the ongoing grief of individuals whose family and friends have passed away in AMC. Those people who died were loved and are dearly missed. Their loved ones have called for answers, for justice and for change, and have felt disempowered by the system. I hear their calls.

I want to reiterate the government's views expressed in the Legislative Assembly earlier this year that we are committed to establishing a board of inquiry into Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander deaths in custody at the AMC. Since the resolution was passed, the government has been considering the best pathway to establishing this board of inquiry.

The government has considered carefully the timing of a board of inquiry, given there are relevant matters still before the ACT Coroner, and I am aware that inquests into the most recent deaths will take some time. It is important that I make it clear that it would be inappropriate for the executive to interfere in the independence of the court by seeking to influence the ACT Coroner to prioritise particular inquests. Waiting for the coronial processes to be finalised would delay the commencement of a board of inquiry for an indeterminate period, and this is not a suitable outcome.

I have sought extensive advice and determined that a board of inquiry can be established with a function that is separate from the coroner's role, and that is to investigate systemic issues surrounding the deaths in custody, rather than investigating the actual deaths. There is precedent for this, so I can report to the Assembly that a board of inquiry can progress in parallel with the outstanding coronial inquests.

Over the past few months, I have had multiple meetings with individuals and groups from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to understand their perspectives on an appropriate way forward. In these meetings, I have heard very

clearly that work needs to be undertaken prior to a board of inquiry beginning.

As a starting point, the government will soon be inviting expressions of interest from members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to participate in an advisory committee for the board of inquiry. This committee will provide advice to the government on key aspects of the board of inquiry, including the scope of the terms of reference and the appointment of members of the board. It is intended that around six to eight people will form this advisory committee.

Further, I have received advice from multiple groups and individuals that, given this inquiry will relate to very personal and traumatic events for individuals, it is important that appropriate supports are in place to support the community and families as this progresses.

I have also heard clear feedback on the need for community education prior to the commencement of the board, to inform the community about the role of the board of inquiry, what it can and cannot achieve, and about alternative processes. The legal ramifications of various processes are significant and must be clearly communicated. I hope to work closely with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body to ensure adequate and culturally appropriate community engagement and education can occur.

I also acknowledge that a board of inquiry will need appropriate resourcing. I will be seeking expert advice from the advisory committee on the terms of reference, the appropriate support mechanisms we need to put in place to take a trauma-informed approach, and advice on who could appropriately lead the board of inquiry.

In the meantime, the government will undertake as much preparatory work as possible. This will include how best to coordinate the multiple pieces of work that are underway in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the criminal justice system, such as the commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028 and responding to the recommendations of the Jumbunna Institute's final report—*Independent Review into the Over-Representation of First Nations People in the ACT Criminal Justice System*.

The government acknowledges it has a significant amount of work to do to respond to the 99 recommendations in the Jumbunna Institute's report, released in July 2025. I note the report makes recommendations around the examination of deaths in custody, including that the government consider establishing an independent inquiry.

There is also a strong oversight framework in relation to the AMC, inclusive of the Human Rights Commission, the Public Advocate, the Inspector of Custodial Services and Official Visitors, as well as several other statutory office holders which collectively provide avenues for individual detainees to raise concerns and report regularly to government on overarching and systemic issues. In October, I will receive the Healthy Prison Review from the Inspector of Custodial Services, which is presented every three years. The government takes all reports and concerns about matters in the AMC very seriously. The board must have reference to, and not duplicate, the functions and responsibilities of these other oversight bodies and accountability processes.

In conclusion, while I am not in a position to give a definitive date on when a board of inquiry will commence or report, my statement today provides a clear commitment that the government is working in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to establish a board of inquiry.

I present the following paper:

Aboriginal detainees at the Alexander Maconochie Centre—Board of Inquiry—
Assembly resolution of 7 May 2025—Government response—Ministerial
statement, 23 September 2025.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.12): First of all, I would like to again thank my Assembly colleagues for passing this motion in May. As we all saw, this was a cathartic moment for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. For some community members who have felt that their calls have been unanswered for many years, it is really powerful that we managed to pass this motion unanimously through this Assembly.

I want to thank the minister for her positive engagement on this matter since then. I have heard good feedback from community members and have had good feedback myself regarding the minister. I understand and appreciate that this was not a matter that was on the government's agenda at the start of the year, and it is something that will take some work and some resourcing. I appreciate the decision to take it seriously, and take the time to do this properly, do it well and produce outcomes out of this inquiry that lead to the kind of change that we need.

It is a little bit disappointing today not to have a start date for the inquiry—not disappointing that it is not starting immediately but that we do not have a clear start date. I note that the original motion was amended by a government amendment to make the commitment to report back by the last sitting week of September with a start and end date for the inquiry. That was a specific call added into the motion by the government. I think it would have been helpful to have a clear start date today, whether it is in the new year, for us to work towards and provide certainty to the community.

I would also note that the government, on the day that we were negotiating the motion, moved an amendment committing to work with the Coroner's Court to expedite the relevant coronial inquests that were already underway into deaths in custody. Today the minister has indicated that it would be inappropriate for the executive to interfere with the independence of the court by seeking to influence the ACT Coroner to prioritise particular inquests.

The community feedback I have received this morning is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members who have been affected by this issue and continue to be affected by over-representation in our criminal justice system are willing to engage and work in good faith on this issue moving forward, as am I, and to ensure that this inquiry is meaningful, that it leads to the systemic change that has been called for on many occasions, and that it creates something positive out of what have been, and

continue to be, some really horrific experiences of some of our most marginalised community members in the AMC.

I also note the Jumbunna review, and the many recommendations that were made into the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the criminal justice system. I welcome the minister's acknowledgement of those recommendations. I believe four ministers responded in the media release to the initial report that was released, which, hopefully, is an indication of government understanding this is a systemic issue that does not start and finish in Canberra's prison, but requires action across the board to address gaps that remain wide, and in some areas are widening here in the ACT.

That review made a number of other recommendations. The minister touched on one, which is essentially to establish this board of inquiry. It also recommended that legislative measures be established by the ACT government for incorporation within performance agreements and KPIs for more senior JACS staff that demonstrate how their staff have sought to improve cultural capability and relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and eliminate systemic racism across the directorate, as well as any other measures identified with First Nations input that are likely to contribute to reduced First Nations incarceration.

There are a range of other recommendations which reflect previous recommendations made by the Productivity Commission in its review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which the minister referenced. I would note that the public accounts and administration committee is currently inquiring into a piece of legislation which would give effect to that recommendation and the multiple other recommendations. I look forward to debating that in the Assembly and hope to have this Assembly's support to pass that bill, as we had this Assembly's support to pass this important motion in May calling for a board of inquiry.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (10.17): The over-representation of First Nations men, women and children in the legal system and in jails is a blight on our jurisdiction. There are no two ways about it. For so many people in custody in the ACT, jailing is failing. We need to think very carefully about how we reshape our justice system to ensure that the underlying reasons why people are in the justice system are addressed, and that we are not simply focusing on the pointy end of the system.

The Greens will always be committed to justice reinvestment and strengthening communities so that people can live well in society with their loved ones, and have their needs met in community, not in custody. Ultimately, a safer community will be there for everybody in this jurisdiction, if we achieve those things. Similarly, we will always support Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to lead in this space. Solutions must be First Nations led, and no decision should be made without the people most impacted being heard.

I acknowledge the deep and intergenerational grief of many of our First Nations families who have lost sons, brothers, fathers, cousins, and sisters, amongst others, in custody. I hope that this government honours you throughout this upcoming board of inquiry process. Having the involvement of those families, and a recognition of their perspectives and experiences, will be a very important part of this process being

successful.

I am pleased to have the update from Minister Paterson today, and I thank her for it. I am pleased that she said she has consulted with Canberra's First Nations community. My impression, from some quick efforts this morning, is that it seems that that consultation has been focused on the Elected Body, who are, of course, an important stakeholder with key experiences. However, it took only a few calls this morning to key community members who work in the justice space and related areas to learn that some had not been consulted, and others were only consulted at the very last minute, and I think that is a point of concern.

I flag that now to suggest to the minister and the government that there is probably some scope there to think about some broader consultation. I am happy to talk later, offline, about some specifics.

The statement overall perhaps raises more questions than it answers. The motion was passed on 7 May this year, and key issues, including how to fund a board of inquiry, do not seem to have been resolved. We are now almost five months on from the passage of the motion, and we have had an entire budget process, but I do not see anywhere in the budget provisioning or funding set aside for the board of inquiry.

Just as we saw with the Jumbunna Institute report, which was due late or just after the budget process, there is not a clear sense of resource commitment at this point in time. There are processes to fix that, but to come in here today with this update on the motion without providing some clarity on those questions does again raise concerns that we will need to keep a close eye on.

On the issue of the relationship with coronial inquiries, the minister acknowledged today that it would be inappropriate for the executive to interfere with the independence of the court by seeking to influence the ACT Coroner to prioritise particular inquests. That is certainly consistent with my understanding of how these things work, but it is worth reflecting that it was Dr Paterson who amended the original motion to include a call "on the ACT government to work with the Coroner's Court to expedite the coronial inquests into deaths in custody which have not yet concluded so that any relevant findings can be taken into account".

I am glad we now have clarity on where this is going, and I again welcome the minister's comments on now looking at ways to ensure that the inquiry can proceed in parallel with those coronial processes, is sympathetic to those processes and is consistent with those processes.

In closing, I hope the government engages more deeply with First Nations leaders and those who have lived experience of incarceration in the AMC as it moves forward with the inquiry, and particularly in this early phase. I certainly agree with the minister's comments about the need to get it right from the start, and I welcome that, but I think there is some work to be done there.

We also need to put money into the areas where comments have been made and set aside adequate funding for the inquiry, and not at the expense of the very programs and initiatives that will keep Aboriginal people out of jail. We cannot see a moving

sideways of money from things that are working and that are successful—essential community services, services that are often led by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the city.

Once again, I want to thank those in the First Nations community who have shared with me over time their perspectives on the system generally and particularly today on the government's statement. You are the people who need to be centred in this inquiry, and I certainly hope that that proves to be the case.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee Scrutiny report 10

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (10.23): I present the following report:

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee (Legislative Scrutiny Role)—Scrutiny Report 10, dated 22 September 2025, together with a copy of the extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I seek leave to make a brief statement.

Leave granted.

MS BARRY: Scrutiny report No 10 contains the committee's comments on two bills, 12 pieces of subordinate legislation, two responses to comments on bills and nine government responses to comments on subordinate legislation. The report was circulated to members when the Assembly was not sitting. I commend the report to the Assembly.

Transport and City Services—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (10.24): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services relating to a new inquiry.

Pursuant to standing order 216, the committee has resolved to inquire into the provision of municipal services in the ACT. In particular, the committee will consider the maintenance and upkeep of public spaces, the geographic spread of active travel infrastructure, parks and playgrounds, waste removal services, policies related to street art and graffiti removal, and benchmarking performance of the ACT against other similar jurisdictions.

The need for this inquiry has been sparked, in part, by the submissions received to the committee's inquiry into Fix My Street. Many submitters to that inquiry discussed the maintenance of public spaces in their local areas, and this inquiry offers an opportunity to examine the work undertaken to keep our city clean and tidy. The existing Fix My Street inquiry is focusing on the Fix My Street software, whilst this new inquiry will examine the natural and built environment in our suburbs.

The committee will make use of the submissions to the Fix My Street inquiry to help inform its examination of municipal services. The condition of our local shops, our verges, our parks and playgrounds, and our waterways is central to our experience of our city. This inquiry offers a timely opportunity to gauge the Canberra community's views on how these spaces reflect our city and people's experiences of it.

Appropriation Bill 2025-2026

Schedule 1—Appropriations—Proposed expenditure.

Infrastructure Canberra—Part 1.4.

Debate resumed.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (10.26): It is amazing what we have learned in the last few months about the budget and the debt and the role that Infrastructure Canberra projects are playing in both of those things. When it comes to our major projects, the government loves to tell us about proper process, but we have learned a lot this year about what the process actually involves, as opposed to what Labor wants us to think it involves.

The government has a capital framework, and the purpose of that framework is to ensure that limited public money is directed to the most worthy projects. Economic evaluation is a central part of that framework. This is to help policymakers understand three things: whether a project is actually worth the money, which design option provides the most value for money, and which of the projects should be prioritised. This is the process and the information you need to make good decisions about how to invest public money, but we now have good reason to wonder whether this process is actually being followed.

The Assembly has forced the publication of dozens of government business cases—some from years ago; others from as recently as this year—and there is a consistent theme in those cases: economic evaluation is rarely undertaken and negative results are routinely ignored. For example, take the 2018 business case for light rail stage 2. It had two options: one which provided a benefit of just 22 cents in the dollar and one which provided 27 cents in the dollar. Or take the recent business case for the materials recovery facility, where the preferred option provided a benefit of 37 cents in the dollar. These are two examples of projects which had economic evaluations but received investment from the ACT and Commonwealth governments anyway.

The more common experience is that major projects do not have any economic evaluation at all, despite this being a requirement of the capital framework. For example, the convention centre had no evaluation, the aquatic centre had no evaluation, the theatre had no evaluation, and the new stadium had no evaluation. These projects will collectively account for more than \$2 billion of investment. They all seem to be agreed by Labor, locally and federally, and they seem to be a higher priority than many other options, yet the government has not followed its own process to assess whether they are worthwhile.

If you support a new theatre or a pool, you might say that is fair enough. Who needs an evaluation which might get in the way of your pet project? But governing is about choices, and Labor is choosing to prioritise luxuries over necessities. Why is a new pool more important than new police stations in Civic, Belconnen and Gungahlin? Why is a new convention centre more important than schools which are fit for purpose? Why is a new theatre more important than improving access to health care? Not one of these questions can be justified based on the evidence, because the government has not followed its own processes to find the answers. Indeed, as we have peeled back the layers, we are seeing more and more evidence that Labor's priorities are actually Andrew Barr's priorities. The safety of people living outside of Belconnen is not his priority, but shiny light rail from Dickson to the city is. The comfort of school kids in Lanyon is not his priority, but the theatre by his office is. Access to endometriosis care or paediatric neurology surgery is not a priority, but a new pool down the road from his work is.

Governing is about choices—Labor's choices. Infrastructure Canberra should be an agency that is prudently, responsibly and sustainably delivering essential infrastructure for the ACT. Labor has chosen to sideline the very processes that could empower the agency to deliver the projects and infrastructure that our community truly needs. Canberrans deserve better than they get from this government.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (10.29): To those who think we can magically solve any of the budget's woes by simply getting rid of light rail, I have unfortunate news. The railway makes up less than one per cent of the budget and only 0.7 per cent of the 2025-26 budget. The Greens are disappointed by the continued slow rollout of light rail, and the government has stated it will not have even signed contracts for stage 2B before the next election. This is slow progress on essential infrastructure in our city.

Stage 1 commenced operations in 2019, and since that time we have let the workforce that designed and constructed that stage dissipate. Planning for future stages of light rail has been delayed. This means we are not seeing the network built soon enough. How long is the community meant to wait for the future stages? How long must we wait for the entire network that we envisage? We cannot have another situation such as where the contracts for raising London Circuit were not signed until six years after the government's decision to extend light rail from the city to Commonwealth Park and Woden.

Parts of our city without light rail are suffering growing pains, with poor transport and planning. We need to have continuous work program planning for the light rail connections for stage 2B and beyond—planning for light rail connections to Belconnen, the airport and Tuggeranong. This must include route identification and feasibility assessments so that future stages can be built sooner. We need to plan our city-wide network, identify future light rail corridors, and get going on important early work so that the construction of future light rail stages can begin sooner.

Many enabling works can be undertaken well ahead of construction, such as relocating utilities and earthworks. Also, we need to examine the existing service from Gungahlin to the city. This stage was designed to be expanded to meet future demand and growth. The service has proven more popular than planned, which means we now have an opportunity to run more frequent light rail services with more carriages between larger

light rail stations. I encourage the government to keep exploring how we can continue to invest in light rail to improve our city.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.32): The ACT Greens believe that governments should plan their city to ensure that homes are close to the things people need and want in their lives, like schools, public transport and active travel links, paths, work and everything else we need for a healthy, happy life. That is why it is great to see the ACT Greens' election commitment for a Belconnen town centre school on Infrastructure Canberra's work list this term. With more young people and families moving into the Belconnen centre and with nearby schools approaching or already at capacity, we need more education infrastructure to make it more accessible and easier for children in our region to attend public schools.

It means that students in five to 10 years' time can easily walk or ride to school. That also makes it easier for parents who have to juggle everything else in their lives: work, running errands, and possibly caring for other children and other members of their family. The Greens would like to see this new Belconnen school support years K-12. I understand the Education Directorate's policy is that the school should be for primary school only. We hope that Infrastructure Canberra's planning includes the possibility of expanding it to years 7 to 12, because of course those children will age and they will need high school as well.

In addition to the recent closures and movement of not-for-profit early childhood care and education centres in Belconnen and Bruce—although we have had some good news on one of those—the future Belconnen school could also be an opportunity for more early childhood education in the region. I understand that is a decision that needs to be made by the Education Directorate, but it would be great if Infrastructure Canberra could also consider that when it is planning and developing in the area. I look forward to Infrastructure Canberra's planning and consultation with the community to progress the development of the school and make sure that it is supporting families in and surrounding the Belconnen town centre.

It is also great to see upgrades and expansions of other schools in Ginninderra, including Melba Copland Secondary School. For Strathnairn, once the school is completed, it would be great to open it to the many families who are moving into Ginninderry. A lot of those families have been waiting a very long time for that school. They have been waiting for years and, unfortunately, a lot of them have already had to make the choice to send their children elsewhere because the school was not finished in time. They probably will not bring their children back. We have probably lost the opportunity to provide a really good and convenient school to a lot of people in that cohort.

As I mentioned before, the Greens believe people need to live close to community facilities that support them to grow well and age well in their suburb. We recognise that, in these greenfield developments, we need to build those services as we are going. The Greens' policy is to focus on infill and building homes where we already have a lot of the services we need and make sure that, as we do that infill, we provide more of the services, more of the schools and more of the community facilities that we need, to make sure that people have convenience and really good healthy and happy lives there.

We are interested in peppercorn leases at the moment. That includes supporting the

essential services that a lot of people need, particularly in times of distress. Canberra is a really caring city. We have a lot of people and organisations in our community services sector who really want to see the best outcomes for everyone. The community sector is stretched really thin at the moment. We all know this. We are saying that a lot here. One of the ways that government could help the community services sector is by providing more peppercorn leases for more organisations. Those organisations are providing a lot of essential community services to Canberrans at the moment. They are essential services that the government is not providing, and they are not being provided on a for-profit basis. They cannot afford commercial leases, particularly in some of the areas where people most need those services. So, if we can open up and expand the range of peppercorn leases, that is one simple way that government can make sure that we are servicing our community.

I want to talk briefly on the shift of arts centre organisation and management into Infrastructure Canberra's portfolio. The lease arrangements have changed. On the whole, I think those lease arrangements are being pretty well managed. Communication about what is happening has been pretty good with the sector all round, but there was one little shock along the way. The centres now have to pay the first \$500 for any repair and maintenance bill. Previously, when they were managed by artsACT, they only needed to pay once it got past \$500, but now they need to pay the first \$500.

That might sound like a very small issue, but a lot of our arts organisations have very tight budgets and are not highly funded, and a lot of them are in very aged infrastructure. A lot of them need to do a lot of repairs, and unbudgeted expenses like that certainly come as a bit of a shock. It is probably not the role of Infrastructure Canberra per se, but it would be excellent if artsACT and the minister could account for those changes and make sure that the arts centres are properly reimbursed and properly funded. I have heard positive feedback on the whole, though, about this change in arrangements, so we are fairly positive about how government has done this. It is probably more a question of fixing a few of the process issues along the way.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.37): I rise today to speak on the government's infrastructure program and its place in the territory's budget. Infrastructure is a significant part of our expenditure and it is central to how we deliver services to the Canberra community. The Chief Minister has stated that, at its heart, the infrastructure program provides the facilities our community relies on, whether that is schools, hospitals, police stations or community spaces. The scale of investment is substantial: nearly \$1½ billion in 2024-25, over \$1.4 billion in 2025-26 and nearly \$1.7 billion in 2026-27. But we must be honest about how this is funded. While there are different ways to pay for infrastructure, fundamentally it comes down to borrowings. By 2028-29, borrowings are forecast to reach nearly \$22 billion, with interest payments alone exceeding \$1 billion in that year. That is 26 per cent of the government's own-source revenue—money that could otherwise be spent on infrastructure to deliver services such as social housing, health, education and police infrastructure.

I welcome the new bridge over the Molonglo River at Coppins Crossing. However, as a new district, Molonglo still needs significant investment in its town centre: a new college, a police station and improved road access. These projects must be in the pipeline, not relegated to the never-never. We all have different priorities. In Woden and Weston Creek, the need for community infrastructure is an ongoing issue that is

never addressed. We are never prioritised on the pipeline. It is important for our community to have local places to meet. This is good for our physical and mental health and social connection, especially with the arrival of 6½ thousand new CIT students in Woden. Infrastructure is expensive, so we must ensure we put the right infrastructure in the right place. Every decision matters, given the impact on the budget and the opportunity cost of those rising interest payments.

While we would have liked to host the new University of New South Wales campus in the south, it went to the Reid site. Still, we are very pleased to have the CIT in Woden running the courses that were at Reid CIT. This is a terrific outcome for the south, although I wish we had more parking. And let us not forget our pool history. In 2005, the owner of the privately-owned 50-metre Oasis pool in Deakin told the standing committee that he wanted to keep the pool open but could not make it commercially viable. The pool closed in 2009.

In 2007, the former planning minister, Mr Andrew Barr, introduced a variation to the Territory Plan to rezone most of Woden's recreation precinct to commercial land. The Woden Valley Community Council raised concerns about losing community facilities, but Minister Barr's response was that only higher level facilities like the pool and oval were protected. The next year, the minister sold the Phillip pool for 99 years, and in 2022 the government approved a change to the draft Territory Plan so we no longer have a 50-metre pool or ice rink, going back on previous policy. Over time, the basketball stadium, pitch and putt, bowling greens, tennis courts, and the YMCA and its gymnasium have all been lost, but the private sector will provide us with a 25-metre pool in the midst of five residential towers.

We have been fobbed off for 20 years and the government's non-existent sports and recreation policy has failed us. Last Thursday, the Chief Minister mentioned some of the government's major infrastructure priorities, but we were not told how much they would cost. There is the lyric theatre—that will be the fourth theatre in the area—and there is a street theatre next to the ANU. While we have been asking for an arts centre for over 20 years, we still do not have one on the infrastructure pipeline. The government might make some meeting rooms available for arts workshops in the phantom new building for Woden Community Service, though. There is the new aquatic centre in Commonwealth Park. How much government funding is going into that while no funding goes into our area for a pool? Then there is the convention and entertainment centre, with no indicative costs.

I support keeping a reasonable pipeline of government projects. This provides certainty to the construction industry and contributes to a sustainable sector. However, there is a significant imbalance in social infrastructure across Canberra. Most of it is in the golden triangle, and the biggest projects in the pipeline are also there: the convention centre, the Entertainment Precinct, the new aquatic centre, the lyric theatre and the upgrade of EPIC.

The ACT government often says it does not get its fair share of funding from the federal government, but we pay our rates and we do not get our fair share of investment in social facilities in the south. The government will say they invest in the Canberra Hospital and light rail, but these are not places we go to meet. The infrastructure pipeline should be fairer. While I support investment in infrastructure, I cannot support

this part of the budget as it stands. We need a fairer, more balanced approach—one that invests in all our communities. We need to know the indicative costs and the impact of infrastructure on the budget to ensure that every dollar spent delivers real value, not just for today but for the future of all Canberrans.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Justice and Community Safety Directorate—Part 1.5.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Manager of Government Business, Attorney-General, Minister for Human Rights, Minister for City and Government Services and Minister for the Night-Time Economy) (10.44): This government is making a significant investment in practical, targeted initiatives to ensure justice in the ACT is accessible, inclusive and fair. I want to begin with two areas that I know are of particular interest to the Greens, as our Parliamentary Agreement partners.

First of all, Mr Speaker, you would be aware, but it is worth repeating, that the government has agreed in principle to the recommendation from the select committee's report in relation to the Rent Relief Fund. While the government recognises the rent relief benefits of the previous program, we also see this now as an opportunity to review that scheme's design and the longer-term sustainability of a broader emergency relief program.

We recognise that housing costs are something that take up a lot of people's time and consternation, and it can be very hard to focus on anything else when you are concerned about where you might live in the next few weeks or months. But, equally, we also know that there are other circumstances or other ways that people arrange their finances that mean that other issues and other funds for different types of emergencies might be appropriate.

For this reason, the government will continue to engage with the community sector on the development of a scheme that continues to provide emergency financial support to low-income households and individuals under severe financial stress. This work is already underway and the government expects to make further announcements shortly. Should the government receive advice that this will take a significant period of time, we will look to temporary support measures and how we can adopt those.

I wish to particularly thank ACTCOSS and Care Financial for an incredibly respectful and extremely constructive engagement, for bringing the community together and working with government and acknowledging that we do wish to have another look at the design of such a scheme. But certainly they have brought us on a journey, I think, as well about the needs that are still there and what they look like more broadly. We will continue to be working in partnership with them.

I also want to acknowledge Mr Rattenbury and this initiative. Can I please assure him, through you, Mr Speaker, that this was never about, "This was a Greens initiative," and to not continue it. It was quite literally, "Here are a whole lot of things that are ending," and making some tough choices about why they were established in the first place and what situations had changed. However, I do recognise that it was Mr Rattenbury's leadership that established it in the first place. I think he thought this was something

personal between himself and me, and I really do want to assure him that that is absolutely not the case. I do regret perhaps not having a longer conversation with him about it and his views about its continuation earlier in the budget cycle. It was perhaps naive of me, but we live and learn, and I look forward to working with the Greens as we design a new scheme.

Another area that I know is of particular interest is our ACT Witness Intermediary Scheme. There is \$1.387 million in funding in this budget that ensures its continuation until 31 December this year—which I will expand on in a moment. This initiative provides targeted services for vulnerable complainants, witnesses and accused persons in the criminal justice system. The role of the intermediary is to carefully assess the communication needs of the witness and to inform police and the court on the best ways to communicate so the witness can provide their best evidence. The scheme draws on the expertise of a small number of in-house intermediaries and a larger ACT intermediary panel. I am grateful to those who provide intermediary services in the ACT. It is a pretty incredible job, connection and nexus that they provide, and I do not think the value of that is doubted in anybody's mind.

The University of Sydney Law School is undertaking an evaluation of the scheme and the indicative findings demonstrate that intermediaries do effectively support vulnerable persons giving evidence and that the program also demonstrates long-term positive impacts on the criminal justice system. I do not think anyone is surprised by this, but I think it is incredibly helpful to have this independently demonstrated to government.

I know there has been some concern raised with the government that how this is presented in the budget papers, with funding to 31 December, gives the impression that this is a service that will cease at the end of this calendar year. I want to assure the Assembly, the witness intermediaries and the justice sector as a whole that the service is not in question. Rather, we wished to see the conclusion of that evaluation through so that its findings could be used to inform the budget for it and what might be appropriate going forward. I am pleased to say that that work is underway, and we look forward to providing certainty as soon as practicable.

I appreciate the 31 December will be here before we know it. I again thank the Greens for raising this and for their advocacy in this space. I hope that provides some clarity at this point in time. But, again, I think Mr Rattenbury, together with most people in this place, would well know that sometimes timing just does not align with the budget process and other things that are occurring. If we were in a land of lots and lots of money falling from the sky, we would be able to set aside buckets for what we expect might come. But, regrettably, that is not the case. I appreciate why there has been consternation, but I hope that we are able to move forward in a really positive way with the findings of that evaluation from here.

While we are on supporting victims and witnesses and vulnerable accused persons, I would note that there is over \$7 million in recurrent funding in this budget to further support the Victim Services Scheme and the Financial Assistance Scheme to respond to an increasing demand for services and applications for financial assistance. That demand is just increasing, perhaps not exponentially, but it feels like it.

The ACT's Charter of Rights for Victims of Crime expressly recognises that victims are central to the justice process. I want to acknowledge the important but often very painful, very traumatic and very triggering contributions of victims of crime, those who report to police to keep the community safe and to ensure that offenders are held accountable. Victim Support ACT provides an invaluable service, helping victims access their rights and entitlements and assisting them with their recovery. One of the mechanisms is through financial assistance, which assists recovery, contributes to the future safety of victims and acknowledges the harmful effects of acts of violence and complements other services provided to victims of crime.

More than \$1.4 million in recurrent funding has been provided over two years to establish a new role of sexual assault advocates within the Victim Support ACT office, as well as staff training and supervision for Victim Support ACT for two years. The government considers this as an important investment to enhance victims' access to specialist services and to support investigations to be conducted in a more victim-centric and trauma-informed way.

I would acknowledge that Victim Support ACT won an award at the JACS Director-General Awards the other week, which Minister Paterson and I were very pleased to attend, as did the Witness Assistance Scheme. Indeed, we are continuing to support that scheme through funding the continuation of officers in that team and adding to it. I note that we are not at the level or the size of the team that the Director of Public Prosecutions would like to see. But I do hope that these incremental changes that we are putting in place provide some confidence to that team, the DPP and the justice sector more broadly about the value that we place in it. I wish to affirm in this place that finding ways to support these vital resources more sustainably is a priority for me in this portfolio in this term.

A well-resourced court system is essential not only for individuals whose disputes are before it but also for maintaining confidence of the broader community in the rules of law. Continued investment in the courts is necessary to ensure that justice is timely, accessible and responsive to the needs of our community. Delays or backlogs in the legal system can result in prolonged uncertainty and hardship and, indeed, cause further harm, if not leading to frustration and undermining trust in the system. That is why we are pleased that there is recurrent funding to establish a tenth magistrate in ACT Magistrates Court aimed at improving processing times and addressing growing demand in civil and criminal matters.

As was emphasised I think by us all in this place last week, there is a flow-on impact from investment in one part of the justice system to other integral parts of the justice system. So this funding includes additional resourcing for the Office of the DPP and in Legal Aid for the first two years to meet the increased demands of an expanded judiciary. This initiative also provides additional resources to the ACT's Coroners Court, which I expect will increase its administrative capacity. I look forward to the reporting that I hope to be receiving soon that will demonstrate the impact that those resources are having.

We are further supporting ACT courts and tribunal through more than \$5 million in capital funding to undertake the replacement of the Jury Management System and the Coroner's Local Case Management System. The Jury Management System streamlines

and automates processes, supporting the efficient delivery of jury trials, and improves the experience of jurors. A modern coroner's case management system is required to support a therapeutic and family-focused approach and a more frequent and longer contact with families and friends across the coronial process, including intensive and specialised support in the initial weeks following a death.

As you know, Mr Speaker, the ACT legal assistance sector is critical, and we are very pleased to be able to continue to support a number of their innovative programs as well as their service offering as a whole. These programs, in particular, include the Women's Legal Centre's Mulleun Mura; the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Access to Justice Program; the Women's Legal Centre's Employment and Family Law Practice; Canberra Community Law, to continue to provide housing and social security legal services; CARE Consumer Law's Mobile Debt Clinic, for continued service delivery to clients experiencing financial issues, including debt and financial abuse; the Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT's Trial Advocate Program to fund the continued legal representation services to First Nations clients; and the Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT's First Nations Paralegal program. We have also committed to funding Legal Aid for a range of initiatives—and I will address that in the appropriate place later in the debate.

Finally, there is about \$1.5 million in recurrent funding for one year provided to the ACT Government Solicitor's Office, including to support the Government Solicitor to establish a regulatory prosecution function to strengthen enforcement and compliance across government and to bridge some of the gaps that we might have between some of the regulatory and operational areas and what that looks like, if a matter does need to proceed to court and how we can improve those processes, if indeed improvements are necessary. An internal review will be conducted to assess demand and impact on resource requirement and any efficiencies which have been gained to inform the long-term sustainability of this function.

This is a budget that delivers for the community. I appreciate that there are always more calls on funding for the justice system—and we hear those calls. I trust that, hearing this contribution to the debate today, members in this place and the community at large see that the government is working very hard to invest right across our justice sector to support culturally safe and accessible legal help, to expand the frontline capacity in our courts and to continue critical programs that put the needs of vulnerable Canberrans—those facing disadvantage, hardship or discrimination—at the centre of our justice system. I commend it to the chamber.

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (10.58): Despite the minister's assertions, this is another example where the budget has failed the agencies of the government, this directorate, and has failed the needs of the people of the ACT. We heard very concerning evidence during the estimates inquiry process and have had significant discussions in this place on the impacts of those failures. From the DPP, to Legal Aid, to community legal services and more, we have heard over and over how resources are being squeezed and services are simply not being provided.

We had a motion in the last sitting week to provide some extra resources to some of those vital justice services. I will highlight some of the concerns that were raised during the estimates. This is important because they show not only a pattern throughout this

budget but also the incredible stress, uncertainty and confusion placed on the agencies by this government through this budget. We have seen it in education and then the backflip on all budget process and we have seen it in JACS and a whole bunch of backflips. It is a chaotic way to run a budget.

Of all the areas in JACS, the one that stood out during estimates was the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. Based on the minister's assurances, both then and following the motion, it looks like resources will now be provided. But that was after months, if not years, after concerns were raised. Indeed, back on 18 June, the DPP publicly stated that she was:

... extremely concerned about the base funding of its agency, which compromises the needs of vulnerable people at the centre of the justice system. This is despite two consecutive recommendations from the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs that the government increase funding to the office.

In relation to the Witness Assistance Program, she went on to state:

The WAS scheme operates at drastically lower levels compared to the WAS support available in other jurisdictions, to the detriment of those who interact with the criminal justice system, namely victims of crime ... and we are often the only support service that a victim or witness engages whilst facing an unknown and complex system.

She also referred to the additional pressures being placed on her office by reforms in other areas. For example, she welcomed the appointment of a 10th magistrate; however, made a point of saying that:

... the funding to assist the office to service the listing of a 10th magistrate will not address the sustained increase in demand on the DPP over the last decade and the unmet resourcing needs.

Even more concerning are the following statements where she said:

There has been no meaningful increase to my budget since 2017.
It falls short of the necessary long-term funding to meet the increased demand of the work of the ACT DPP.

Finally, she said:

If the ACT DPP is not adequately funded, community safety is compromised.

All of this was said before and during the budget process, and the government blindly ignored all these comments from the DPP—dating back to the estimates report from 2017. So why did we then have to come back after the budget has been presented to then have a motion for the Attorney-General says, “We will go back and look to fix all this”? It is a pretty chaotic way to run a budget. It is a pretty chaotic way to run a government.

We heard before and during the estimates period that the DPP are no longer handling regulatory cases—and I will quote:

The decision has been made considering the resourcing strain my office faces, which has been the subject of ongoing public comment by my predecessors and which I have been raising with government since my appointment. We have never been properly funded for this work and, as a result, cannot continue to absorb it.

I do not blame Ms Cheyne for all of this. She inherited this mess from Mr Rattenbury. Mr Rattenbury comes in here all smug and full of grandiose statements now, but he handed her this hospital pass. Mr Rattenbury “the pious” is now lecturing the government, but I have certainly not forgotten the many years he stood in this place creating the very problem that we face. So let’s not forget that—and Ms Cheyne is nodding her head; she gets it. She inherited this mess from the Greens minister that now criticises her. It is pretty ironic, isn’t it? So the Greens and Labor created this mess together. It is an absolute debacle—and these are not my words about the problems of funding; they have come from the DPP. Mr Rattenbury will no doubt quote from the DPP, but the quotes and concerns that she has raised go back a long time, under the stewardship of Mr Rattenbury.

This problem that the DPP has identified led to ongoing discussions with other agencies as to who would undertake this extra work and whether they were adequately funded to do so. That is another area that has been known for some time, but was not addressed in this budget. We had to come back and clean it up and get the minister to agree and say that, yes, she is going to go back and look at these issues.

But it is not just about what happens to the DPP; it is also about the knock-on effects. One of those is the effect on the Government Solicitor. In estimates, he said that one agency that contacted him—who he said would remain nameless—said: “Oh, you know those 150 matters?” and the Government Solicitor’s Office said, “What 150 matters?” When you do not resource one area of government, the effects then flow on to other areas and you see the pressure being applied everywhere, including in the Government Solicitor’s Office. This creates significant uncertainty.

During the hearings, Ms Cheyne said:

The challenge with a stack of these initiatives that had genuinely good intent behind them is that there is no ongoing funding source.

That is problematic, isn’t it? Mr Rattenbury said:

We all know that is because the Treasury only ever gives two years of funding on a business case. It is the same as the argument about the Law Reform and Sentencing Advisory Council.

So Mr Rattenbury, who is the architect of half of these problems, is going to be the cure, apparently. I look forward to that. I will quote from Ms Carrick. It is always good to have a Ms Carrick quote, isn’t it. She said:

I guess it comes back to constrained funding for disability advocates who advocate for people who do not know where to go, helping them to find support. We hear from a range of people, including advocates, they need more funding to do their jobs. They do not have enough to meet demand.

Over and over, we are hearing that services are being asked to do too much and being provided too little and that there is a lack of certainty. If you are trying to recruit good people into agencies, like Legal Aid, the DPP and elsewhere in government, and there is no certainty as to that funding, are they going to take that employment if they cannot have their employment guaranteed beyond a certain period? So there are some pretty significant problems across this budget. To quote from Region media:

The ACT's Director of Public Prosecutions has described the decade of under-funding for her office as "unacceptable" as the government has acknowledged it's "falling short" on providing the justice system with adequate resources.

Ms Engel told *Region* Mr Hanson's motion—which was fully supported by the Assembly on Tuesday (16 September)—needed to be met with "immediate action".

Ms Engle is quoted in *Region* as saying:

Without a properly funded criminal justice system, access to justice for Canberrans is severely compromised. Every day in the ACT, the community rely on the DPP to fairly and efficiently seek justice on their behalf. ACT Policing lay charges, but the DPP is the vehicle through which justice in the Court system is either achieved or not achieved.

At a time when victims of family and sexual violence are rightly demanding better access to justice and protection, not providing the DPP with resources to deliver a base level of service is unacceptable.

The current situation is simply not sustainable.

So I struggle to understand why it is that this is a government that refused to provide any additional funding for the DPP for years and years, despite the highlighting of these problems. It is a bit like the police. I remember the police minister—who is, no doubt, going to talk about the budget and how wonderful it is—repeatedly voting against the need for more police. Do you remember that?

(Second speaking period taken.)

Dr Paterson is going to get up and talk about what she has done in the police area, and we will remember that Dr Paterson—amongst her other colleagues across the road—voted against additional police, until we identified the fact that there were fewer police in 2022 than there had been in the decade before. Under the Greens and Labor government, they ran down police numbers in the territory. Even though over a period there were 70,000 more people in Canberra and that the government demanded more of our police, they ran the numbers down.

We voted against the budget, because they were not funding the police with what they needed. When we said that we needed more police, Dr Paterson, Ms Cheyne, Mr Steele and Mr Rattenbury repeatedly voted against that increased funding—until it became so embarrassing and the Chief Police Officer was coming out saying that he could not do his job and community safety was at risk. Why is it that this government underfunds when they have the Chief Police Officer, the DPP, the head of Legal Aid and legal aid services, saying, "We do not have enough; we cannot do our job"? Then we come in

here and repeatedly say that and the government then backflips. Why is that? Is that a way to run a government? That is the way they are currently doing it.

I will again quote from the *Region* article:

Legal Aid ACT CEO Dr John Boersig added during estimates that his office's funding was "flatlining" in the face of increased demand.

Dr Boersig told *Region* that Canberra was now dealing with a range of "big city problems", both from high population growth and the cost-of-living impact on disadvantaged and vulnerable people.

"It is crucial that the justice sector is funded to meet the increased demand in our courts," he said.

The real problem is that it took repeated calls from those agencies, a difficult estimates period and then a motion to get it addressed.

When we are critical of the budget and when we say that this is not a budget that is delivering for the people of the ACT, we are not being howled down by those agencies. That position is being supported by the people on the frontline. The justice system, Aboriginal Legal Services, services for women, the DPP, Legal Aid and the Government Solicitor are saying the same thing. It was the same with the Chief Police Officer previously. Why does it take that sort of pressure to be put on the government for them to say, 'Yes, we got it wrong'? We have seen in education, where the government have now backflipped on all the job cuts that they were going to put into education.

There are failures across the budget in terms of what the government are delivering and how they are delivering it. We are pointing out a range of those problems. I welcome the fact that the minister has backflipped on the DPP and on Legal Aid and those other legal services. I welcome the fact that the education minister has backflipped on the education cuts, and I welcome the fact that this government previously backflipped on the funding that was needed to increase police numbers. But it is a hell of a way to run a government, isn't it? It is an extraordinary way to run a government—and you wonder why there is such a morale problem across the board.

Ms Castley often highlights this in health. We know it is the case that teachers are frustrated, and we know that is the case with our frontline services—like the DPP or the police—and the struggles they face. They do not feel supported by this government. They do not feel that they are being listened to by this government. It should not have to take the opposition coming in here to highlight these problems to force backflips to stop this government from underfunding our frontline services and, in fact, in terms of education, actually cutting staff.

It is a budget that is not delivering. It is a budget that is quite clearly chaotic, and, in both education and in JACS, literally within weeks of the budget being delivered, the government is now backflipping on. So when you look at this government and scratch your head and say, "Is this a budget you would support," have a good look at it.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services,

Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (11.13): I am pleased to speak in support of the 2025-26 budget appropriation for the Justice and Community Safety Directorate, which covers multiple portfolios of mine. I am proud to stand up today and speak in strong support of investments that the ACT government is delivering in these areas.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all members of our emergency services and police—ACT Policing, ACT Fire and Rescue, the ACT Rural Fire Service and our ACT SES. Thank you for the work that you do every single day in making sure that Canberra remains one of the safest cities in Australia.

Contrary to Mr Hanson's synopsis, the budget provides a significant investment into strengthening ACT Policing so that it can continue to deliver the services that help keep Canberrans safe. In this budget, we are investing \$112.9 million over four years to improve the working conditions for ACT Policing staff, including pay increases, in line with the new Australian Federal Police Enterprise Agreement. The new enterprise agreement came into effect on 9 December last year. In addition to pay increases totalling 11.2 per cent over three years, ACT Policing members will also be entitled to allowances for working unsociable hours, use of force certification and workplace responsibility allowances.

At the 2024 election, ACT Labor committed to recruit an additional 150 police officers. I remain committed to delivering on this and am pleased to report that ACT Policing welcomed 89 new recruits in the 2024-25 financial year. Since 1 July this year, an additional 14 recruits have joined ACT Policing. That brings the total to 103 new recruits since 1 July last year, significantly bolstering our ACT Policing numbers.

Investing in the ability of police to respond to domestic, family and sexual violence is also a key priority for this government. Recommendation 2 of the Sexual Assault (Police) Review report recommended the government establish a new investigative team within the Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Team. As part of this budget, \$5.022 million over two years has been allocated to achieve this. The new team will consist of one sergeant and nine constables.

In addition, we are providing \$986,000 over two years for Victim Support ACT, as the Attorney-General has stated, to pilot a sexual assault victim advocates team, and \$284,000 over two years for the Office of the DPP for a Witness Assistance Scheme officer. The new Sexual Assault Advocates will be employed by Victim Support ACT and embedded within ACT Policing's specialist Sexual Assault and Child Abuse team. This model will create a targeted, expert criminal justice advocate function that complements the broader advocacy undertaken by other specialist services working to support victim-survivors in the ACT. In my capacity as Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family and Sexual Violence, I look forward to continuing to work with ACT Policing to improve justice responses to sexual violence and hold perpetrators to account.

Another key pillar of the work funded in this budget is the National Firearms Register. Members of ACT Policing put their lives at risk every single day to make sure our community remains safe. We have seen over recent weeks, the impact that firearms

have in the tragic loss of police officers serving in Tasmania and Victoria. Australia has some of the strictest firearms laws in the world, but I remain committed to implementing a federated model for firearms information management, as agreed by national cabinet.

The National Firearms Register will improve community and law enforcement safety by enhancing information sharing about firearms between jurisdictions. A national register will allow law enforcement to better assess firearms risks, with near real-time information, as well as link firearms information with other relevant police and government information, including the National Criminal Intelligence System. This will significantly improve law enforcement's capability to detect and respond to illicit firearms activity and improve compliance and enforcement.

In order to achieve this important goal, this budget provides \$4.9 million over two years to continue development and design of ICT systems for the digitisation of the ACT's Firearms Register, which will allow the ACT to participate in the National Firearms Register. This register will improve community and law enforcement safety by enhancing firearms information sharing. Another \$13.8 million is centrally provisioned over three years, which will contribute to the cost of an ICT solution.

We are also significantly investing in our Emergency Services Agency, and will continue to ensure that the ACT community continues to receive world-class ambulance, fire and SES services. Investment in this budget includes \$6.028 million in capital funding for upgrades of major ICT systems used by the Emergency Services Agency, including the Territory Radio Network, Emergency Triple-Zero, the Computer Aided Dispatch System, the Mobile Data System, the Direct Turnout System and the emergency alert capability, and \$2 million in recurrent provision for the new Territory Radio Network contract, with the release of this provision to be considered during 2025-26 following the contract's finalisation. This initiative ensures the ongoing functioning of the major government critical systems directly related to life-saving services provided by ACT ESA. We are also investing to ensure our emergency services continue to have access to modern high-quality vehicles to ensure they can effectively serve the needs of the Canberra community.

This budget includes \$1.095 million in expense funding for upgrades to mechanical equipment in the ESA maintenance workshop, which services the agency's fleet. This initiative also provides funding for additional temporary mechanics to boost the capacity and output of the workshop. The government has also established a \$23 million capital provision of Vehicle Replacement Program funding over three years from 2026-27 to 2028-29, with a review assessing the future requirements of the program.

In the Corrections portfolio, the government continues to invest in supporting the provision of safe, humane and rehabilitative corrective services for the benefit of the detainees, staff and the broader ACT community. To this end, this budget is providing \$2.427 million in capital funding to upgrade and improve essential equipment and facilities at the Alexander Maconochie Centre. This investment will allow for critical design work to occur for two new on-site satellite health clinics at the AMC. All health services delivered at AMC are currently operated from the Hume Health Centre, which was not designed to cater for the number of detainees currently at AMC.

The AMC's population have complex health needs, including a significant number of older detainees who require specialised care. The two new satellite clinics, design of which has been funded in this budget, will, when complete, significantly increase the space available to health staff as well as providing access to new equipment and reducing the need for transport to hospital, because an increased range of healthcare services will be accessible inside the AMC.

The package will also allow for important upgrades to the electronic security system. The ESS consists of seventeen (17) elements, including systems such as the electronic access control, key management, closed circuit television (CCTV), intercom and public address systems, biometrics, access control barriers, perimeter detection and the underlying supporting network infrastructure. Many components of this system are aging, and upgrades are required to ensure the operational requirements are supported. Additionally, there is an urgent need to replace one of the two metal detectors which screen the approximately 250 staff, visitors and support services who enter the AMC on a daily basis. This will be replaced with newer image scanning equipment. This investment will deliver a safer and more secure centre for staff, detainees and visitors.

This budget also includes significant investment in reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT Criminal Justice System. This budget provided \$9.4 million over three years to engage with the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to continue delivery of the Circle Sentencing Court and ACT Corrective Services alternative reporting sites. The funding has also provided for continuation of other key initiatives, such as Empowerment Yarning Circles, the Yarrabi Bamirr expansion, the Bail Support program and the On Country program through to 2026-27. The alternative reporting site initiative has been implemented and continues to operate effectively.

Canberra is the safest city in the country. The funding provided to police, emergency services and corrections in this budget demonstrates that the ACT government is committed to ensuring this remains the case. I am proud of Labor's track record of promising and delivering on commitments made in the budget, and I look forward to delivering on the commitments I have outlined in the Justice and Community Safety Directorate. I commend the appropriation.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (11.23): I welcome this opportunity to speak about the Justice and Community Safety Directorate funding and other justice funding in this year's budget.

I will start on the Rent Relief Fund. I welcome the attorney's comments. I am happy to assure her that it was never personal. It is always about the policy and it is about need and it is about conviction because this was a program which helped more than 1,400 vulnerable households maintain their tenancy and would likely prevent many from ending up on the now well over 3,000 long public housing waiting list. Established in 2023, the Rental Relief Fund offered up to four weeks rent to a maximum of \$2,500 to help renters in financial hardship. Over two years, the fund delivered over 1,400 grants or about two grants a day.

We know the ACT faces a severe housing affordability crisis with the highest rate of rental stress among Commonwealth Rent Assistance recipients in Australia according

to the Productivity Commission's 2025 *Report on government services*. Just over 50 per cent of these households in the ACT were paying more than 30 per cent of their income on rent, and over a quarter, 26.9 per cent, were paying more than 50 per cent of their income on rent.

Released in April, Anglicare Australia's 2025 *Rental affordability snapshot* found that the ACT was one of the most, if not the most, unaffordable jurisdictions for low-income households. It is the classic story of Canberra. There is data that will show you plenty of people are doing fine. If you are a two income household, perhaps with no kids at this point and doing reasonably well, then Canberra is a great place to live, but if you are not in that category, this can be a tough city and that is what these figures underline.

The University of New South Wales City Futures Research Centre has estimated that 4,500 households in the ACT have an unmet need for social and affordable housing. We will pick up more on that when we get to the housing agenda item, but this is all context for the Rent Relief Fund. I was pleased to sponsor the petition that was tabled in this Assembly which generated support from 863 Canberrans who wanted to see the fund continue.

Now, this brings us to the government's response to the *Report of the Select Committee on Estimates 2025-26*, in which they agreed in principle to recommendation 52. I welcome the conversations that we have had with the government on that on the side, and as I said, I welcome the attorney's comments today where they are now taking an opportunity to review the scheme design and contemplate a broader emergency relief program. These are welcome comments.

I think it is quite clear to reflect—and I have observed this publicly before—whilst there have been a number of comments made about the Rent Relief Fund being a temporary measure, clearly post-COVID we saw a significant escalation of affordability pressures and that is why the fund, whilst it started as a COVID response, morphed into a different program. As observed in the public hearings for the estimates program:

ACT Shelter explained how important the fund was in providing a 'period of stabilisation' for people experiencing rental stress:

It is a temporary measure, but it can prevent a person's situation from escalating further. It can mean that they avoid homelessness and all the other consequent issues that come along with that.

The Committee considers that...The decision may have been viewed as a cost-saving measure, however it is possible that it will lead to some people requiring more costly support services if their situation worsens.

I share that quote in the context of the consideration that is now going on as to what might be put in place in the future. We have seen various descriptions of that. The government's response to estimates notes that since ceasing the Rent Relief Fund they have prioritised food relief by establishing a food bank fund. I suppose the idea is that if you are struggling to pay your rent, you might also be finding it hard to pay for food, but it is like robbing Peter to pay Paul. These are not either/or choices. Generally both pressures are facing people. Certainly the fund was a cost-effective way to meet housing need at a critical time in a person's life.

We are lucky to have food pantries, food banks and the like already in Canberra and I really acknowledge the community organisations that provide those services. We have now heard from the attorney there is an intent to introduce, or reintroduce, what will be called the Support Fund, which could provide targeted support to people experiencing rental stress. I hope that this is a clear response to the advocacy that we have seen. We are now going to see consultation with community organisations. I think there is a degree of nervousness around this. There is a bit of a sense that there was already a successful, impactful fund operating and so what is the consultation going to be?

We saw a lady appear on ABC, Ms Johnson, who said that while she hopes the new scheme will deliver a similar lifeline:

I'm nervous about what it's going to look like. We had a really successful scheme that was ... helping keep people in their homes and preventing homelessness.

I think she summed that up very well in that article of 18 September. She was someone who had received support from the program previously and I think it was very courageous of her to speak publicly. I think in that short quote she sums up very well the situation and the sentiment that I think exists amongst many working in this space.

We have also heard the Treasurer on a number of occasions say there is other cost-of-living rent relief in the budget, but a glaring issue in the budget is the government's treatment of the Electricity, Gas, and Water Rebate. In its response to the estimates committee calling for the Rent Relief Fund to be reinstated, the government response sets out that it has permanently increased the Electricity, Gas, and Water Rebate to \$800 per year to support low-income and vulnerable households. I believe this is really quite misleading when you consider the rebate in the context of the budget and other relief offerings.

The Electricity, Gas, and Water Rebate has not increased in any real sense over the past four ACT budgets. In fact, by permanently increasing it to \$800 the level of support it provides has declined in real terms as the price of electricity, water and gas has increased significantly over the past four years, and will increase further in 2025-26, alongside a reduction in the National Energy Bill Relief by \$150 and a reduction in energy support payments, formerly the Utility Hardship Fund Energy Support Vouchers, from \$300 to \$100.

Now, I note the comments that there is not money falling from the sky and budgets do require a range of pressures and I am as aware of that as anybody in this place. I understand these pressures but to have the government crowing about this being the big cost-of-living relief measure in the budget: it simply does not warrant that level of amplification. It simply does not meet the rhetoric that we have heard on it because the reality is this rebate has effectively been set at around \$800 since 2021-22 through temporary and one-off increases. Eligible low-income households will effectively see a \$150 reduction in the amount of energy bill relief they will be receiving following this budget compared to 2024-25 due to the reduction in the federal government's Energy Bill Relief Fund from \$300 in 2024-25 to \$150 in 2025-26. Obviously that is outside the ACT government's control, but again, that is the context for the circumstances people find themselves in and shining a little bit of light on the rhetoric

that we have seen coming in the budget.

Let me comment briefly on the DPP funding. We did have a significant discussion on this last week so I do not intend to repeat my comments. It was a moment in this debate to see Mr Hanson coming back to form, giving the sort of speeches where he has a slag at everybody. I will make this observation. There has always been pressure on the DPP for as long as I can remember in this place. I think that the DPP annual report, every single year for probably a decade, has said, “We need more money.” They always say that. That is their platform, as independent statutory office holders, to make that observation. There has been a range of increases over the years for the director, including during my time as attorney.

I think what has certainly been interesting is the perspectives brought by the new director who has put a very particular light on it. Mr Hanson has come in here and said I am all responsible for it as well, and yes, sure, I was in ERC during those times and in the budget cabinet. One of the things I have noted in recent times is the commentary of the way quite a few programs have been critiqued for being funded through the Confiscated Assets Trust Fund. The observation has been that this is temporary funding, and that is true, but what that has been has—certainly in my time I used it in order to solve some of these problems in the short-term.

So for example, when the new Director of Public Prosecutions came along, we had witness assistance staff, and she said, “We just do not have enough. It just does not meet the demand.” So we were able to quickly find four additional positions, well outside of the budget cycle, by using the CAT Fund. Similarly to the way the Law Reform and Sentencing Advisory Council was funded. It came up outside of a budget cycle and we were able to use it temporarily. These offer opportunities for cabinet to later take a decision to continue this funding or not. So I reject the criticism I have heard in a number of fora now. *(Second speaking period taken.)*

The point I make is that I reject the criticism of, “This was only ever in the CAT Fund, it was never sustainable.” Well, I think everyone knows that. The point is the CAT Fund can also be used to initiate things and to fix temporary problems. Certainly that is how I sought to use it in my time. Rather than wait a whole year, there are times when you can get things done more quickly. Certainly that response of providing four additional witness assistance staff was an example of that, of responding to the calls from the DPP in a timely manner to get things moving in order to get us through to the next budget cycle. Budget decisions then get made and we saw in this budget one witness assistance position was permanently funded.

Then we turn to the issue of police funding, which was also another issue in this budget and one of Mr Hanson’s favourites. I always reflect on the whole justice space as our actual objective is community safety. That is the bottom line. That is what I have always been focused on and there is a range of ways to achieve that. I think the simplicity of the “We must fund more police” argument is intellectually bereft and is about a particular political positioning rather than about actually focusing on the objective, which is to make the safest possible community.

We know that a significant number of people in our justice system are repeat offenders. They have offended before. They have offended in some cases many times and they

have cycled in and out of the justice system. They have been to jail and the police have picked them up again. We hear those frustrations from the police and I can understand why they are frustrated. The fact that they recognise people, that they see them time and time again is incredibly frustrating. But what we are doing is not changing that. If you keep cycling them in and out of the justice system, unless you make some serious interventions, then it is not going to make any difference. So this argument that we just need more police because that is the easy solution is not a good one. We need to invest in serious interventions and things like the Drug and Alcohol Court, as I have spoken about in this place before, have now been evaluated and shown to make those kinds of impacts. These are the sorts of things that can make a real difference.

It is worth noting that this and recent ACT budgets have invested heavily in ACT Policing. I am the first to acknowledge that police have an incredibly important role as part of that justice response. They do play an important part in community safety. My argument is they are not the only people that can make a difference in this. They do a job that most of us would never want to do. They attend the most horrific things. They see a lot of people on the worst day of their lives. They have an incredibly tough job and they should be appropriately funded but we cannot just focus on the police. It is not enough and it will not make a difference if our actual objective is to promote community safety.

One issue that did come up during estimates, and which has come up a lot recently, is the issue of ACT Policing's transparency. This is an area that I am concerned about because we have seen a series of incidents and reports that have identified examples where things have gone wrong. We have seen abuse of power and we have seen inappropriate use of force and the like. Now, ACT Policing has a mechanism for dealing with that but there is a lack of transparency around it. I made the point in the estimates process—and I have said this directly to the Chief Police Officer, so I feel I have behaved with integrity on that, in being up front in my comments to him as well—is that we need to have a process where, when these incidents do happen, there is a better community understanding of the consequences.

What we do not want to see is a loss of faith from people in the community about police operations because they have such a difficult and important role in our community. So I raised this in estimates. The government's response to the committee's report was to agree in principle to recommendation 58:

The Committee recommends that ACT Policing increase transparency to improve public trust, including by publishing aggregate data on complaints, disciplinary actions, and outcomes.

This is a welcome start but until we have a system which shows us publicly that police are held to account for their actions, that they are disciplined for their misconduct and kept away from vulnerable people that needs to be the case, how are we to accept that police investigating their own is appropriate and that systemic racism is a thing of the past?

The ACT Ombudsman recently reviewed police use of force and found “unprofessional behaviour” of police “unnecessarily inflamed situations,” finding:

...unprofessional conduct, offensive and abusive language, and unnecessary aggression displayed by some officers...In about a third of the cases we reviewed...

In estimates I cited a number of examples that were really very disconcerting. We saw in one case police arrested an intoxicated 16 year-old child who fell off a bench with his pants tangled around his ankles. He was grabbed, rolled over and handcuffed, despite not being physical with police. Instead of de-escalating the situation, police pepper-sprayed the child and then, when he asked to have his eyes washed out, the officer told him, and I quote—I actually cannot quote it in the Assembly, but it involved quite a few expletives in a fairly derogatory manner.

We saw a series of articles in the *Canberra Times* about similar instances of police misconduct. It included shocking footage of three adult ACT police officers taunting a First Nations child in a city police station, with one officer inciting the young person to “Neck himself.” We saw the case of Jack Wighton and Latrell Mitchell. Now, fortunately, these two men of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage have the means to engage excellent lawyers who, through their forensic work, unpicked that case, that very high-profile case. But think about all the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people out there who do not have the means to get the best lawyers in town to come in and defend them.

These are concerning incidents. Fortunately, they are the minority of examples. But what we need is better transparency so that when these sort of things do occur the community can have faith that they have been properly addressed and that they do not disappear, where we say, “Well, we cannot comment on that because of privacy.” There are tricky issues to balance out here, I acknowledge that, but we need to do better to make sure that the community has confidence these matters are being appropriately dealt with and this sort of conduct is being weeded out of our policing system here in the territory.

Having touched on those few points today, I would like to indicate our support for this line item on the budget. There are always challenges. As has been observed today, I am well aware of those challenges in this space, but the objective always is to strive for better in the future. I think there are some important initiatives in this budget.

One thing I did want to touch on is that I am concerned about the lack of new funding we saw in this budget for electronic monitoring. This is despite the Chief Minister’s commitment in national cabinet last year that this would be a priority for him to have operational. I am concerned about the timeline on this project. Again, I am well aware of the complexity in getting the system underway but the absence of clear funding to get it operational in this budget is of concern because it means we are potentially looking at quite some time until it can become operational.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (11.41): I rise to speak on behalf of Deborah Morris, who is the shadow police emergency services and community safety minister. The government’s budget announcements of a major investment in ACT Policing and community safety makes a mockery of ACT Policing and the community they are charged to protect.

The government has boasted of investing a total of \$4.8 million in police infrastructure upgrades, which they say will future-proof police facilities and ensure ACT Policing is a competitive, modern and well-resourced police force, but this could not be further from the truth. Sadly, in Canberra the dedicated staff in ACT Policing are working in poorly maintained facilities, repeatedly beset by gas leaks, flooding, lead dust and raw sewage contamination. Government documents obtained by the Canberra Liberals show all police sites owned by the ACT government have either exceeded the end of their life or are approaching their end of life due to systemic underinvestment that has not kept pace with the demanding operational requirements placed on the asset portfolio.

Across Canberra our police facilities are not what they should be and are in urgent need of investment. The City Police Station, Canberra's largest and most active police station, is slowly crumbling due to a lack of foresight, investment and planning from this ACT government, leaving it functionally obsolete. The Winchester Police Centre is ACT Policing's headquarters, yet it lacks the appropriate facilities for staff and victims of crime. It is a former technical college and was never designed to be a police centre. It faces significant functionality issues. It has suffered water leakage issues. It is not fit for purpose and was rated in poor condition in the 2018 assessment.

These recent announcements are barely a drop in the ocean of what is required just to keep the doors of our police stations open. However, what do we expect from a government whose police minister thinks that "...police stations are not there to keep the community safe"—that is a quote, I believe—or that dismisses the concerns of our police officers because raw sewage contamination was confirmed only to one room? All of our police precincts need serious government investment but those opposite have failed to do what is needed to treat our police with respect, to keep our police fully operational and so to keep our community safe.

To make matters worse, the revolving door of offenders released into community on bail continues to stretch police and put the community at risk. Everyone deserves to feel safe but the only people who seem to be safe in Canberra are the criminals who know this government will protect their right to do whatever they want. It is no wonder that 50 per cent of Canberrans are concerned about local crime when keeping the community safe is obviously not a priority for this government.

The funding for Safer Families increases from approximately \$18 million in 2024-25 to \$30 million in 2025-26. This is partly a transfer of funding from other existing programs and partly additional funding for new initiatives. The accountability indicator for Safer Families is that a family violence statement is presented to the Assembly each year. According to the budget papers, this indicator measures the government's progress and achievements in addressing domestic, family and sexual violence. It does no such thing. The statement and the budget papers contain no measurable performance indicators of progress in preventing, reducing or responding to domestic, family and sexual violence.

The Auditor-General's report on the *Safer Families Levy* noted the lack of public reporting on the success or failure of the Safer Families program. This failure should be rectified as a matter of urgency. Accurate, meaningful data is required for such an important issue, especially when ACT Policing data shows family violence-related

incidents have increased by 40 per cent since the 2016-17 year, when the forerunner of the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Office was established.

When Canberrans think about emergency services they expect one thing—that if disaster strikes, our firefighters have the tools and the training they need to keep families safe. Unfortunately this budget tells a different story. Instead of prioritising capability, the government has wasted millions of dollars chasing trinkets. The facts speak for themselves. In a response to a question on notice the government admitted that the hybrid electric fire truck has spent 40 per cent of its time off the road for repairs since it became operational in December last year. Think about that: nearly half the time the truck is in the workshop, not protecting our community.

Meanwhile, the Volvo electric breathing apparatus support truck, acquired back in August 2023, has never entered service. Two years after taxpayers bought it crews are still waiting to use it. Do not just take it from us. The United Firefighters Union, representing the very people who risk their lives for us, have been sounding the alarm. ACT Secretary, Greg McConville, has made it clear the absence of the hybrid electric truck is a source of “great frustration.” He said:

A conscious decision was made to get that truck, instead of two other conventional trucks which were tried and proven. And the result of that is that we are three years late in getting additional resources on the road to protect the Canberra community.

Mr Assistant Speaker, that is a damning indictment. The community expects fire protection. It does not expect trinkets. And what have we received instead? A logistics truck that has never been operational and a fire truck that spends 40 per cent of its time out of action. Years of delays, millions of dollars spent and no truck on the road. This is what happens when a government values headlines over hard work, when it prioritises being first over being prepared. Canberrans deserve better. They deserve a government that equips our firefighters properly, invests in proven capacity and ensures that when the sirens sound help is ready and waiting, not stuck waiting for repairs.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (11.47): I move amendment No 2 circulated in my name [*see schedule 1 at page 2937*] and table a supplementary explanatory statement to my amendments.

Another year, another budget. I once again move amendments to phase out the public subsidy from the ACT government to the horseracing industry. Since the MOU funding began, the ACT government has given and pledged over \$100 million to the horseracing industry. This year’s budget provides an \$8.5 million handout to the horseracing industry. Ending this multimillion-dollar handout should be an easy decision, particularly in a budget that we are told is full of tough decisions.

The ACT Greens oppose public funds for the horseracing industry. It is not providing public good. It provides public damage in the form of gambling harm, the commodification of animals, and workplace injuries and deaths for workers. It should not be funded by the government.

This is the fourth time I have put up a budget amendment like this. I have consistently called on government to phase out the funding. In 2022 I asked to reduce funding by

20 per cent; in 2023 by 40 per cent; last year by 60 per cent; and this year by 80 per cent. Government should not provide any future MOU funding for this industry. The Greens have been pursuing a phase-out rather than a sudden end, to give the industry time to organise itself and ensure that people and animals involved are properly cared for during the transition.

Each year, ACT Labor and the Canberra Liberals vote to keep funding the horseracing industry, and this year Labor has gone further. They are now proposing access to government-funded insurance as well. The Labor government has now announced an insurance slush fund, and government has not yet said how much that will cost the taxpayer. The minister said that the horseracing industry is “the most dangerous industry in the ACT” and WorkSafe has a particular focus on them. The minister went on to say, “Advice to me by officials causes a sense of alarm about rising rates of noncompliance with workers compensation.” No wonder their workers compensation premiums are rising to 30 per cent of their payroll.

The horseracing industry has reported two worker deaths and five worker injuries in recent years. The minister has said there are approximately 17 employers with around 40 workers expected to be in scope. So this is a tiny industry with a track record on work safety that would get any other industry shut down by its union. It is no wonder their dying industry cannot afford to pay WHS premiums. Government usually bans and regulates dangerous industries, and that is what we did with loose-fill asbestos and engineered stone, but the ACT Labor government is underwriting this one.

I asked the minister what he is doing to actually make the industry safer, noting those two deaths and five injuries in a tiny workforce over a few short years, because underwriting insurance claims does not make an industry safer, it simply compensates people for the deaths and accidents that will keep happening. And I asked if the industry had complied with all of the WorkSafe recommendations made so far. The minister did not have an answer for me. He said he will get back to me, and I am hoping the Assembly gets that information before we are called on to rubber-stamp an urgent bill to underwrite the ACT’s most dangerous industry.

Public support for the horseracing industry has collapsed. The club is losing members and running financial deficits year on year. They are not able to make enough money from ticket sales to cover the cost of their events because not enough people want to go to them. Canberrans do not want to join the club or pay for the industry, so instead Canberrans are forced to pay for it by a Labor government happy to run a billion-dollar deficit on the budget. It is a series of decisions like these that have given us the budget we are debating.

When the funding deal was first contemplated in 2010, public servants at the time suggested it was a bad idea. The 2010 cabinet submission signed by Andrew Barr, which first set up the MOU taxpayer subsidy, noted that the proposal “does not provide any argument to support the subsidy”. They could not come up with a reason to support the funds, and I am sure they tried, because cabinet signed off on it anyway. And 15 years later we are still getting an endless source of free money for the horseracing industry.

Since then, and despite that initial advice, the industry has been given and pledged over

\$100 million. The funding deals did not run through a grant process. They did not run through a procurement. They did not have to go through a commissioning process. There was no competitive process to decide whether this industry provided the best service or whether it was the best use of public money. Let us compare that to our environmental organisations, who provided volunteer land care services worth \$21.5 million. Government has given them less than a quarter of the funding government gives the horseracing industry, and government is now forcing those organisations into a competitive tender process. Perhaps instead of meeting with the minister and the directorate and asking why, the environment sector should have hired horseracing industry lobbyists.

The horseracing industry has got some obligations to get this funding, but they are not meeting them. The industry has not provided the report on how they will limit the use of whipping. That report is more than a year overdue, but there is no consequence for that: the horseracing industry still gets their funding. Horseracing funding is not an annual decision, unlike most budget decisions. We are constantly told that community groups and arts organisations and other sectors cannot have long-term funding because budgets are annual decisions and funding decisions have to be annual—unless you are the horseracing industry, in which case you get three five-year funding deals one after the other. No need for a grant process, no need for a procurement, no need for a commissioning process; just ask and the Labor government delivers, with indexation.

Now, personally, I think if an organisation is worth funding long-term, they should have their funding indexed. That is only fair, because otherwise they are going backwards. But indexation is not guaranteed for everyone who gets government funding. Across our arts, sports and community sectors, indexation is a vexed question. Some get it, some do not. Many have to beg for it each year and only get it after an extensive media campaign, and it often falls short of increased costs. Many organisations do not know if they are getting indexation or not. It is discretionary, so they cannot budget for it. Sometimes it is handed out for part of a year only, and sometimes indexation is actually announced as a funding increase. But the horseracing industry gets their indexation as a right.

This funding is out of step with sports funding. Each year the ACT government funds the ACT Brumbies for around \$1.8 million and the Canberra Raiders for around \$2.6 million. After years of the Greens pointing out how little funding the Canberra Capitals and Canberra United got compared to the horseracing industry, they now get \$400,000 each per year—double their previous funding. Community sport and recreation groups can apply for funding under the Club Enhancement Program, and in 2024 successful recipients got a combined amount of around \$230,000 between them. In 2025, that was cut to less than half. There is also a sports Industry Partnership Program that last year provided \$1.3 million, but this year that was cut to a million. And there is also a State Organisation Support Program with a total funding pool of \$190,000.

If you add up all of those amounts together—if you combine public funding for the Brumbies and the Raiders and the Canberra United and the Canberra Capitals, and what every single community sport and recreation club gets under all of these grants they have to apply for—it is still less than the horseracing industry gets every year. And the community sports got their funding pools cut while horseracing funding continues to increase. ACT Labor and the Canberra Liberals have decided that the horseracing

industry is worth more public support than all of our community and professional sports groups combined.

This funding is out of step with arts funding. Our arts organisations are struggling to survive. Costs are rising, leaving the organisations struggling to maintain facilities, roll out programs and pay proper wages to artists and arts workers. Under this budget, every single arts centre and organisation had to share in a funding pool of \$9 million. We have got that raised a little, which is really good news. It is now slightly more than the \$8.5 million that the horseracing industry gets. But you could double the arts budget just by redirecting horseracing industry funding.

What about the community sector? Every MLA in here hears the same calls that we have. The community sector is struggling as it never has before. The cost-of-living crisis means more people need their services, and at the same time the cost to provide those services has gone up. These are critical services that keep people in safe, secure housing and that provide support when people are in distress or in crisis. They are the government's trusted partners to support those most in need in our community, and the government has made cuts.

I want to remind the Assembly about some of the tough decisions we have seen in this year's budget. Labor's budget cut the Rent Relief Fund. After significant community distress and a campaign with the Greens, Labor is putting it back, but we do not yet know the details. Labor's budget cut the Women's Safety Grants. Labor's budget cut the multicultural women's safety program. Labor's budget failed to fund libraries to meet national minimum standards on staffing levels. All of those tough budget decisions that Labor made add up to less than the \$8.5 million that Labor found for the horseracing industry.

I want to check-in on some of the myths that will no doubt circulate again, and we often hear these myths each year from the horseracing industry. The first is that the horseracing industry should get this handout because they contribute to betting tax. That is not how tax works. *(Second speaking period taken.)*

A business cannot say, "I pay payroll tax, so give it back to me." An individual cannot say, "I pay income tax. Can I have it back as a rebate, please?" But if it was how tax worked, the horseracing industry is making an incredible return on their betting operations tax. Betting operations tax does not just come from ACT horseraces. It comes from golf and rugby and motocross and horseracing in other states and all sorts of activities all around Australia.

I have spoken about this a lot, so I will be brief now, and the information I am sharing comes from the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission report, the Australian gambling statistics and last term's Treasurer, Treasurer Barr. Bets on horseracing in the ACT contribute a tiny and diminishing amount to the ACT's overall betting tax. It is in the order of around \$250,000 each year. So if you were going to give them back their tax, you would not give them back \$8.5 million; you would give them \$250,000.

We are also likely to hear a myth about all the jobs created in this industry. I have gone through Thoroughbred Park's annual reports and the Canberra Racing Club's economic

impact report, so this is coming directly from industry figures. It looks like Thoroughbred Park creates somewhere between two and 20 FTE jobs directly. There are indirect jobs, and there is a general economic contribution, and we know this from the Canberra Racing Club's economic impact report. According to the industry's own report, 60 per cent of their economic contribution comes in the form of gambling and ads on gambling. It is not the kind of economy that most Canberrans want to subsidise.

The horseracing industry's economic contribution is also quite small. Even based on their claim that they are generating \$80 million, noting that most of that is coming from gambling harm, it is a little industry. ACT's creative industries contribute \$2.9 billion to our local economy. The horseracing industry's economic impact, dollar for dollar, is also small. For every dollar spent, the horseracing industry says they contribute less than a dollar to our local economy. So most of the money flowing through this industry actually leaves the ACT.

Let's talk about gambling harm. I am astonished that our new gaming minister is comfortable propping up this industry. Prior to being minister she campaigned hard to ban online gambling and betting advertising. These are the primary economic contributions from the ACT horseracing industry: that is what Labor is funding. The Labor government is subsidising gambling harm and ads on gambling with public funding, and now they want to underwrite it with government insurance as well.

I asked the new gaming minister how she reconciled this, in estimates, and she did not have a lot to say. She said she will continue to work with the racing industry to help them diversify. I asked her how they would diversify, and she said she did not know. I do have some bad news for the minister on this: the horseracing industry is gaslighting her. They have been promising government they will diversify away from gambling harm since 2014: that is in cabinet papers just released. The industry was worried about funding, so they said they just needed some funds in 2016-17 to help them diversify just until light rail came in. Guess what? Light rail came in. It did not help. It does not matter how easy you make it to go to the horseraces, not enough people want to attend, so all last term, even after light rail came in, government continued to half-fund their operations.

Diversification does not appear to be working. That is because this is a dying industry. This has been clearly set out in annual reports and cabinet documents for the past decade. Why is the Labor government still propping up a dying industry?

The Canberra Racing Club is delivering some pretty worrying financial results. During the last five years, and despite our generous Labor government funding which covered half of their operations in most years, the horseracing industry went from a small surplus to repeated deficits over the last three years. It is possible that for a Labor government also delivering deficits, they look like a good prospect. The horseracing industry's cash reserves are dropping. Their total expenses are rising. Their total liabilities are rising, and liability has doubled over four years.

Attendance is low. The biggest horse race event, the Black Opal Stakes day, got 8,000. Their attempt to diversify into another stream, the Festival of Speed, managed 13,500. Let's compare that to Floriade, which government also funds. Floriade gets over 430,000 attendees. Summernats gets over 130,000 attendees. What about the Folk

Festival? The Folk Festival has to operate with no government funding at all. The Folkie gets \$30,000 in a bad year and \$50,000 in a good one.

Horseracing is not getting the turnout of our other key events, and that is despite the fact that they are getting incredibly generous public funding. Their membership is dropping. Five years ago, they had over 1,150 members and in 2024 that dropped to 1,002, and then they stopped reporting membership numbers altogether.

What is our public money being used for? We obviously cannot say dollar for dollar where the taxpayer handout goes, but last year's government funding was about the same amount as the amount that the Canberra Racing Club gave out in prize money and payments to key personnel, so it does look an awful lot like Canberrans are publicly funding horseracing prize money and CEO salaries.

I am interested in CEO salaries. Payments to Thoroughbred Park key personnel went from \$200,000 in 2019-20 to \$841,000 in 2023-24. I think we have seen from a lot of organisations lately that high CEO salaries do not mean an organisation is being run well, that its money is being spent well, and that its workers are being looked after. I would urge extreme caution before supporting any organisation with increasing liabilities, decreasing turnover and high CEO salaries.

This industry has lost its social licence, and that is why it cannot make enough money to operate from membership fees and ticket sales. The industry was given land too, and they still cannot operate viably. They say they need government funding, and now government insurance as well. Where is this going to end?

The use of the land for a racetrack is another decision that goes completely against the interest of Canberrans. That land is on light rail, in the heart of our city, and we are in a housing crisis. We need a whole suburb there, with homes and schools and parks and shops, not an under-utilised racetrack. It is not just the community or Greens who think this; government itself has proposed this.

In the past two decades, we have seen at least two serious attempts by the hardworking public servants who actually have the interest of Canberrans at heart. In the first draft of the District Strategy last term, they suggested development of the site for a suburb with no racetrack. Chief Minister Barr overrode that decision. In cabinet papers just released from 2014, public servants made the same suggestion.

When we asked about the planning variation the horse industry has lodged, public servants told us there were matters that government needed to consider, including the need for social infrastructure arising from the horseracing industry's profit-motivated plans. It is so obvious to everyone, except to the horseracing lobbyists and the Labor ministers: what we need there is a whole suburb, not a racetrack with some luxury apartments on the side.

I am often asked by people in the community how it is that the horseracing industry got the deal it has got. They met the minister for workplace health and safety, and a couple of months later he proposed their latest slush fund, in a law that we will be debating this week that has been rushed through with no time to run a parliamentary committee inquiry or to conduct proper scrutiny.

The only advice I now have to give to the arts sector, the community sector, the environment sector and the sports sector is to go out and get yourself a horseracing industry lobbyist. I am hopeful that our community Independents in parliament will stand up for what Canberrans want and need. This is your chance to show that you think this funding can be better used by government to help people who are struggling right now.

Speeches are words, and we have had a lot of words in here already, but how you vote shows Canberra what decisions you make when you represent them. I commend my amendment to the Assembly.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (12.06): The government will not be supporting Ms Clay's amendment. The amendment proposes a major industry policy and financial change midway through a five-year funding agreement that the government has in place with the ACT's two racing clubs: the Canberra Racing Club and the Canberra Harness Racing Club.

Ms Clay has cherry-picked and presented a version of history that I would like to correct. Ms Clay refers to two cabinet submissions—one from 2009 and the other from 2010—which provide extensive supporting arguments for establishing the memorandum of understanding. The first paragraph of the 2010 submission details the decision from 2009 which ended the Racing Development Fund and replaced it with direct funding from the budget. These submissions are available under the executive documents release scheme. As the 2009 cabinet submission explains, the then government noted that a rapidly changing industry environment was threatening both the viability of the local racing industry and the government revenue derived from its ownership of the ACT TAB. This led to two immediate decisions. First, the government decided to introduce a scheme for race field information fees, which is now reflected in part 5B of the Racing Act 1999. These fees are collected by the local racing industry. Secondly, the government decided to change its funding agreements for the racing industry.

Until 2010, the ACT racing industry was financially supported by the Racing Development Fund, which allocated 4.5 per cent of ACT TAB's racing turnover to our local racing clubs. In 2008-09, the combined allocation to the clubs was \$7.7 million. From 1 July 2010, the government decided that it would abolish the Racing Development Fund. This was to be replaced by a combination of direct government funding to the racing industry and revenue derived by clubs through the new race field information fees. The government based the value of government funding to the racing industry on the 2010-11 forecast expected from the Racing Development Fund, which was estimated at around \$8.27 million.

To account for the new revenue derived by racing clubs through race field information fees, the government initially decided to reduce direct government funding to the racing industry by an initial estimate of these fees of \$1.5 million. Subsequently, through the cabinet submission referred to by Ms Clay, the government decided to increase the annual government funding contribution by \$500,000. The resulting annual government

funding to the racing industry from 2010-11 totalled \$7.27 million, which was to be annually indexed.

As noted by the 2010 cabinet submission, the government expected the forecasted recurrent operating impact of these decisions to be a budget cost of around \$0.5 million. Additionally, although the cabinet brief referred to by Ms Clay suggests the full value of racing industry funding was a subsidy, this appears to have been a misunderstanding on the part of the authors of that cabinet brief. Paragraph 12 of the 2010 cabinet submission explains that funding to the industry was being offset by the value of the ACT TAB's turnover derived from ACT race meetings. The actual value of the subsidy at that time was around half of the total of the funding to the industry.

Additionally, as part of these decisions, later in 2010 the government referred a review of the racing industry and its funding arrangements to the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission. The current funding arrangements reflect the government's response to the commission's final report.

Funding to the ACT racing industry is now annually indexed in line with budget indexation, less 0.5 per cent, resulting in a structural mechanism to require the industry to reduce its reliance on government funding over time. Subsequent developments, such as the government's decision to end greyhound racing in the ACT, have led to further cuts to the total industry funding envelope.

Both the government in 2009-10 and the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission noted a need to consider developments in the national market for racing products when deciding long-term industry funding arrangements. All jurisdictions, including the ACT, now collect a point of consumption tax on betting activity within their jurisdiction. So, while the ACT budget funds the racing industry, this industry, through the associated national betting market, also contributes budget revenue that now exceeds the value of the funding to the local racing industry. In 2025-26, the betting operations tax is expected to collect some \$23.7 million, which is more than 2½ times the funding directed to the racing industry. By 2028-29, this figure is expected to exceed \$29 million.

I trust this background assists members to understand why the government funds the racing industry under the current arrangements. The current arrangements reflect circumstances that developed through no fault of the local racing industry. The government's response has also largely been driven by unavoidable outside factors. These have included the development of a national market for racing and several High Court decisions that contributed to key financing arrangements now present in the racing industry.

Very clearly, the circumstances leading to the current industry funding arrangements have a long history. While members may not agree with the government providing funding to the racing industry, the government urges members to see that we will continue to pursue this memorandum of understanding. It is not reasonable to seek a cut in funding to the industry by 80 per cent in one year based on the five-year transition proposal put to the Assembly during prior budget years but repeatedly not agreed by the Assembly.

A further aspect of the premise underlying Ms Clay's amendment to the budget requires correction. The explanatory statement states that the Canberra Racing Club has not yet provided a report about proposals to limit the use of whipping in at least three ACT race meetings annually. As was explained to Ms Clay in response to her questions at an estimates hearing, this is a joint obligation that rests on both the government and the industry. The government has been working collaboratively with the industry to prepare a report, as expected by the memorandum of understanding. It is not correct to allege that the racing club is in breach of its agreement.

I also want to briefly touch on some of the diversification projects occurring at Thoroughbred Park. As I have said many times in this place, one of my key objectives as Minister for Gaming Reform is to support the industry to diversify from gambling revenue. I saw one of these events firsthand in May when I visited Thoroughbred Park for the Oz Feline Fair and CATstravaganza, an international touring cat show which attracted hundreds of people over the weekend. This event was the perfect way to showcase how clubs and the racing industry can be hubs for diverse, vibrant and inclusive events for the whole community. Thoroughbred Park hosts 120 other events per year, including the Canberra Festival of Speed, the Canberra Brick Show, and the ACT government's Sustainable Canberra Expo. I was also there for the ESA Family Fun Day on the weekend. They have also spoken publicly on their plans to redevelop the site to provide housing for the local community, with up to 3,200 homes on the table, as well as restaurants, cafes and shops on 17 hectares of land. They would sit alongside racing facilities and complement EPIC to ensure an important events precinct remains for the community. This would be an incredible opportunity to increase housing stock in our city.

On 22 August, the ACT government announced the independent inquiry into the future of the clubs industry. One of the key outcomes of that inquiry will be a pathway for clubs to diversify away from gambling revenue. This will ensure that they remain thriving and sustainable parts of community life. I have no doubt there will be findings that Thoroughbred Park will be able to take from this inquiry to assist in their diversification journey.

I urge members to support the budget unamended.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (12.14): I do not support the ACT government subsidising the horseracing industry at \$8½ million a year and agree that the money should be reprioritised, potentially to the many services Canberrans need—for example, \$1.7 million for respite care at Burrangiri. We have an MOU in place which finishes in two years, and I would like to see the subsidy phased out through the MOU process. So, while I support Ms Clay's intent to stop subsidising the horseracing industry and appreciate her legislating to phase it out at 20 per cent a year, I support a different process to do it. Over the next two years of the MOU, the industry needs to consider how it will be financially sustainable with its share of the betting operations tax and other diversification measures without the \$8½ million in government funding.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (12.15): I thank Ms Clay for her advocacy on this issue, and I agree that this is a conversation that we have to have. I also concur with Ms Carrick's comments. She reflected my position on this. I want to pull out some of the figures that Ms Clay mentioned in the explanatory statement and her remarks. There

is \$8.5 million to the horseracing industry in the current financial year, compared to \$9 million in total for 29 arts organisations and centres. That comparison does not meet community expectations. It is important that we debate and determine, perhaps through a different mechanism than this amendment, how the racing industry should be supported moving forward. There is \$5.2 million in total for elite sports teams. The Raiders, the Brumbies, the Caps and Canberra United are also below the total figure. All the information in the explanatory statement raises some serious questions that Ms Clay reflected on in her remarks. I note the MOU. In 2027, there will be an opportunity to revisit the arrangement and ensure that any future arrangement does meet community expectations.

We are seeing an interesting phenomenon across the board with the diversification of sectors that have historically relied on gaming and gambling. There is quite a lot of talk about diversifying these sectors, and much of that looks like it involves development of land for housing, which is fantastic. Importantly, at the same time, gambling is removed or reduced. I think there is a real risk that, if we densify around hotspots for gambling, we will put more people physically close to risks of gambling harm at a time when we need more social housing in our housing mix. That puts us in an interesting and difficult situation. Many members of the Assembly—Ms Clay included—will be pushing more for social housing in those developments, but then there is a risk that we are building a whole bunch of social housing around poker machines, racing tracks and sites where high-risk gambling will cause quite a lot of harm to people who really cannot afford to experience that harm.

I made an in-principle decision to support the government's budget this year, including elements with which I might disagree, on the basis that I am not in a position to propose an alternative budget. I am not sure whether this is the approach I will take in future years, but it is a decision I made this year, so I will not be supporting this amendment, although I again very much thank Ms Clay for bringing it forward and look forward to this conversation continuing.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (12.18): Whilst I had not intended to contribute to this discussion, I want to highlight that I disagree with a number of the many things the minister just said. We just heard the justification. We generate \$23.7 million from the betting operations tax, and that is nearly three times what the ACT government invests. The minister has laid bare her position, which is that, as long as we are making money from the betting operations tax, it is all fine. That is an extraordinary position for someone who has made considerable public positioning around her concerns about gambling to take. We just heard that, because it is nearly three times what we invest, it is a reasonable return for the ACT government. It is clearly all about gambling. That is only the amount from the betting operations tax, so that is just a portion of what is being spent. This needs to be highlighted in the course of this debate.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (12.19): The Speaker has been a long-term advocate for the racing industry and has held the shadow portfolio for the better part of 10 years. He is not speaking to this debate today, but, if he were, I am sure he would say that the biggest single effect of this amendment would be that dozens of low-paid workers would become unemployed. Some of them would move interstate and get work with interstate trainers, but many would simply become unemployed. Additionally, a number of businesses which rely on business generated by the racing

industry would cease to be viable. The horses currently being trained in the ACT would be picked up by trainers in New South Wales. If Mr Speaker were speaking to this debate, I am quite sure he would say that horseracing, harness racing and greyhound racing are part of the fabric of Australia.

None is the sport of kings, as is often claimed by Ms Clay and others. These are the sports of battlers. The ranks are full of minimum-wage battlers, many of whom do not hold skills to gain employment in other areas. The allocation of funding from the government, which is much lower than the allocation to every other comparable race club in New South Wales and, indeed, is much lower than in any other jurisdiction in the country, provides direct and indirect employment of 500 people. In the past, Ms Clay and her band of progressive warriors have failed to understand that most of the funding to the Racing Club is returned to the community through prize money. They seem to believe that, when it comes to assessing how many jobs are created, we just need to consider the people directly employed by the Racing Club and the Harness Racing Club.

Ms Clay talked about attendance figures. I can tell you that the total attendance at events conducted by the Canberra Racing Club for the year is tracking towards 100,000. It is far in excess of, for argument's sake, the National Folk Festival.

We will not be supporting this amendment and we think that it is time for the Greens to find another obsession.

Question put:

That **Ms Clay's** amendment No 2 be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 4

Andrew Braddock
Jo Clay
Laura Nuttall
Shane Rattenbury

Noes 19

Andrew Barr	Elizabeth Lee
Chiaka Barry	James Milligan
Yvette Berry	Suzanne Orr
Peter Cain	Mark Parton
Fiona Carrick	Marisa Paterson
Leanne Castley	Michael Pettersson
Tara Cheyne	Chris Steel
Ed Cocks	Caitlin Tough
Thomas Emerson	Taimus Werner-Gibbings
Jeremy Hanson	

Question resolved in the negative.

Ms Clay's amendment No 2 negatived.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Sitting suspended from 12.26 to 2 pm.

Questions without notice**Health—walk-in clinics**

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, what effect will the commonwealth's recent announcement of three new bulk-billed GP clinics have on the operation and cost of your walk-in centres?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I cannot see any reason why it would have any cost.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, will these three new bulk-billed clinics reduce the number of patients seeking care at the walk-in clinics?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Castley for the question because it gives me an opportunity to explain that walk-in centres are quite different to the general operation of general practice, so while the walk-in centres do see some minor injuries and illness that could be treated in general practice, primary care is really about ongoing family care for individuals and families over their life course. What additional bulk-billing general practices in the ACT will really do for our health system is ensure that people are getting that early intervention, that preventive care and the support for chronic illness and complex conditions that general practitioners are so important in delivering.

MR COCKS: Minister, will you commit to an independent evaluation of walk-in clinics to ensure that ACT taxpayers are receiving the best health services and outcomes for their taxes?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Cocks for the question. I know that the opposition would seem to like us to spend all our health resources on various inquiries and investigations, but we are in fact already undertaking an inquiry, which was called for by this place, into a range of activities across our health system.

Mr Walsh, who is chairing that inquiry, has already visited Weston Creek Walk-in Centre. I would invite Ms Castley to respond to Mr Walsh's correspondence inviting her to a meeting, and to meet with him. If she thinks that walk-in centres should be an area of focus for his inquiry, she is more than welcome to raise that with him.

He is looking at a lot of areas of the health system, including its cost-effectiveness, efficiency and data, so I have no doubt that that will factor into his considerations as well. In the meantime, our walk-in centres continue to evaluate what they are doing on an ongoing basis. We have heard the calls from people, and we will continue to look into that as well.

Digital Health Record system

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. A *Region* article published today quoted the minister as saying that the need for written consent from patients to allow the sharing of medical records was a "practical barrier" to increased uptake of the DHR and that legislative reforms were being considered. Minister, will you assure Canberrans that their full informed consent will always be required before patient records are added to the Digital Health Record?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: This question demonstrates that Ms Castley does not appear to understand the difference between the Digital Health Record and the national My Health Record, which is an opt-out system and people can choose to have information added to it. The Digital Health Record is the electronic medical record system for Canberra Health Services. We have been through this many times. People do not have the opportunity to opt out of their clinical information being included in the electronic medical record that Canberra Health Services uses to treat them. What they do have the capacity to consent to or not consent to is other people's access to that information. This is in the context of, for example, general practitioners or specialists having access to the ACT government's Digital Health Record system to ensure integrated care.

It is something that we debated in the Assembly the other week as a result of a motion from Mr Rattenbury. I went into detail at that time. I assume that is what *Region* has used to inform their article, so I would refer Ms Castley to the *Hansard* of that debate, where I went into detail about some of the issues and challenges in relation to consent and what we were considering doing about it.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, what evidence is there to suggest that written consent is the problem, rather than lack of confidence by the community in the government's IT systems?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: This is based on feedback from general practitioners who would like to be able to access the Digital Health Record to deliver integrated care to their patients who also receive care in Canberra Health Services and other places that have access to the Digital Health Record. Their feedback is that the process of having to go through the step of written consent is a barrier, particularly for patients with complex and chronic conditions where that whole process can take some time. That is what we are looking at. Again, I would refer Ms Castley back to the long debate that we had on this exact issue and the comments that I made about that at the time.

MR HANSON: Minister, why should patients have confidence that their personal information will be protected in DHR, given the government's recent failures to protect personal information in the MyWay+ system?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: There is no suggestion that people's personal health information is at risk in the Digital Health Record. While there is always the chance of human error, which occurs in all types of medical record systems, whether they are electronic or paper records—incorrect sharing of information by mistake or, indeed, deliberate access to information by someone who should not have it—one of the great things about the Digital Health Record is that it tracks all access to information. It can pick up when someone is accessing information that they do not need to have access to for a clinical reason, in a way that you would never be able to track with, for example, paper records or where you potentially have some disjointed electronic medical records that do not have the same level of security. I can assure members of this place and I can assure the Canberra public that the security of people's personal health information was absolutely top of the list in implementing the Digital Health Record system.

Gambling—cashless gaming

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the Minister for Gaming Reform. Minister,

earlier this year you undertook a visit to cashless gaming trial venues in New South Wales. What insights and lessons did you gather from those visits?

DR PATERSON: I thank the member for the question. Yes, earlier this year I went to New South Wales and met with the New South Wales government and their implementation committee around cashless gaming for their trials, and I visited the Canterbury Bankstown club and saw their cashless system.

There were quite a lot of learnings that I took from this trip, including that the implementation of account-based gaming needs to be mandatory across all venues. What seems to have not worked in New South Wales is the voluntary nature of the implementation. I also learnt that young people, particularly, take up the account-based gaming. They are very used to transactions on their mobile phones. So this provided them a way of engaging with gaming machines with technology that they were quite comfortable with. I also learnt that it is preferable for there to be a transition period, to see that people are aware of the technology and are able to understand how it works before it is implemented.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, are you aware of what the expected completion date is for the trials in New South Wales?

DR PATERSON: No.

MS CLAY: Minister, what will be the cost for clubs in the ACT to implement your account-based cashless gaming model, given you have specified that the club industry is expected to meet the implementation costs?

DR PATERSON: That is a matter for the clubs. As Ms Clay said, the clubs will have to cover the costs of implementation of cashless account-based gambling. It is a matter for the clubs in terms of which provider they go with.

Light rail—roads—Commonwealth Avenue

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Transport. Minister, why did the government rebuild the road connection along Commonwealth Avenue during the London Circuit works—why did that work occur without including the light rail tracks for stage 2A?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. The raising London Circuit project was a separate project to stage 2A. Some of the benefits for the project included that it would provide a platform for future light rail to move from London Circuit on to Commonwealth Avenue, noting that there is quite a significant grade difference of up to six metres in between the two roads. There was a benefit that the government considered as part of considering whether this work should occur as part of the light rail project or separately in providing wider benefits in connecting the city to the lake. There was also the benefit of separately procuring this work and potentially getting a better price for the project by undertaking a separate procurement for the raising London Circuit project rather than through the stage 2A extension, which ultimately became an extension or augmentation of the existing PPP arrangement for stage 1 of light rail.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, how much extra will it cost in time and money to dig up and rebuild that road again to lay the tracks?

MR STEEL: Well, a significant amount of earthwork was undertaken for the Raising London Circuit project to move in earth to be able to fill in the gap between London Circuit and Commonwealth Avenue and that will remain as part of the stage 2A project. The tracks will be built on top of that earthwork that has been undertaken. As part of the design of raising London Circuit, it was designed so that minimal abortive works need to be undertaken. The light rail stage 2A contractors can lay their tracks with minimal impact on what has already been built as part of the raising London Circuit project which, as many members of the Assembly and the community have seen, has made a significant improvement to the streetscape around London Circuit, both east and west.

Ms Castley: Relevance. The minister did not answer my question at all.

MR SPEAKER: You are saying, point of order on relevance?

Ms Castley: Yes, point of order on relevance. “Dirt has been brought in” that was all the minister could give us. How much extra time and cost—

MR SPEAKER: Unless the minister wants to add more, I think that he did answer the question. He did not come up with a cost but he suggested there would be minimal extra work that would be needed. I am not going to say that that was—the minister is free to add to the answer if he wants to? No, all right.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, why did the ACT government not plan these works so the road would only need to be built once, instead of subjecting commuters to multiple disruptions?

MR STEEL: We did consider that as part of the design. The further works on stage 2A were factored into the design of raising London Circuit to minimise the amount of abortive works that would be required and to make sure the territory got best value for money on the procurement that we undertook separately for the raising London Circuit project.

Transport Canberra—patronage

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Transport. It has now been almost exactly one year since the government last published new public transport data.

Why has the government stopped transparently reporting on-time performance, daily passenger journeys and other statistics?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. This is a matter that is still part of the transition to the MyWay+ system. It is a responsibility of NEC under the contract to provide that data. It is being tracked, but it has not yet been provided to Transport Canberra in a form that can be published, such as through the open access data portal, where that data is usually made publicly available. We intend to publish that as soon as

it is provided in the right format.

Other improvements to MyWay+ are a priority ahead of that patronage data being published. But we do expect that to be published as soon as possible, and I look forward to providing the Assembly with an update on that once I have an expected timeframe. It is also expected that the data across the entire year since MyWay+ became operational will be published.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, when do you expect the data to arrive in the right format? Will it be this year? Next year? And will it continue to be reported on?

MR STEEL: I expect it this year, but I will take that on notice and provide an update if there is a further, more direct timeframe on when that may be occurring. But it is part of the contract we have with NEC to deliver that.

MR HANSON: Minister, is there a reason you do not want people to know about public transport usage for the period around the botched implementation of MyWay+?

MR STEEL: No.

Environment—light pollution

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the minister for city services. Minister, a petition to the commonwealth House of Representatives calling for national legislation for light pollution regulation and dark sky preservation received over 12,000 signatures, showing a strong support in the community for addressing light pollution and ensuring we can see the stars at night. The chief petitioner stated that we are seeing, at the moment, anywhere from a five to 10 per cent increase in light pollution per year.

Minister, what is the government doing to reduce light pollution in Canberra?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Braddock for the question. Light pollution is already explicitly recognised in the ACT as a form of environmental nuisance. That is under the Environmental Protection Act 1997, and the definition of that is an unreasonable interference with the enjoyment of a place or area by the public, section of the public or an individual. It could be caused by noise or anything else—light, of course—that is polluting someone's amenity or their public enjoyment, and that may be subject to regulatory action—and, of course, that is published in our annual reports each year.

In terms of public lighting installations, minimising light pollution is a major consideration. There are lighting standards and specifications that are published online, which I can make available to Mr Braddock, but, in particular, the biggest opportunity for us has been through upgrading our streetlight network. Many members will recall that it was in 2018 that we entered into an energy performance contract for the maintenance and upgrade of our network. There are smart nodes throughout our network, and many of our lights in our network can be dimmed. There was a large-scale trial conducted in the Molonglo Valley, with 800 lights being dimmed in Wright, Coombs and Denman Prospect in February 2023, demonstrating the large-scale dimming capability of the network, and there are other options that are being explored, including on arterial and collector roads like Athllon Drive, as well as a localised trial

in a cul-de-sac in Throsby.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister why are these efforts not working, if light pollution continues to get worse by five to 10 per cent each year?

MS CHEYNE: I am not sure I would agree with Mr Braddock's characterisation, because I think he is referring to a national petition that is talking about light pollution across Australia. In the ACT—

Mr Braddock: A point of order, Mr Speaker.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, Mr Braddock?

Mr Braddock: That assertion was from an astronomer at Mount Stromlo Observatory; that is not my observation. It was Canberra based.

MS CHEYNE: I am happy to withdraw that. I am sorry if I misheard Mr Braddock, and I apologise to him. What I would note is that the upgrading of our network and our streetlight network is still a work in progress. We are only part way through. There has been a considerable amount of work undertaken to get to this point, but there is still more to do.

Of course, we do have new suburbs coming on, and you would expect that there would be an increase in light as a result, but I would again point Mr Braddock to the outcomes of that trial from February 2023. That was in the astronomical society journal that was published in March. The adaptive, variable and on-demand dimming of streetlighting is being considered on arterial and collector roads. You may not know—or maybe you do, Mr Speaker—that there has been a trial over the last 12 months with streetlights along a section of Athllon Drive that have been dimmed between 11 pm and 5 am. There have been no community complaints or demonstrated impact on road safety objectives, which of course is what we are seeking to balance in areas like that. There is more to do, but in the meantime, we are trialling this new technology, and I think it is having a good impact.

MS CLAY: Minister, when is the next review of lighting standards in the ACT scheduled to occur?

MS CHEYNE: I will take that question on notice, generally, but what I would note is that the energy performance contract is coming up for renewal or tender. I expect that there will be a contract executed within the next 12 months, and that will further increase the number of smart nodes that are available, which in turn will increase the number of options we have to explore how we can ensure that the lighting mix in the ACT is appropriate.

Schools—heating and cooling

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood. Minister, in the 2024 ACT election, ACT Labor promised \$30 million for the installation of heating and cooling in ACT public schools. Minister, how many schools

will be recipients of this funding?

MS BERRY: I do not have the actual number on me at the moment. I will take that question on notice and bring back the details.

MR HANSON: Minister, can you advise when the work will be completed, in terms of upgrading heating and cooling in those schools?

MS BERRY: Yes, I can do that, noting that the start times for the schools that will be provided with the electrification program, the \$30 million, will vary. I will bring to the Assembly whatever information I have.

MS BARRY: Minister, will \$30 million meet the full need for heating and cooling systems within ACT public schools?

MS BERRY: No, but it will have a big impact on schools that will require that work. In the meantime, the ACT government continues to work on other ACT government schools that require heating and cooling upgrades. That work will continue, alongside the \$30 million.

Canberra Hospital—parking

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for Health and for Infrastructure Canberra about congestion and car parking at Canberra Hospital. Prior to the last election, ACT Labor made a commitment to deliver a new multistorey car park on Yamba Drive to “make it easier for staff, patients and visitors”, saying:

We will explore options to work with non-government partners to deliver the new car park for the Hospital, with construction expected to start in the next term—

which is this term.

Minister, in recent hearings about proposed amendments to the appropriation bill for the Calvary addendum, you advised that there was currently no capital provision for this multistorey car park. Minister, given your election commitment to commence construction of this car park during this term and the serious pressure on parking availability at the hospital, when will you go to tender to plan the new multistorey car park on the north side of Canberra Hospital?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Carrick for the question and for her interest in parking at Canberra Hospital—something about which I am obviously also very interested. I can assure Ms Carrick that work is funded in the budget and is getting underway in relation to improving car parking at Canberra Hospital, and that includes funding to create more parking availability, both at the former CIT site, where Multiplex staff were previously parking for the Canberra Hospital expansion, and on the former helipad site. That work is funded in the current budget.

In terms of a new multistorey car park on Yamba Drive, that work continues. We have not determined the delivery model yet, so there is no funding in the budget, because we do not know whether it will be delivered as a capital project by the ACT government,

which will require capital funding in the budget, or whether it will be delivered under some other delivery model. Ms Carrick referred to our election commitment, where we referred to potentially working with other partners in the delivery of that project.

MS CARRICK: Minister, when do you anticipate construction will commence for this car park?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: In line with our election commitment, in this term of government.

MR EMERSON: Minister, has any consideration been given to providing a shuttle bus to connect all parts of the hospital campus with the Woden bus interchange to provide more transport options for hospital visitors?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: There have been previous conversations in relation to this. There is a shuttle bus that travels around the campus and connects the campus to the former CIT car park. We now have a new bus stop that has opened at the Yamba Drive entrance of the Canberra Hospital. A number of buses go past that in both directions, including from the Woden interchange. The R6 and the 56—am I right about that, Mr Steel?—both go past there. When we did the opening of the Yamba Drive entrance, the buses were there very frequently. I am not sure what the value would be of an additional specific shuttle, given the regularity with which buses travel between Woden interchange and the Yamba Drive entrance to the hospital.

Community events—ACT Seniors and Better Ageing Expo

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for Seniors and Veterans. Minister, I understand the ACT Council on the Ageing's 2025 ACT Seniors and Better Ageing Expo is set to kick off tomorrow. How has this government supported COTA to deliver the expo and what is its significance to aging Canberrans, their families and their carers?

MS ORR: Mr Werner-Gibbings is correct: it does kick off tomorrow, and I look forward to attending the expo. The ACT government is committed to supporting our older Canberrans, particularly guided by the principles of inclusion, dignity, respect and active aging. This includes funding under this initiative to support the delivery of the ACT Seniors and Better Ageing Expo. This is through the ACT government's Silver is Gold program, which is delivered by COTA.

The ACT Seniors and Better Ageing Expo is something of a local institution. Having begun in the early 1990s at the Ainslie Arts Centre and continuing on to the Hughes Community Centre Hall, the expo has become one of the largest events in the ACT specifically for people over 50. It gives everyone an opportunity to come together and to connect with businesses, government agencies and community organisations that provide valuable resources and information to support their wellbeing and day-to-day lives.

The expo is all-inclusive. It is a sociable event and it features something for everyone at any stage of the aging journey. I encourage anyone who can attend to pop along and make a day of it.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, what are your expectations for tomorrow's expo with respect to attendance and exhibitors?

MS ORR: I have been advised that there are over 150 exhibition sites and thousands of attendees expected. My expectation when I go to have a look is that I probably will not buy a bed, the way my parents did last year. But they very much enjoyed having something that suits their needs and being able to get that information. There is also lots of entertainment and lots of food and drink vendors there, just for everyone to go out and be social and to hear about things that suit Canberrans as they age and know that our community is important, inclusive and connected.

MS TOUGH: Minister, does the government support COTA to deliver any other major community events for seniors?

MS ORR: Yes, we are partnering with COTA to deliver some other programs as well, including UPSTAGEING Canberra, which is a seniors arts festival. This will be run in March 2026 with grants now open and supporting participation. This will be Australia's first dedicated arts festival developed by, and aimed at, older people. The festival will work to dismantle barriers to creative and artistic expression for older people, while showcasing exceptional, emergent and established work underway in support of older people's creativity.

As well as this, one of the other exciting community events for seniors that we do is the National Film and Sound Archives dementia-friendly community film screening program, which is called A Day at the Movies. This program is an ACT government initiative that has been designed for the comfort of people living with dementia and their families, friends and carers. It is there to support their continued participation in community life. Carers can receive a free ticket, courtesy of Carers ACT and guests can expect to be welcomed by specifically trained staff who will be on hand throughout the showing, movies that meet dementia-friendly programming guidelines, low lighting, extra wayfinding and signage, reduced sound levels, a dedicated quiet space, a 10-minute intermission and refreshments before and after in the garden courtyard.

The next screening, which is on 19 October, will show *Send me no flowers*. Tickets are available now on the National Film and Sound Archive's website. I again encourage anyone who can to pop along and enjoy.

Lakes and waterways—Sullivans Creek

MR EMERSON: My question is for the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water. Minister, in response to a question asked during estimates about the renaturalisation of Sullivans Creek, you indicated the project would cost roughly \$300 million. How did the government calculate this cost?

MS ORR: I will take that on notice. I would just note that that question was answered by officials not myself. So I will seek from them an update as to how they came to those calculations.

MR EMERSON: Point of order. I believe the minister's signature is on—

MR SPEAKER: Sorry, your point of order is on?

MR EMERSON: The minister's signature was on the question.

MR SPEAKER: My understanding is that Ms Orr has taken the question on notice. That is correct isn't it?

MS ORR: Mr Speaker, just for the avoidance of doubt and so that we can move on, I was referring to the commentary that was provided during the estimates hearings on this matter. I think Mr Emerson is referring subsequently to a question taken on notice which, yes, I did sign, but that was on the advice of the directorate. Either way, I will still take the question on notice and will come back to him.

MR EMERSON: Minister, did the government consider progressively naturalising subsections of the creek to mitigate a large upfront cost, and if not, why not?

MS ORR: This project was actually undertaken in the last term of government, so I was not necessarily a party to the actual specifics as to what considerations were made. What I am advised is that the options paper that the previous minister had taken continues to inform the work of the government where possible and where relevant. It is something that we will continue to work towards in an aspirational capacity, as the previous minister stated, but it is not a specific policy of government to be implementing all the recommendations of these particular option papers.

MS CARRICK: Minister, did the government include in its costing the economic impact of potential flooding of Sullivans Creek and of poor water quality resulting from leaving the creek as it is?

MS ORR: Again, Mr Speaker, I will have to take that on notice.

Housing—National Housing Accord

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Homes and New Suburbs. Minister, under the National Housing Accord the ACT government has committed to a target of 30,000 dwellings by 2030—around 5,000 per year. But from July 2024 to June 2025 only 2,731 were approved and only 3,129 were completed. The Property Council says:

Approvals are falling off a cliff, projects are being shelved, and we're on track for the lowest housing delivery in 20 years.

Minister, when will the ACT start delivering on the 5,000 homes each year to meet the requirements of the Housing Accord?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Clay for her interest in the Housing Accord. I note that the government's commitment was not to build 5,000 per year but to complete 30,000 by 2030. That is still our target, and it is still our intention to achieve that.

MS CLAY: When will new home approvals and completions start rising?

MS BERRY: That is a hypothetical, Mr Speaker. I could not possibly answer on what is going to happen in the future.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, do you have annual targets within your 2030 target?

MS BERRY: The land release program provides information on the land release targets for contributing to our 2030 target of 30,000 homes.

Roads—safety

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. In the Road Safety Action Plan 2024-25, the government promised to use the federal Black Spots Program to help improve road safety in Canberra. However, according to the federal infrastructure investment website, 246 projects across Australia were supported by the Black Spots Program in 2024-25 and not a single project was in the ACT.

Can the Minister confirm whether the ACT received any funding for new road safety projects under the Black Spots Program in the 2024-25 financial year?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Milligan for the question. We receive support from the commonwealth government through a range of different funding streams, and of course there are some enormous projects that will improve safety that we are proud to partner with the commonwealth government on. As to the exact question, I will take that on notice.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, did the ACT government submit any requests for support under the federal Black Spots Program during the 2024-2025 financial year?

MS CHEYNE: I will also take that on notice.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, does the failure to receive any new funding for road safety improvements, despite the promise to do so, indicate the government's inability to secure the best road safety outcomes for Canberra?

MS CHEYNE: I would refer Ms Castley to the first answer I gave. There is an enormous amount of funding being provided from the commonwealth parliament and the commonwealth government through a range of different initiatives, including some huge partnerships such as the Molonglo River Bridge, the Monaro Highway and, of course, William Hovell Drive. These are projects worth multi hundreds of millions of dollars—just in those three alone. Ultimately, they will contribute to safety. So I reject the premise of the question.

Land—land release

MS BARRY: My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. In May 2020, Sanatan Samaj Australia asked your government for land for a temple and community space. There has been no progress on this request. What are the impediments to and

timeframe for consideration of this proposal?

MR STEEL: I will take the question. I reject the premise of the question, because there has been progress. The ACT government committed to release more community facilities land through the land release program. An expression of interest process was run. I provided quite a bit of information, both during the estimates hearing and on notice, about the outcomes of that expression of interest process.

I encourage the member to have a look at that answer. We did put out land, including a site identified in the future Molonglo town centre, which will form part of the future subdivision planning for the new town centre. There were specific land use requirements on certain blocks that were released. There were around six in total that specifically identified places of religious worship, to enable community groups like Sanatan Samaj to be able to apply. I understand that they did, and there is some further information on there. They have been notified of the outcome of that first stage of the two-stage process.

MS BARRY: Minister, what options have you provided to the community while these considerations are underway?

MR STEEL: I have encouraged those community groups to explore the range of other community facilities that are available, and where they may wish to undertake their religious activities. That may be in both government facilities, through Infrastructure Canberra places and spaces, or indeed through other community services, non-government service providers, and the infrastructure and land that they have available, some of which is underutilised. I have encouraged many groups that come to government asking for land to also consider how they could work with some of those providers, where they do have underutilised land, to potentially build their projects, noting that there is a scarcity of land generally in the ACT. The ACT government has also identified more land for community facilities in the most recent housing supply and land release program. That will, again, go out to those organisations for an expression of interest process this financial year. We will continue to look for further opportunities for those organisations to apply for other blocks in the future as well.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, how can your government say it supports multiculturalism when it clearly does not prioritise the spiritual needs of different migrant communities?

MR STEEL: I reject the premise of the question. We are providing opportunities for religious organisations to be able to apply for land that is suitable for their needs. That is done through a fair, merit-based process, as set out under the Planning Act and regulation, which is a two-stage expression of interest process, noting that there are more organisations than just Sanatan Samaj that are interested in land. There is a huge number. I get requests for meetings all the time from them. I take the requests and listen to them, and show them the process that they need to walk through. We make sure that they have the information that they need, and that they are on the list with the City and Environment Directorate, so that they can be updated when the opportunities are made available.

The old system was not working. It was a first-cab-off-the-rank system where there was a long list of organisations, and it did not matter what the merit of those organisations

was, it would only be the person who had waited the longest for the land that got the land. That is not the process that we are running. We have a fair, merit-based system, and that is what is being applied.

Taxation—rates and levies

MR HANSON: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, my constituents in Murrumbidgee face the highest rates in the territory. They are your constituents too. This has only got worse under your budget, with some suburbs facing increases of up to 18 per cent in their rates. Treasurer, how much of these rates increases are actually for servicing interest payments on government debt?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. I point him to the budget papers, where all of the information is contained around the amount of interest that we are paying on the territory's debt. That debt is there because, during the pandemic, we provided support for the community and businesses at a time when they needed it most and because the ACT government has been investing in generational infrastructure for our city that we all benefit from. That includes health infrastructure—a new hospital that we built in my electorate, in Murrumbidgee, to service the whole city—investment in better public transport services and investment in upgrading schools, such as in Garran, for example, and the work that is being undertaken to upgrade schools in the Inner South. These are all required investments to support our growing population, and rates are one contribution to that.

This year, we have been very clear that rates will increase by an average of 3.75 per cent, but the proportion that is paid by ratepayers is based on the land value of their rateable property. Therefore, areas which have a higher-than-average unimproved value, averaged over five years, will make a greater contribution through rates than other parts of Canberra where the value of properties is lower. It is a very progressive system that makes sure that the landowners who can afford to pay more are generally charged more in rates to make a contribution to the services and infrastructure that our community needs.

MR HANSON: Treasurer, what do you say to my constituents who say that they are paying more but are increasingly getting less from this government?

MR STEEL: I reject the premise of the question. They are getting more under our government. What I would say to them is that we are investing in the hospital services that we all use at some time in our life, whether it is when we are born, right through our life cycle and when we age. In our electorate, we have the oldest community in Canberra and they will be consuming healthcare services more than perhaps any other part of the ACT. We are investing \$1.19 billion in this budget to support those services and the extra activity, part of which is driven by those macro factors of an aging population and the comorbidities that are being presented in our healthcare system. We are making a direct investment in the budget, and it demonstrates that the amount that people contribute to public services—including people in my electorate—is being invested in services that we all use.

MR COCKS: Treasurer, how do you justify increasing rates by 18 per cent in any suburb, especially when people are already paying more than they would on the North

Shore of Sydney?

MR STEEL: Firstly, I again reject the premise of the question, because it is comparing us to a local government when we have territory functions. We operate and deliver healthcare services in the ACT. I am sure that the North Shore is not running a hospital. In fact, I believe it is now being purchased by the New South Wales state government to bring it back into public hands. Our Labor government is investing in healthcare services. That has required us to make some difficult decisions. We were very up-front about one of those decisions—that, under our progressive rate system, those who own land that is worth \$1 million or more would make a greater contribution than those with land of a lower value. We would certainly be of the view that that is good in a progressive system—that those with generally more means contribute more to the cost of delivering services and infrastructure for the whole community.

Environment—Monaro Rock quarry

MISS NUTTALL: I hope my question is to the Minister for Planning. It is about the Monaro Rock quarry. Minister, I have had a number of constituents approach me because they are really concerned about the proposed development application for the Monaro Rock quarry. They are worried about silica dust polluting our air in Tuggeranong, the loud sounds and shaking grounds from blasting and crushing, the clearing of 22 hectares of endangered box-gum grassy woodland, heavy daily traffic along the Monaro and more. Despite being in New South Wales, this proposed quarry is within three kilometres of some Theodore residents. Minister, what community consultation has the ACT government specifically done given the likely impact of this quarry on Tuggeranong residents?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. This is not an ACT government project, and so we are not going to be consulting with the community about a project which is not ours. But what we have done, through the City and Environment Directorate, is review the environmental impact statement that is associated with that project to understand the potential impacts on the ACT. On 22 September this year, the City and Environment Directorate representative provided the New South Wales government with comments regarding the proposed development in the EIS. This included comments from relevant entities covered, including water quality; erosion and sediment controls; issues of air quality; dust, noise and vibration impacts; fire management issues; heritage; and additional application requirements for development within the ACT—because there would be, as a part of their project, a development application required if they wish to access the Monaro Highway across the border, although I believe that development application has not yet come forward. That would provide another opportunity for the community to have their say through the Territory Planning Authority's assessment process.

We will continue to engage with the New South Wales Department of Planning and Environment on the matter and, of course, consider any comments received.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, have you or anyone in the ACT government lodged a formal submission to that development application on the NSW Planning Portal?

MR STEEL: In 2021, the New South Wales Department of Planning and Environment

consulted on the Planning Secretary's Environmental Assessment Requirements, which are the scoping requirements for an EIS—which is known as SEARs. EPSD provided comments on the SEARs and raised matters to be addressed in the EIS. As a result, the DPE issued an amended SEARs, and the proponent has now submitted an EIS to the New South Wales department for their assessment. As I mentioned before, the City and Environment Directorate has been engaging in this stage in relation to the proposed development and the EIS in relation to the matters that I mentioned in my previous answer.

Miss Nuttall: On a point of order under standing order 118AA: the question was whether the ACT government has specifically made a submission to the New South Wales Planning Portal. I did not catch that in the minister's answer.

MR SPEAKER: Minister, if you—

MR STEEL: The answer is: yes, we have made comments.

MR SPEAKER: I can consider that point of order regarding 118AA, but my belief is that the minister referred to the ACT government participating in the pre-EIS. If you would like us to have a look at it, we certainly will.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, what due diligence and investigations have you done to understand the impact on the ACT's road infrastructure and traffic management where the proposed access point will intersect with the Monaro Highway?

MR STEEL: That would be assessed as part of any future development application, and it would be up to the proponent to provide information to support their assessment. Of course, as part of the assessment of a development application, referral entities across government would be contacted to seek their views on the project and address any issues that they see and ask for further due diligence to be undertaken by the proponent to be able to assess the project. As I understand it, a development application has not yet been lodged with the authority. But, once it is, it will then be assessed according to the requirements in the Territory Plan and the Planning Act.

I also note that the Monaro Highway corridor is also in a designated area. So it also falls into the jurisdiction of the National Capital Authority and requires a works approval, providing another opportunity for community consultation through that process potentially.

Economy—performance

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Treasurer. Treasurer, can you please provide an update to the Assembly on recent economic indicators for Canberra?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Tough for her question and her interest in the economic indicators for the ACT. As both the ACT budget and also Standard & Poor's recent assessment of the ACT's budget show, Canberra has a strong and resilient economy. I am pleased to provide the Assembly with an update on recent economic indicators, noting that there are a lot of positive signs for our economy, following some challenges

and pressures in recent years.

The June quarter state final demand data shows improvement to both public and private demand. The recovery of household consumption for the June quarter is across both discretionary and essential categories, and similarly, there is strength in private investment in both dwelling and non-dwelling investment. Just noting the previous question to Minister Berry, we have actually seen quite a significant rebound in terms of the number of dwellings in the ACT. We are now seeing a quarterly increase of 1400. If you times that by four and times it by five you get above the national housing target which is a requirement under the National Housing Accord—to answer a member's previous question.

Household spending has also risen for the third consecutive month in July, driven by a one per cent increase in services spending. As Canberrans benefit from reduced interest rates and strong wages growth, I would hope that we will continue to see an increase in household spending. For those Canberrans getting a tax return, consider supporting local businesses.

In other indicators, in June we saw a strong rise in the amount of construction work done. This was broad-based reflecting engineering work and residential and commercial work. Public and private engineering work has grown strongly in the ACT over the last three quarters. Similarly, dwelling approvals continue to trend upwards in the ACT, particularly as we see a good monetary environment. *(Time expired)*.

MS TOUGH: Treasurer, what impact does a strong economy have on Canberrans' wages?

MR STEEL: A strong workforce means a strong economy and the ACT continues to enjoy one of the lowest unemployment rates in the country. As members will know, low unemployment provides a range of benefits to the ACT community. It can create real pressure for positive wages growth. In recent months we have seen some very positive signs for wages in the territory. Average weekly ordinary time earnings rose by 2.6 per cent in the six months to May 2025. This is the second highest rise of jurisdictions within Australian states and territories in terms of trends, and this followed a 2.2 per cent increase in the previous six months to November 2024.

Another positive aspect is that female earnings rates have grown faster than male earnings. We know that there is a gender pay gap across the country, but I am pleased to inform the Assembly that the ACT had some positive progress in this regard. I am also pleased to update members that this has reduced from 7.4 per cent to 6.9 per cent from November 2024. There is still more work to do to bridge the gender pay gap but this is a very positive sign that wages in the territory continue to track in the right direction.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Treasurer, following the strong wage growth for Canberrans can you provide information on how this has affected different Canberrans?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his supplementary. Strong wage growth means that workers in Canberra will be able to get more out of each pay packet. We know that real wages are growing and inflation is decreasing. This is good news for

anyone who is working in the territory, as more jobs means more choice and opportunities with regard to employment. After a difficult period of high inflation, we are now seeing positive signs of low unemployment, increasing wages and lower interest rates.

In my previous answer I indicated there is some positive news for the engineering and construction sectors as this means more opportunities in these fields. However, there are also flow-on effects as greater activity for engineers and construction sector workers will translate to more infrastructure delivery for the territory.

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

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

Environment—light pollution

MS CHEYNE: In response to Ms Clay's question on when the lighting standards will next be reviewed, the answer is January 2026.

Horseracing industry—work health and safety

MR PETTERSSON: I have some information in relation to some questions I took on notice last week about the horseracing and training industry. The question was: has the horseracing industry implemented every safety order made by WorkSafe, and is the horseracing industry fully compliant with the Work Health and Safety Act and Workers Compensation Act?

In response to the member's questions, which I took on notice, I am advised by WorkSafe ACT that they have had 22 regulatory interactions with the horseracing and training industry since 2021. These interactions have been in response to both notifiable incidents and complaints made to WorkSafe ACT around various safety matters. The nature of the sector is high risk. After each interaction, WorkSafe ACT has reviewed safety systems in place for the relevant PCBU. Out of this, five formal regulatory notices have been issued, and all have been complied with.

In relation to workers compensation, I am advised that, in relation to non-compliance with the Workers Compensation Act, WorkSafe ACT has not been advised of or identified specific breaches of the act in this time. However, government has separately identified that the number of declared workers has reduced over time. This is reflected in the total wages insured and estimated headcount data, indicating people working in this sector are being relocated to New South Wales. This poses an increased risk of under-insurance for those workers who may be properly characterised as ACT workers. It is on this data that I am concerned about underlying compliance within the sector.

WorkSafe ACT continues to prioritise the safety of vulnerable workers under their strategic plan. This includes young workers, who are a significant cohort in the horse training industry. This continued regulatory focus is not, however, the sole approach to this problem. The determined indemnity pathway, as discussed in relation to Workplace Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (No 2), does not negate the safety responsibilities and obligations of employers in the horse training sector. The continued expectation for the horse training industry, as with all industries in the ACT, is that they eliminate risks

to workplace health and safety as much as possible.

Through this pathway, the ACT government will have direct oversight of participants. We will be able to understand who is in this sector and be assured that they are appropriately provided with workers compensation protection.

Environment—Monaro Rock quarry—standing order 118AA

MR SPEAKER: I want to reiterate that the Clerk and I will be assessing the supplementary question on which Miss Nuttall raised the 118AA. We will have a look at it when the *Hansard* comes out, and we will give a response before the end of the day.

Papers

Ms Cheyne, pursuant to standing order 211, presented the following papers:

Cemeteries and Crematoria Act—Cemeteries and Crematoria (Governing Board)

Appointment 2025 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-251 (LR, 15 September 2025).

Electricity Safety Act—Electricity Safety (Light Rail Regulated Utility - Stage 2A)

Exemption 2025—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-245 (LR, 4 September 2025).

Emergencies Act—Emergencies (Strategic Bushfire Management) Plan 2025—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-249 (LR, 11 September 2025).

Environment Protection Act—Environment Protection (Industrial Chemicals) Amendment Regulation 2025 (No 1), including a regulatory impact statement—Subordinate Law SL2025-17 (LR, 11 September 2025).

Gene Technology (GM Crop Moratorium) Act—Gene Technology (GM Crop Moratorium) Advisory Council Appointment 2025 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-250 (LR, 11 September 2025).

Government Procurement Act—Government Procurement (Non-Public Employee Member) Appointment 2025 (No 3)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-247 (LR, 11 September 2025).

Planning Act—Planning (General) Amendment Regulation 2025 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2025-18 (LR, 11 September 2025).

Property Developers Act—Property Developers (Relevant Property Developer) Code of Practice 2025—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-248 (LR, 8 September 2025).

Racing Act—Racing Appeals Tribunal Appointment 2025 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2025-246 (LR, 8 September 2025).

Voluntary Assisted Dying Act—Voluntary Assisted Dying Regulation 2025—Subordinate Law SL2025-19 (LR, 11 September 2025).

Climate change—adaptation and emissions reduction

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (2.58): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the significance of climate change as a global issue impacting cities worldwide;
- (b) the first National Climate Risk Assessment, released on 15 September 2025, and the national emission reduction target of 62 to 70 percent by 2035, released on 18 September 2025, by the Commonwealth Government;
- (c) that despite efforts to reduce emissions, a very significant level of global warming has already occurred and been locked in, which will increase the incidence and severity of extreme weather events, including heatwaves and severe storms;
- (d) that adapting to climate change is no substitute for efforts to reduce direct and indirect emissions as a part of the global effort to limit global warming, but will be necessary in conjunction with continued mitigation efforts;
- (e) that previous climate strategies have achieved a lot in the ACT for emissions reduction, and climate adaptation policy is becoming an increasingly important area for government attention in the next strategy;
- (f) that since the election, the Government has created the position of a Government Landscape Architect, which will necessarily operate in the context of climate adaptation policy;
- (g) the ACT's Living Infrastructure Plan contains goals and actions including city-cooling initiatives and the development of landscape plans, which should remain an ongoing focus for the Government; and
- (h) that climate-proofing new and existing buildings can help maintain Canberran's health and wellbeing within their home through thermal comfort and indoor air quality. Techniques include insulated slabs, double glazing, light-coloured roofs, rooftop gardens, green walls, green courtyards and maximising solar orientation of blocks; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) reaffirm its commitment to the ACT's legislated emissions targets;
- (b) ensure the ACT's upcoming Climate Strategy:
 - (i) recognises the need for whole-of-government coordination and collaboration on climate change adaptation across the diverse fields of environmental management, health, planning, landscape planning and city services;
 - (ii) prepares for the increased incidence of extreme weather events;
 - (iii) embeds climate change adaptation planning and emissions-reduction considerations into all ACT Government day-to-day operations;
 - (iv) implements further strategies to enable Canberrans to climate-proof both new and existing buildings;
 - (v) ensures contributions to reviews of building standards and

- construction codes are done in a way that supports resilience and liveability in a changing climate; and
- (vi) further advances the goals of the ACT's Living Infrastructure Plan;
- (c) ensure that the ACT Landscape Plan's objectives include:
 - (i) ensuring landscapes are resilient to climate change, supporting biodiversity and water-sensitive urban design;
 - (ii) supporting an integrated approach to the ACT Government's targets for housing, emission reduction, climate adaptation, and ecological conservation; and
 - (iii) enhancing liveability through high-quality design and innovative use of green infrastructure;
- (d) report back to the Assembly on its progress against these calls by no later than the end of August 2026; and
- (e) update the Assembly on the status of the Climate Strategy on the second sitting day of 2026.

Climate change is an issue that is impacting cities worldwide. Canberra is not immune from these challenges and impacts. Many people in the Assembly and across our city would remember the Black Summer bushfires. I remember how the sky turned black, and the city was choked with smoke. I remember how the temperatures rose and rose, with the hottest day ever recorded in Canberra occurring in January 2020.

The National Climate Risk Assessment released on 15 September this year showed a catastrophic risk to Canberra's future. With a predicted increase of three degrees, Canberrans will face severe heatwaves of up to 44 degrees for 10 days each year, and up to 40 days a year will be above 35 degrees. Fire seasons will be longer and more extreme. It seems that the Black Summer was just the beginning for our beloved city.

Despite the ACT's previous good work under Greens leadership to reduce emissions, a significant amount of global warming has been locked in. There is no doubt that climate change is here, and it is driving extreme weather events. These weather events are threatening the lives and livelihoods of ordinary Canberrans.

We know emissions reduction is the only way meaningfully to minimise the impacts of climate change. With the Greens at the table, the ACT has been a world leader in combating climate change through emissions reduction. While many would rest on the laurels of past achievements, the Greens know the importance of continuing to reduce emissions. Every tonne of emissions released is added to our cumulative total, to our eventual detriment. This makes the Australian government announcement of an unambitious 2035 federal emissions target all the more disappointing, putting lives and livelihoods at risk.

As leaders and decision-makers, we must also turn our attention to adaptation. As climate change induced weather events increase in their frequency and severity, Canberrans are looking to us and asking what we are doing to keep them safe from catastrophic weather events. What is the ACT government doing to climate-proof the future of our city? What climate adaptation measures can we expect to see over the coming years? This motion seeks to ask and answer some of those important questions.

The ACT has been set up with some of the systems to assist us with this next stage. In particular, the newly announced Government Landscape Architect will operate in the context of climate adaptation. The ACT also has a Living Infrastructure Plan, introduced in 2019 by the previous Greens minister for climate change. The Living Infrastructure Plan acknowledges what so many Canberrans love about living here. One of the bush capital's greatest assets is its trees, plants, soil and water systems. This Living Infrastructure Plan will play a critical role in cooling our city in the context of a warming climate. This motion calls on the ACT government to further advance the goals of that Living Infrastructure Plan.

In addition to the Government Landscape Architect and the Living Infrastructure Plan, we also understand more about how Canberrans can keep their homes at a comfortable temperature in the face of extreme heat. This knowledge needs to be put to good use as we adapt to climate change.

This is the foundation on which Canberra faces the challenges of a warming climate. It is a good foundation to take our city through the next uncertain years and decades. The question is whether the ACT government will be able to fulfill our potential and safeguard Canberran lives and livelihoods through climate adaptation. This is what my motion asks for today.

The motion calls on the ACT government to ensure we are responding adequately to climate change. We are asking the ACT government to do this through targeted emissions action, through the upcoming climate strategy, and through the ACT landscape plan.

In particular, I call on the ACT government to reaffirm its commitment to the ACT's legislated emissions targets. Without heavy industry, and with the natural gift of high sun hours and wind in Canberra, these legally binding targets should be easily achieved. We understand the risks of runaway warming—risks that can only be addressed by a strong and firm commitment to action on emissions.

This motion also calls on the ACT government to ensure its upcoming climate strategy adequately addresses the adaptation challenge. We believe the climate strategy should focus on a number of areas. The climate strategy needs to acknowledge the compounding, cascading and concurrent climate hazards that Canberra will be facing into its future.

The National Climate Risk Assessment has made it clear that future changes in Australia's climate will not occur gradually or smoothly, and our climate strategy needs to prepare for the hazards we will face. We know that climate change will impact our lives across many different domains, and we know that work on climate adaptation cannot be the responsibility of a single team, a single directorate or a single sector. The climate change strategy should require coordination across all areas of government, from Canberra's plan for a tree canopy and cover, to our health system's preparedness for extreme heat events, to where we plan to build our city into the future. All these areas need to speak to each other to ensure we are ready for what comes next.

Further, climate adaptation and emissions reduction cannot only be coordinated across

government, although that is important. It must be embedded in the ACT government's day-to-day operations, from our public transport to our school system, to our hospitals, to our parks and facilities. Our climate strategy should ensure we ask: how are we acting today to protect our city into the future?

Specifically, this motion also calls upon the ACT government to ensure that the next iteration of the climate strategy focuses on key issues in our built environment. We ask for the implementation of further strategies to allow Canberrans to climate-proof both new and existing buildings. I am also calling upon this government to ensure all contributions to reviews of building standards and construction codes focus on resilience and livability in a changing climate. Canberra is small, but we are agile, and we have an opportunity to lead the country in climate-proofing our built environment into the future.

I also believe there is much to achieve in the next iteration of the climate strategy, and the Greens are proud to bring forward this motion to ensure we are continuing to move in the direction in which we know Canberrans are looking for us to move.

Apart from the opportunities presented by a new climate strategy, I welcome the news of the appointment of the Government Landscape Architect and the development of a Canberra-wide landscape plan. This is a crucial opportunity to deliver a city that is adapted to the changing climate.

The motion that I have brought forward today calls on the ACT government to ensure that a number of objectives are captured in this plan. The plan should ensure that the ACT's landscapes support biodiversity and water-sensitive urban design—two features that we know will promote the resilience of our city to climate change in the future.

The plan, like the climate strategy, is also a key piece of the puzzle for a number of priorities for Canberra's future. The plan needs to be integrated with the ACT government's targets for housing, emissions reduction, climate adaptation and ecological conservation, as we know climate change will touch all of these areas of our lives going into the future.

Canberra is already one of the most livable cities in the world. The ACT landscape plan should focus on high-quality design and the innovative use of green infrastructure so that we can maintain that livability and enhance it, going well into the future. I am asking the ACT government to report back on its progress on these calls by August 2026 and to provide an update on the climate strategy by the second sitting day next year.

However, while we are asking for a response by 2026, I am focused on well beyond that year. Hotter days, a longer fire season, dangerous air quality and severe storms mean that climate change is here, it will get worse, and it is risking Canberrans' lives and livelihoods.

Today's motion is another step towards ensuring that we take meaningful action to address the problem that is approaching, and I will not stop pursuing a better future for this city.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (3.07): I will make a brief contribution today, setting out the reasons why we will be supporting today's motion. Essentially, it is a motion which asks the government to do what it has undertaken to do, and not to backslide on its climate commitments. It is a little puzzling as to why the Assembly is in the position of having to move a motion along these lines, but it is understandable, given the minister and the government's approach. It is hard for us to know what the priorities are, but we do know that the climate strategy is long overdue.

My worry is that the strategy released at the end of the year will be filled with vague targets rather than specific actions or outcomes and will then be subject to a couple of years of consultation. It is about time we had some transparency about where the government intends to go and how much it will commit to the new strategy. I acknowledge that the territory is broke, and this does affect what we can invest in priorities, but if the government believe they do not have the financial capacity to meet their commitments, they need to be honest with us about that.

I appreciate the Greens moving this motion and trying to flush out some answers. I note there is an amendment from the minister, which we will also be supporting. I do not know that we will get the clarity we are seeking, but I am looking forward to us heading in the right direction.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (3.09): I want to thank Mr Braddock for moving today's motion. It is important having regard to the release of the climate reduction target and the national risk assessment. A lot happened on climate in the last week, and I will break it down to three things. I have a confession, a provocation and a joke.

I will start with the confession. I knew the climate crisis was bad, but I found it really hard to read the Climate Risk Assessment. I cannot do it. I have an 11-year-old daughter, and I keep going back, to try and get through that whole report, and it is really hard, because all I can do is picture her in this world that we have made. That is my confession.

That report does not look like any government report I have ever seen, and I began my career in counterterrorism. That report looks like an apocalyptic storyboard: compounding and cascading hazards; extreme heat, floods, bushfires, poor air quality, communicable disease, crop failures, and coral reef bleaching; loss of ecosystems and species by the middle of the century; defence risks, national security risks, supply chain disruptions; one million uninsurable homes by 2050; and a million or more Australians displaced.

It will be bad for everyone. It will be worse for some. The changing climate will make countries sick. It will challenge self-determination for our First Nations peoples. We will see a lot of injury, illness and death, but we will see more for some people—the elderly, women, those who need assistance, those on lower incomes. The impact on the mental health of our children already is astounding.

I tried to read that report with a narrow focus. That sometimes helps you to process a little bit better, so I thought, "What about Belconnen? What are we going to get in Belconnen?" Belconnen is looking hot. There is lots of fire risk out there, and lots more smoke coming our way, I think. Lawson and Page already had the highest mortality rate

during the heatwaves of 2016 to 2019. I started to tell stories about this, to try and understand: why Lawson and Page? Lawson is one of the hottest suburbs in Canberra and, in the last heat map I saw, it had about a four per cent tree canopy coverage. I think people are going to die on 50-degree days. What about Page? There is a street in Page with three nursing homes on it, side by side. A lot of my family has lived there and died there. I wonder whether that might be what is going on in Page.

It was a big week for Australian climate policy. As well as the risk assessment, we got federal Labor's climate target. What is our federal government's response to this apocalyptic risk assessment? Surely, it would be a steep and ambitious cut, with a funded, urgent, ambitious response. No; and this is my provocation. What we got was a target aiming to reduce emissions from as little as 62 per cent by 2035. We might get 70 per cent cuts; we might not. Recent experience has shown that, when a government sets a range target for climate, the bottom end is what we get, and the top end is PR.

Laura Nuttall and I went to a rally yesterday. Amy Blain read out Alicia Payne's Labor circular as a provocation for the crowd, and I will now read the one little section that upset people the most:

Our target is based on advice from the independent, expert Climate Change Authority, informed by CSIRO modelling considering the climate science, as well as economic and national interests.

Is it, though? The Climate Change Authority published their draft target earlier, and their draft was for 65 to 75 per cent reductions, and that is not what we are getting. If we only deliver on the bottom of the range, 62 per cent, we are not even approaching that recommendation. There has been a lot of scientific analysis showing that even 75 per cent reductions might give us two degrees warming or more, and we are accepting a lot of catastrophic impact with two degrees of warming. That climate risk report was contemplating three degrees.

The target has been labelled a failure of leadership by 350 Pacific, Australian Conservation Foundation, ACOSS, the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change, the Climate Council, Doctors for the Environment Australia, Emergency Leaders for Climate Action, Greenpeace, WWF Australia, and more. It is early days, and I think a lot of people like me are still struggling to understand what we have just seen. Sixty-two per cent is not enough to turn us around.

I actually do not want to hear any more about what is achievable. I know what is achievable. What is achievable is what you set out to do. When it matters, you do what you set out to do. I ran a climate target before this job. I cut my footprint by 75 per cent in a couple of years, and I did it without federal funding and without the resources of the government. We can do many things if we try.

It has been a big month for the climate, but I promised you a joke, so here is my joke. Have you heard about Labor's North West Shelf gas approval? It will still be emitting in 2070. "Yeah, well, we need the gas to get us off coal. It's a transition fuel." Have you heard about Labor's Glencore coal mine approval? "Yeah, well, we need the coal to get off the gas. It's complex and complicated." That is it. That is the best joke I have.

There are a lot of people at the moment who are angry and grieving, who are begging forgiveness from their children and who are worried that they have failed. We need to do what needs to be done. It is so beyond time to carefully map out what is easy; it is time to map out what is necessary.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (3.15): I want to thank Mr Braddock for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. We have spent a lot of time in this Assembly recently debating costs. We know the cost of inaction on climate change is just so much greater than the cost of action, yet we are still moving so slowly. We know that underinvesting in climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies now will result not just in far greater costs, but in far greater risks and human consequences, not to mention biodiversity loss down the line. One estimate from the Climate Council predicted that the cumulative loss of wealth from the impacts of climate change on agricultural and labour productivity would be \$4.2 trillion across Australia by the year 2100.

The ACT is a small jurisdiction. We are not going to be spared these costs. We are already in a tight financial environment, of which we are repeatedly reminded by the government. We must look to adaptation strategies that will provide long-term cross-portfolio cost savings if we are serious about managing the budget responsibly. This is something that came up during estimates hearings, when we heard from the Chair of the ACT Climate Change Council, Dr Arnagretta Hunter, who is also a cardiologist and a physician. She said:

The environment is foundational to our health and wellbeing. It is becoming increasingly obvious in the healthcare system and in the health of our population that environmental variables will influence our health now and the health of subsequent generations. A tremendous justification for investing in climate change mitigation and adaptation is to protect and preserve human health and wellbeing. It is also a remarkable opportunity to invest in the environment. Caring for both people and place translates to lives that are dignified and healthy ...

We find these little intersections across health and environment all over the place when we look for them. It is one of the opportunities that I think we have in this jurisdiction where people are passionately engaged in both of these spheres.

I could not agree with her more. Dr Hunter spoke of the catastrophic bushfires that Mr Braddock also mentioned, the bushfire smoke experience that we all encountered, heatwaves that we have seen in the ACT, and the hailstorm that ended that summer experience. She said:

The imagination we need for the future and the way in which we plan for the city of the future really needs to invite that imagination—hailstorms, increasing temperatures of extreme. That key phrase of “the increase in extreme weather events, the intensity, severity and frequency”, should be foremost in the way that we plan for the city of our future.

I throw around numbers. I am not a climate scientist; I am a cardiologist. I think our city of the future needs to plan from minus 15, very cold winters, through to 50 or 55 degrees. These are built environment challenges we have not seen before and these really ask us to think about where we work, how we work, how we look after each other and the way in which we allocate our resources. It is a challenge around evaluation as well, because these things may not happen, and yet we need

to build for the possibility of risks which we do not understand, because we have not seen them in the past.

It is a complex area, but it is also one with tremendous opportunities, coming back into those intersections between the way we can invest in climate action, mitigation and adaptation in a way that improves the health and wellbeing of our local population, the place that we live, this extraordinary city that we all love, and the people who are here.

They are pretty incredible remarks, and I could not agree more with Dr Hunter. I think the framing that she provides for us not only to debate this motion but also to consider all the decisions that we make in this place is incredibly valuable.

Of course, there is the economic imperative, which I have touched on. There is also an incredible moral imperative on us in this place, and places like this one, regarding future generations. It is on us, as elected officials and as a society, to ensure that the generations of Canberrans who come after us are not left with a world characterised by deadly heatwaves, terrifying bushfires, massive ecological diversity loss and all the devastating impacts thereof.

To the extent that they are left with such a world, steps need to be taken to prepare them for it, so that we do not kick the can down the road and leave it up to future generations to solve the problems that we have created for them. We need our built and natural environment to be cultivated in a way that allows us and them to adapt as best we possibly can to a rapidly changing climate.

It is also true that the impacts of the climate crisis are not distributed evenly. Community members who are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change include the elderly, the very young and those with pre-existing health conditions. Inaction on climate change is an injustice to everyone, but most particularly to already vulnerable people and future generations—those who have the least say in the decisions that are made that will affect them.

Politics, both locally and nationally, needs to be the vehicle for crafting the future we want. That is what politics is for. It is where we come together and decide what it is that we want for our community, for the future of our community, for our children and for their children. We need to have the courage to make tough decisions about the future that we are trying to cultivate, by making those decisions now, and not leaving it to someone else.

I believe that if there is anywhere—and this reflects Dr Hunter's comments—that can work to mitigate the climate crisis and implement genuine adaptations in a changing environment, it is the ACT. There is a strong mandate from our community for ambitious action on this front. I think that is indicated in the level of support we are seeing for this motion today. There are already a number of existing initiatives that we can strengthen and build upon, including the forthcoming climate strategy, in the update, whether that is through the Assembly or in greater collaboration with community groups who are also doing a lot of incredible work in this space.

We need to ask ourselves: what can we do? Often we hear about the pressure not to act quickly because, "Other places aren't doing as much; other places bigger than us aren't

moving quickly, so why should we?” My strong view is that nothing is too small. Local solutions and adaptations to a changing climate must be considered, not just for their long-term benefits, but also as a kind of salve to the climate anxiety that is gripping increasing numbers of people in our community. And it can be small. How do we make it easier for residents to choose different transport options that do not involve burning fossil fuels? How do we make the city that we live in one that encourages different decisions, better decisions for ourselves and for our future?

There are initiatives like urban farming, where we come into contact with our local natural environment and cultivate it. It is about getting invested in nature. Things like nature strip plantings feel small—and there are initiatives in this space, and I welcome them—but they can have an impact. It will be a small impact, but an immediate, lived and felt impact.

There is aligning government initiatives more with volunteer land management efforts that are already underway. Again, this cultivation of people’s connection to nature is so vital; because, without it, it is hard to feel that the urgent need for climate action is pressing, unless we have these catastrophic disasters. But we are so quick to forget them, shortly after they occur. With these day-to-day connections that we can cultivate—and in this place we have an opportunity to make it easier, and encourage residents to cultivate those connections—I really strongly believe they do have an impact in the long term.

It is about having that kind of shift in our conception of how we think about nature—not as something that is out there, outside the city, on the outskirts, that we sometimes visit, but something of which we are a fundamental part, that is touched by us. We need to do more to cultivate a meaningful relationship with it, both at an individual level and at a societal level.

That said, we also need to be cautious not to leave the responsibility solely to individuals. With this motion, we can reiterate that it is the responsibility of people in positions of power to show leadership for our future, to collaborate with our community on local solutions, to show other parts of the country and the world what it actually means and what it looks like to be courageous when it comes to climate action, and to provide sufficient funding and investment to prepare the ACT for a radically different climate into the future.

With all of this in mind, I thank Mr Braddock for bringing this rather comprehensive motion to the Assembly today. I also want to thank Ms Orr for her work on the amendment to Mr Braddock’s motion. Of course, urban heat islands will pose a massive risk and already do, and that is only going to grow in the coming years. I am pleased to see a proactive addition to this motion brought forward, which looks to address this. I thank both Ms Orr and Mr Braddock for their willingness to collaborate in good faith with the Assembly to improve outcomes for our community and for future generations of Canberrans.

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (3.24): I am pleased to speak in support of this motion. It is a timely reminder of some of the key

challenges and commitments that guide the government's actions in climate adaptation and mitigation. I thank Mr Braddock for the open and constructive way in which he and his office have worked with me and other members of the Assembly to find common ground on this issue. Adapting to climate change will require a sustained effort across the territory in coming decades and will require agreement across the Assembly and the broader community on our goals.

The National Climate Risk Assessment, which we have heard many people talk about today, makes clear that the climate is already changing because of greenhouse gas emissions. Coordinated action is required now to ensure that Australia, including the ACT, remains a safe and liveable place for the community and future generations. The NCRA, National Climate Risk Assessment, identifies 11 priority climate risks, nine of which are relevant to Canberra in varying ways. These are: risks to domestic disaster response and recovery assistance from the competing need to respond to multiple concurrent natural hazard events; risks to critical infrastructure that could impact access to essential goods and services; risks from maladaptation and inaction from governance structures not fit to address changing climate risks; risks to health and well-being from slow onset and extreme climate impacts; risks to ecosystems and landscapes, including risk of ecosystem transformation or collapse, and loss of nature's benefits to people; risks to primary industries that decrease productivity, quality and profitability and increase fire security pressures; risks to the real economy from acute and chronic climate change impacts, including from climate related financial system shocks or volatility; risks to supply and service changes and climate change impacts that disrupt goods, services, labour, capital and trade; and risks to water security that underpins community resilience, natural environments, water-dependent industries and cultural heritage.

These priority risks are consistent with the risks identified in the 2022 whole-of-government *Climate Change Risk Assessment for the ACT*. The ACT government is already actively seeking to address these risks through several programs, policies and strategies, including: programs to support improvement of the thermal performance and energy efficiency of homes, especially for those in public housing or renting; measures including the tree canopy target of 30 per cent by 2045 and embedding urban heat provisions in the planning system to mitigate the urban heat island effects which exacerbate warming from a changing climate; a pilot program, including financial support for community service organisations to strengthen their ability to assess climate risk to their services, operations and assets and to develop climate adaptation plans to strengthen their resilience; the recently completed ACT Disaster Resilience Strategy; the ACT heatwave subplan; and currently undertaking a 10-year review of the ACT Water Strategy.

In addition, the ACT government, to ensure its response is as current as possible, uses the latest regional climate projections from its partnership with New South Wales. The New South Wales and Australian Regional Climate Modelling project will inform climate risk management and adaptation planning for the ACT.

Initial planning is also underway to more consistently embed climate risk management and adaptation planning across directorates to ensure the climate resilience of government services, operations and assets continues to be as robust as possible. Implementation of this plan is expected to begin in the new year.

This motion notes the ACT's Living Infrastructure Plan. That plan seeks to cool the city and reduce the risks from the key climate change impacts of heatwaves, droughts, storms and bushfires through resilient living infrastructure. Seven of the 15 actions in the plan have now been delivered, with another eight still progressing. Details are included in appendix A of the 2023-24 ministers' annual report under the Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act 2010.

In addition to the Living Infrastructure Plan, on-ground work is underway to protect and restore habitat connectivity across the ACT and increase resilience to a changing climate, providing a foundation for the landscape plan. These all build on the Connecting Nature, Connecting People initiative from 2022-24 and includes strategic investment in habitat restoration and enhancing ecological resilience to climate change. These activities improve biodiversity, soil health and water retention, which are key factors in climate resilience. Even with this extensive amount of work in train, we know we cannot rest on our laurels. The ACT government is committed to effective emissions reduction and acknowledges the need for increased climate adaptation policies to respond to the climate change impacts we will not be able to avoid.

As I noted in the budget debate last week, the government has committed \$10.789 million under the continuing climate change action and environmental protection initiative to ensure our government continues to meet its mitigation and adaptation commitments, including support from the ACT Climate Change Council and development of a new Climate Change Strategy. The ACT is committed to achieving net zero emissions by 2045, as legislated under the Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Reduction Act 2010, with the interim emission target reductions being 50 to 60 per cent by 2025, 65 to 75 per cent by 2030, and 90 to 95 per cent by 2040.

The motion and a number of the speeches so far have noted the national emissions reduction target of 62 to 70 per cent by 2035, which was released on 18 September this year by the commonwealth government. I note that the ACT emission reductions continue to move ahead of this commonwealth target, but the commonwealth target is far ahead of some other jurisdictions. It is important that we are all doing as much as we can and more.

The ACT has achieved and maintained 100 per cent renewable electricity since 2020, which means that the two largest sources of emissions we now have are ground transport and fossil fuel gas combustion. In 2023-24, ground transport was 65.5 per cent of total emissions and fossil fuel gas combustion was 19.2 per cent of total emissions. To address transport emissions, priorities to date have focused on switching to non-polluting vehicles. As at 1 September 2025, there were 12,878 zero-emission vehicles, or ZEVs, registered in the ACT. The government is continuing to encourage the take-up of ZEVs through support for charging infrastructure throughout the territory. We will continue to look at ways we can reduce our transport emissions and new opportunities that might be presented.

We also have a target of phasing out fossil fuel gas by 2045. This transition is supported by electrification programs such as the Sustainable Household Scheme. In the three years to June 2025, approximately 7,500 customers disconnected from the ACT gas network—about five per cent of all customers in the ACT—and we have seen a drop of

20 per cent in gas demand in the last two years. As we phase out gas, the ACT government will continue to look at ways we can support an orderly and equitable transition.

The ACT landscape plan—which we have mentioned too—will look at building on the work that we have done so far through the Living Infrastructure Program and our environmental conservation biodiversity work. It will consider things such as: ensuring landscapes are resilient to climate change; supporting biodiversity and water-sensitive urban design; supporting an integrated approach to the ACT government’s targets for housing, emissions reductions, climate adaptation and ecological conservation; and enhancing liveability through high-quality design and innovative use of green infrastructure. All of the actions that I have outlined are preparing the ACT for a changed and changing climate. As the National Climate Risk Assessment makes clear, the risks to the territory from a changing climate are significant. I wish to put on the record that the government is taking these seriously.

In response to a few of the speeches today, it has become quite apparent that members in this place would like to see bold and ambitious action towards responding to what is arguably the most significant challenge of our generation. I note that, even though the speeches give support across the board, there have been varying levels of how far that action should go. This is one of the biggest challenges that we will continue to face as we move to the next phase of our response to climate change—that is that everyone is at a different level of preparation and understanding of what needs to come. It is fair to say that it broadly falls into three categories: those who are ready, keen, committed and want to do it all yesterday; those—who are perhaps in the minority but can be a bit vocal sometimes—who do not want to believe that climate change exists; and everyone else in the middle. Those in the middle are the people who want to do the right thing but are perhaps not quite sure what the right thing looks like or how to build that into their everyday life. Those are the people we really need to support as we move through the next part of the transition, because the things we will have to deal with will start to look at greater behavioural change. That will not upend people’s lives but will certainly look at adjustments or will challenge the ways in which we go about our day-to-day lives—ways that we have not thought about and ways that might be a bit scary when you start to look at some of the science behind what could happen if we do not.

In approaching that challenge, it is not lost on me that we need to make sure that we take a measured and sensible approach in how we respond to the next challenge within our climate change emissions reductions and adaptation tasks. We need to do this—as I think Mr Emerson quite strongly pointed out—within the priorities of government, which are extensive and have many competing parts. I note that, as we move through this challenge, it is going to be about embedding this work in all of our business, not just in making really large announcements and having one-off initiatives. I remain the eternal optimist, even after having read the federal government’s risk assessment, and say that we can get there with a bit of thinking, collaboration and understanding that we are all moving at different paces, but we do all need to move a bit quickly together.

I again thank Mr Braddock for bringing this motion before the Assembly. I look forward to providing future updates on the progress that is made.

I move:

Add:

“(3) further calls on the ACT Government to identify and report back to the Assembly by the last sitting day of June 2028, the five highest heat island areas within the urban footprint and potential options for addressing the heat island impacts in these areas as part of the development of the ACT Landscape Plan.”

This is a very simple and short amendment to add to what is a very good motion by Mr Braddock, in my opinion. It hopefully, without pre-empting decisions of cabinet, shows where we can go by addressing some of the adaptation issues we have in our day-to-day government business, so that we support our community as we work through the challenges that face us.

The amendment calls on the government—me and my officials—to identify the five highest heat island areas within our urban area and look at some potential options for addressing them. That is very much in the spirit of what Mr Braddock has been focusing on, particularly the adaptation aspects of his motion. It is something that he is quite passionate about. Over the course of this term as we work through that, I look forward to continuing to get his input and feedback as we start to look at the challenges and opportunities.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.37): I was pleased to present the motion which addresses one of the most pressing issues facing our city in the future. I commend the constructive work of my colleagues in the Assembly on the motion and thank everyone for their support. In particular, I welcome the focus on the heat island impacts in the ACT landscape plan and the amendment moved by the minister. I thank her for her constructive collaboration on that amendment. If it were not for the standing orders, my signature would also have been on it.

As the National Climate Risk Assessment tells us, heatwaves and extreme temperatures pose an extreme risk to Australian people and their way of life, regardless of whether they are from the sensible centre or an extreme. With three degrees of warming, Canberrans can expect to see the number of heatwave days increase from two to four per year, or up to about 20 or even 30. We need to imagine what that is like. That will impact everyone if we do not take sufficient action.

We can expect our hottest heatwave temperatures to tip to 44 degrees Celsius, and the numbers of days over 35 degrees Celsius will continue to increase. Looking at the Heat-Health Risk Index developed by the Australian Climate Service, we can also expect outer Canberra to suffer the adverse impacts of these heatwaves. Ms Clay mentioned Lawson, which I would not describe as a suburb in outer Canberra, but it is an example of a recent development with very low tree canopy cover that is uniquely exposed to heat island effects; hence, heatwaves could have a really detrimental impact on the population that resides there.

You could only imagine what the impacts to our health system will be from these heatwave events. We could expect heat related mortality and morbidity to increase over time. The pressure on our ecosystem and natural environment will increase as the temperature rises, and the impacts of heat on our energy infrastructure could contribute

to the compounding and cascading effects of climate change. This is what happens when the power goes out, right at the moment we need it most in order to keep people safe. That is why we need to move this motion today. Understanding where in Canberra we are experiencing the heat island effect will help us understand how to respond as our climate continues to get hotter. Potential options for addressing these effects will form a crucial part of Canberra's plan for adapting to climate change in the future.

I commend my motion and the amendment to the Assembly.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Roads—Commonwealth Avenue bridge

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (3.40): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) upgrades to the Commonwealth Avenue bridge will mean each span of the bridge will be closed for one year each, substantially reducing capacity along this corridor for two years;
- (b) the Minister for Transport has announced Labor will reduce the number and frequency of bus services using the Commonwealth Avenue corridor from early 2026, which will severely impact public transport users commuting between Canberra's south and centre; and
- (c) this congestion will also severely impact motorists who currently travel via Commonwealth Avenue, and the congestion will spill over to other arterials, such as the Tuggeranong Parkway and the Monaro Highway;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) the construction of Light Rail Stage 2B will extend the impact of this congestion for an unknown number of years, as the project progresses along the southern side of Commonwealth Avenue, and along State Circle and Adelaide Avenue; and
- (b) these works will coincide with major roadworks on the Monaro Highway, Coppins Crossing Road, William Hovell Drive, and Athllon Drive, creating significant and years-long congestion challenges for residents throughout Canberra's south, centre, and west; and

(3) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) provide local communities with practical and regularly updated advice about current and future congestion impacts;
- (b) develop a plan to maintain existing public transport capacity and minimise the increase in road congestion; and
- (c) report back to the Assembly by the last sitting day of 2025.

The upcoming closure of Commonwealth Avenue Bridge for renewal works looms large in the mind of many commuters. I have heard from a number of local residents

who are concerned not only about the closure itself but also about the government's poor response. Two years of significant road closures and all the congestion that entails is a huge concern for many Canberrans, and rightly so. We have known about the upcoming works for some time, but it was only last week that we learned Labor's response. It was not to address congestion but to make it worse by cutting bus services while the roadworks knock out half of the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge for two years. It is a remarkable decision that the minister has justified by saying the increased congestion will delay buses anyway.

The government's logic could not be more back to front. While lane closures will cause increased congestion along Commonwealth Avenue, the government's solution is to make congestion worse by encouraging public transport users to drive to work, resulting in more cars on the road and even more congestion, which will further delay the bus services that remain after the cuts.

Both the government and the Canberra Liberals have long encouraged the use of public bus services. The difference is that the Canberra Liberals hold to this principle, while the government looks at punishing bus riders and strip away services. For bus riders with their own vehicle during the cuts to services, it will mean forking out more on petrol and more on parking and spending more time stuck in traffic. For those without private transport, the government is essentially saying, "Too bad. Find your own way or try to squeeze onto one of the remaining packed services." It is a slap in the face.

These cuts are hypocritical. They serve as another broken promise from a government that only a few months ago committed to delivering more bus services in its budget. Leaving local people stuck at the bus stop is not good enough. That is why the Assembly needs to call on the government to develop a plan that maintains public transport capacity and also minimises the increased congestion from the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge closure.

We need this plan because the congestion does not stop there. While traffic along the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge will be bumper to bumper, it will also spill over onto other arterial roads, such as the Tuggeranong Parkway and the Monaro Highway, locking down those roads. The commute for Canberrans in the west, the south and the city centre will be an hour of stop-start traffic for years, assuming the works deadline is actually met. When was the last time that happened? If you think it might be over after two years and it would be reasonable to think that light rail stage 2B would be about to take off, the developments could cause congestion in the area of Commonwealth Avenue, State Circle and Adelaide Avenue for a very long time—a gridlock in the south of Canberra. If you throw into the mix London Circuit issues, it is no exaggeration to say that Labor are delivering a decade of delay and disruption for south-side commuters.

It is not just public transport users who will be adversely affected by the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge closure and subsequent service cuts. The increased congestion will negatively impact every commuter from the south side of the lake to the north—every single one of them. We are talking about people who drive to work, families who have multiple school drop-offs and people with caring responsibilities and are trying to get into the city or out of the city.

We are calling on the government today to provide the community with practical and accurate advice so that Canberrans can plan around these works and minimise their personal commute. More time spent waiting in traffic will mean more time and money being wasted. The Canberra Liberals believe that the government's efforts in transport should serve to reduce people's commute and give them more time in their day so that they can spend it doing what they enjoy.

MR BRADDOCK(Yerrabi) (3.45): I want to say, straight out of the gate, that this is a good motion, and I would like to thank Ms Castley for bringing it forward. I, too, like Ms Castley and many Canberrans, was surprised and disturbed by Mr Steel's statement last week about the impact that the planned closures would have on traffic across the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge. I am supportive of Ms Castley's calls, and my amendment simply adds to these calls, without detracting from what she is asking for.

The National Capital Authority have a reputation for not thinking much outside their bubble, beyond the triangle. They will be submitting a traffic management plan for the bridgeworks and immediate surrounds, but they are still placing a bottleneck on a significant arterial road that services the ACT.

The consequences will be felt across the whole of the city in a way that the ACT government will then have to deal with. I suspect that the network planners in Transport Canberra wish they had got a bit more notice from the NCA. This bridge closure will have scrambled their plans for the bus network, not to mention traffic management city-wide.

Ms Castley is correct in calling for community updates about congestion, so as to help people make the best decisions they can when travelling through the city. She is also correct in calling for a plan to maintain existing public transport capacity. That call might be a bit more complicated than it looks on the surface, but it is fundamentally necessary.

In situations like these around the world, good city councils know that road closures and traffic disruptions reinforce the need for good public transport use. Getting more people onto public transport reduces the number of cars on the road, easing the congestion. Public communications are planned accordingly.

As a case in point, this weekend, everyone in Melbourne will know not to drive into the city for the AFL Grand Final, and that the best option will be to catch a train. They do this every year. Canberrans also do it for major events like New Year's Eve, Skyfire and Floriade. By promoting and prioritising public transport, the roads remain manageable.

Canberra's central and most prominent arterial road is about to get its traffic capacity halved. We know what we need to do. We need more public transport connections to help deal with it, not less; and, since our principal mode of public transport in this area is buses, we need to prioritise getting our buses through the traffic.

How do we do that? There are a few options. Under normal traffic conditions, one lane of road can carry just under 2,000 passengers per hour travelling by car. By contrast, a dedicated bus lane can carry up to 8,000 passengers per hour, which is up to four times

the amount of people in the same width of road. Dedicating at least some of the space on the open span of the bridge to bus travel is one way of making this work. Other options include jump lanes, which prioritise getting buses to the front of the queue and onto the bridge quicker, and express connections diverted over Kings Avenue Bridge with similar tools. Alternatively, we could also look at buses going up the Tuggeranong Parkway or up the Monaro and the Majura Parkway.

These are just some of the options. There may be others, and a combination of solutions may produce the ideal outcome. What ultimately matters here is travel times for the greatest number of people. If bus travel times can be minimised, they will become an even more attractive option for people to use to commute, further enhancing their uptake and their congestion-reducing capabilities. If that means having more buses crossing the lake during peak hours than do so today, that is good.

A plan to reduce the number of bus connections crossing the bridge would be a plan to fail Canberrans. In any case, the best outcomes will be reliant on cooperation from the National Capital Authority, who are not known for being considerate of anyone outside their bubble that is called the triangle. That is why my amendment calls on the ACT government to up the ante with the NCA, and to see what is possible to prioritise public transport in this area. It would be better than waiting for the Prime Minister to complain when his Comcar is stuck in traffic crossing the bridge. I move:

After paragraph (3)(b), insert new paragraph:

“(c) advocate to the National Capital Authority for bus-prioritisation measures along Commonwealth Avenue to minimise bus travel times and maximise bus utilisation during construction works.”.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (3.49): I want to speak in support of Ms Castley’s private member’s motion relating to proposed upgrades to the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge being undertaken by the NCA. The Australian government, through the NCA, is undertaking major renewal works of both spans of Commonwealth Avenue Bridge. The project is being fully funded and managed by the Australian government and is unrelated to the ACT government’s light rail project, either stage 2B or stage 2A.

The bridge has not undergone any significant upgrades since it was built 60 years ago. In this time, the size and weight of everyday vehicles has increased, and it is important to ensure that the bridge is upgraded to accommodate these increasing vehicle sizes into the future.

The time for these upgrades has definitely come, but these works are not connected with light rail. Whilst there are works associated with light rail stage 2A being delivered on the northern section of Commonwealth Avenue at the same time, the NCA’s Commonwealth Avenue Bridge strengthening works are unrelated and are likely to have a more significant impact on the traffic network than previous projects that we have seen on Commonwealth Avenue or in the city. The project involves bridge strengthening and widening of the shared paths to cater for Canberra’s long-term transport needs, while maintaining the bridge’s heritage value.

In addition to traffic lanes, Commonwealth Avenue Bridge is the primary north-south link for pedestrians and cyclists and, at only 2.4 metres wide, the existing shared paths on both sides of the bridge do not meet Austroads guidelines or industry standards. The project will double the width of the path system, significantly improving safety for both pedestrians and cyclists.

We welcome the NCA's project to extend the life of this infrastructure for decades to come, to connect the north and south of our city. Whilst it is an important and welcome project, it will come with significant impacts for our traffic network. The government established, a number of years ago, a disruption taskforce, which is working with the NCA to understand the traffic impacts of their bridgeworks ahead of them commencing around the end of the year. The ACT government will continue to provide updates to Canberrans about the impacts on the traffic network and on Transport Canberra's bus network once the travel time impacts are known.

I met with the NCA CEO on 28 August this year to discuss the project and better understand its impacts. We discussed a range of potential options to mitigate the impact of the works, and officials are now working closely together. We are pursuing all options with the NCA to mitigate the impacts. We have requested that they prioritise public transport through the development of their temporary traffic arrangements, and Transport Canberra is exploring timetabling options and alternative routes for the bus network to mitigate the impacts as much as possible.

The government has specifically requested the NCA to provide a bus priority lane in at least one direction during the period of works on Commonwealth Avenue. However, we expect that, regardless of these other potential mitigating options, a reduction in the overall number of lanes from six to three will still have a direct impact on the frequency of bus services, as there are strong traffic volumes in both directions during morning and afternoon peaks.

Unfortunately, all of those buses and general traffic will now be squeezing into half the road space once the bridgeworks commence. This will mean increased congestion on the road network and buses stuck in traffic, directly reducing the number and frequency of buses being able to pass over the bridge every hour.

Members will recall that, just last week, I advised the Assembly of this, and that all of our rapid bus routes and all but three of our local route services that connect Canberra's south to the north currently use Commonwealth Avenue Bridge. That is some 1,380 Transport Canberra bus services at the moment that cross the bridge every day during the week.

It is simply not possible for a bus stuck in traffic consistently to run to a timetabled service designed to function outside the NCA's bridgeworks. That is why a new bus timetable will be designed to take into account those travel impacts, to commence at the start of term1, following the relatively quiet holiday period. This is dependent on confirmation of travel time impacts being provided by the NCA.

I note Ms Castley's motion asks the ACT government to provide local communities with practical and updated advice about current and future traffic congestion. I am pleased to say that the ACT government already regularly provides the Canberra

community with updates on traffic congestion issues, particularly around the city precinct. We have a regular newsletter that goes out, for example. I have already committed, last week, to updating the community early and often, as we work towards mitigating the impact on Canberra's commuters, where appropriate with the NCA, who are responsible for the project.

We are happy to support this motion and the amendment moved by Mr Braddock, but I want to address some of Ms Castley's remarks. Whilst we support her motion, her remarks were somewhat strange. She suggested that she wanted the government to bring forward the stage 2B project that she has consistently opposed in this place and, indeed, at multiple elections now. It is simply not possible to deliver the stage 2B project at this time because it is in the planning and approval stage for the project. It has a long way to go, with respect to that stage, including through the NCA's processes.

Constructing a new span to Commonwealth Avenue Bridge in between the two existing spans would come into direct conflict with the NCA's bridgeworks, which need to be completed first. That is really important. The stage 2A works are happening in Commonwealth Avenue at the same time. Overall, as the NCA's works get under construction, that will help to minimise broader disruption on the traffic network.

It is also unfortunate that Ms Castley sought to cast blame on the ACT government for the unavoidable impacts of the NCA's bridgeworks, which are necessary but which will have a significant impact on the traffic network. We will do everything we can to try and mitigate those works; but, at the end of the day, it is an NCA asset, a commonwealth asset. They are undertaking the works, and those impacts will be unavoidable.

There will be a range of mitigations that we can put in place, but we cannot fully mitigate the impacts of this. We will do our best to see what we can do in terms of improvements to the bus timetable, the bus network, and we will be providing updates to the community about that.

It is disappointing that Ms Castley, the opposition leader, has decided that she wants to politicise this as much as possible when her motion is actually quite reasonable, as is the amendment to it. It is in line with what I brought to the Assembly last week, in transparently updating the community about what we expect.

I am looking forward to further updating the community once we have further information from the NCA, as they undertake modelling about the traffic impacts of their project on the community. I am looking forward, hopefully, to jointly communicating about what Canberrans can expect over the new year period and beyond, over the two years of this project's construction. We will communicate what the ACT government will be doing in terms of our network, to make sure that we can continue to deliver reliable services on the bus network, and what the best travel options are for Canberrans during this period, both on buses and on the broader road network.

The government supports the motion and the amendment moved by Mr Braddock.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (3.57): Let's all be honest in here about congestion and delays, because we are focusing on two years for the bridge project. Mr Steel has just said that once that is done, we are going to do the bridge in the middle. Quick show of

hands: is there anyone in this chamber—attendants count as well—who believes that when we build the bridge in the middle, that that is not going to involve congestion and delays as well?

Is there anybody in this chamber who believes that when we build the tram from Commonwealth Avenue to Woden—we are not talking about two years' worth of delays here and two years' worth of congestion. We are talking about three, four, five years of congestion and delays.

I want to defend Mr Steel, because I think, sometimes, he is attacked unnecessarily. I know that there are those who believe that any portfolio space or any project that Mr Steel takes stewardship of he steers into an iceberg, and I think that is unfair. I think that is extremely unfair, and, indeed, I want to pay credence to Mr Steel—to the genius involved in the thing that we are debating today! One of the great problems that the government has in selling the vision of stage 2B and stage 2 in its entirety to people is in the difference in journey times of the bus as opposed to the tram.

One of the problems that the government has in convincing people that we should spend four thousand million dollars on this project is that the bus runs that route in somewhere between 17 and 20 minutes, and the tram is going to take 32 minutes. So it is really, really difficult to convince people that this stacks up.

There are two ways you can deal with that: you can either make the tram faster or make the buses slower! Indeed, I reckon by the time we get to the completion, all of the information regarding bus travel is going to be so much slower than it currently is, and I think that is a masterstroke. I am fully supportive of Ms Castley's motion.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (4.00): The buses have been getting slower over the years. But I rise to speak on the issue that will affect thousands of Canberrans every single day for the next two years, and for a longer period. For those coming from Weston Creek and Molonglo, this is an ongoing issue. This does not stop after two years. This does not stop after five years. This issue just keeps going. There will be significant disruption to traffic on Commonwealth Avenue for the NCA bridge strengthening and then, again, for the construction of light rail.

Commonwealth Avenue is a major link to carry people to work, to school, to appointments, to loved ones. We even have to drive to Lyneham for many of our sporting activities, given the lack that we have on our side. But for the next two years, its capacity will be slashed due to bridge strengthening works. This is not a minor inconvenience; it is a major disruption with serious consequences.

Minister Steel has announced that the current 1,380 buses crossing the bridge daily will be reduced, because the reduced road capacity and expected congestion make it impossible to maintain current service levels. Each bus will be stuck in traffic, and when one bus is delayed, the next bus is delayed too. This domino effect means we will not have reliable services. Our public transport network will suffer and so will the people who depend on it.

This is not just about buses; it is about the entire transport network. When buses are delayed, people lose confidence, and when people lose confidence, they go back to their

cars. That means more congestion, not just on Commonwealth Avenue but across our arterial roads. The ripple effect will be felt city-wide.

Minister Steel has said that traffic modelling is being done by the National Capital Authority and the ACT government, but the question is: “Why hasn’t it already been done?” This project has been in planning for years. We should have had a clear, transparent traffic management plan ready to go. Instead, we are seeing buck-passing between Minister Steel and the NCA. This helps no-one.

The NCA must understand that it has responsibilities to the people of Canberra. It does not operate in a vacuum. It must work with the ACT government to future-proof this vital corridor. That means planning for bus lanes: not just temporary fixes but permanent bus lanes for Western Creek and Molonglo that will not be serviced by the city to Woden light rail.

Minister Steel has said they are pursuing all options and have asked the NCA to prioritise public transport in their temporary traffic arrangements. In addition, Transport Canberra is exploring timetabling changes and alternative routes. These are welcome steps, but there must be more than words. We need action and accountability. One solution is to prioritise long buses on Commonwealth Avenue routes to maximise capacity. If we are running fewer services, let us make sure each one carries more people and is reliable.

Mr Assistant Speaker, the people of Canberra deserve a transport system that works, even during disruption. They deserve transparency, planning and a commitment to public transport that goes beyond mere rhetoric. We need collaboration between the ACT government and the NCA, and above all, we need to demand that the needs of Canberrans come first. I would like to thank Ms Castley for bringing forward this very important motion, and I support Mr Braddock’s amendment for bus prioritisation measures.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (4.04): No-one likes sitting in traffic. It is seriously frustrating. It is time wasted. It is time away from your family. It is time you could be better investing in getting to work, doing productive things, spending time with those you love, those you care about, friends, family and doing the things you love. When you are sitting in a car in traffic all you get is frustration and a sense that you could be doing something else.

Sadly, that is the day-to-day experience of people across Canberra already. Everyone in Western Creek knows it. Everyone in Woden knows it. You know it if you live in the inner south and you are trying to get into the city across that bridge. You know it absolutely if you live in the Molonglo Valley. In Molonglo Valley already a 15-minute drive from Coombs to the city has become a 40-minute crawl. School zones have become rat runs, and the Cotter Road is carrying the load of multiple districts.

And now we have discovered that things are going to get even worse. The capacity on Commonwealth Avenue Bridge will be reduced to one span at a time for two years. This is absolutely something that is critical for the government to deal with. But, really importantly, it was important for the government to deal with years ago. The government has known this is coming. The minister has already confessed that there

was a task force that was supposed to be dealing with this. In fact, I think it was 2021 when Mr Steel set up a disruption task force to deal with exactly these issues and the issues flowing from the construction of Labor's light rail project—2021.

To date, the great achievement of that task force and the government itself is to, effectively, send the problem back to Canberrans to deal with. The great slogan of "Rethink your routine; we cannot fix it so you better fix it for yourself," seems to be the message that has come from the government around congestion for far too long at this stage. That is incredibly disappointing, because in 2016, heading for a decade ago, this government promised to solve congestion. That was on the flyers that they were handing out—Labor had a plan to solve congestion.

I do not know about anyone else in this place, but I do not think congestion has been solved. As far as I can tell, congestion seems to be getting worse and worse and worse. Every time we turn around, it is more difficult to get out of Molonglo Valley. It is more difficult to navigate your way through the intersections near the hospital in Woden. Just trying to get out of the suburbs in Woden can be a nightmare. Everyone is contending with it and everyone knows that it is getting worse. Everything the government brings seems to be just an attempt to blame someone else for the predictable problems it has failed to deal with.

Sadly, Mr Parton has stolen about three quarters of my talking points today. But I think it is very important to realise that Mr Steel promised some years ago—three years ago, at least—a decade of disruption. So Canberrans were not taken by surprise. But we are three years into this decade of disruption and when you look at the timeframes of the projects that they are talking about now, there is no end in sight. The idea that it would be only a decade seems to be rapidly moving out the window. One of the most rapid things we have seen is the moving away from that commitment for it to be a decade.

I want to reflect on this idea that somehow people can just navigate and find an alternative way. This is becoming increasingly difficult as well, because, over the past 10 or 15 years probably, we have seen a rapid reduction in the number of car parks, which in itself concentrates the load of traffic into a narrower period of time, increasing the problems during peak hour—something that Canberrans did not have to deal with some time ago. It is not just population growth and it is not just movements between one part of the city or the other. The reduction in car parking spaces has had the counterproductive effect of making more people be on the road at the same time. That means more cars at the same time and that means more emissions. The more cars stuck on the road at the same time, because the government will not provide enough car parking spaces and the government will not provide the infrastructure and alternative approaches you need to get people to where they need to go quicker, the worse the emissions get.

If the minister's solution to that problem is the idea that everyone is going to be taking public transport, we have another problem now. If you are reducing services, you are reducing trust in the public transport system. Every time you lose another patron from our buses, they have to find some other way to get to where they are going.

Every time you look, this government has neglected the problem, ignored the problem, or tried to blame someone else for it. That cannot keep going. It is not sustainable. That

is why I am very happy to support Ms Castley in this very sensible and very important motion.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (4.11), in reply: I appreciate all members for your support on this motion. I specifically did not put what I thought would be a solution as more buses or closing down a lane. However, Mr Braddock, I appreciate your amendment, and we will be obviously voting in favour. I hoped that the minister was in conversations with the NCA, and I did hear something about that, and hope that they have the data and the studies to come up with an appropriate solution.

I am not quite sure what part of my speech Minister Steel thought I was referring to about how the light rail project and the Commonwealth bridge project should be the same. I was merely making the point, as others have, that this is not just two years; it is going to be longer once light rail starts after the bridge is strengthened. So I did not mean to create any confusion there.

I am happy to bring this motion today. Again, I thank Mr Braddock. I would welcome any advocacy, because I am not confident that enough has been done and look forward to the report at the end of the year on what it is the government will be doing about the congestion woes that we are all going to endure, how that looks, and what the response is going to be. So thank you all for a great debate today.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

Motion to take note of papers

Motion (by **Deputy Speaker**) agreed to:

That the papers presented under standing order 211 during presentation of papers in the routine of business today be noted.

Appropriation Bill 2025-2026

Schedule 1—Appropriations—Proposed expenditure.

Debate resumed.

Health and Community Services Directorate—Part 1.6.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (4.14): I rise to speak in my capacity as ACT Greens spokesperson for disability, young people, LGBTQIA+ affairs and women. The ACT Greens firmly believe that a lot more needs to be done in this budget to support people with disabilities. This is not just a responsibility of the ACT government, of course; disability is one of those policy areas that sits across the levels of government, and we are all heavily reliant on the commonwealth to do the right thing on national initiatives like the NDIS. However, we are not seeing the leadership we need in this budget or

from the work that should be done in community consultation.

Time and time again we are hearing from advocacy organisations that they have no idea what is going on with disability funding, especially in the context of changes to NDIS. This is not a small thing. We have Canberrans in our city dependent on NDIS plans to ensure that they have a roof over their head and food in their fridge. When that money goes away, there is not a backup. This is not a group of people who have been given the opportunity to set up a rainy day fund. There is not always a plan b.

I keep hearing that the money is going away and that plans are being reviewed and lapsing with minimal notice and with no realistic pathway for the money to be restored. I understand that this is a decision made by the federal government, but what happens in practice is that it leaves our constituents high and dry. We need to see more from the territory government to fill that void. If we have people who are left in desperate circumstances by the NDIS cuts, that falls to us—something needs to be done.

I recall during estimates hearings someone asked whether I was calling for a parallel NDIS, and I would like to reassure them that I am not. I believe that the government should be doing what Foundational Supports is meant to do, which is fill the gaps that the NDIS has created for itself and meet the needs of people with a disability where those needs currently are not being met. Right now, what we need is to give clear and direct answers to the community on what exactly is going on with the NDIS, Foundational Supports and Thriving Kids. We need a timeline and a vision for Foundational Supports, because the commonwealth is starting to make changes on the presumption that states and territories will have complementary services in place already to support people with a disability.

I note that recommendation 49 from the estimates committee on providing transparency on the timeline of the rollout on Foundational Supports has merely been “noted”. This troubles me. If the community were reassured that we had a roadmap for Foundational Supports, they would not be contacting us so regularly. There are too many people in the community who need these programs, and they are getting very little information about what to expect.

This also brings up one of the main areas where we need dedicated funding, which is funding for systemic advocacy. There is money going to advocacy groups in this space—and I absolutely acknowledge that. However, that funding is almost always connected to specific projects and does not really go towards allowing organisations to be dedicated advocates for their communities. What we need is guaranteed funding to ensure that advocacy groups can dedicate themselves to just that—advocacy. When NDIS funding is disappearing, when we are dealing with desperate people left in the lurch without it, we need passionate advocates to be speaking to all sides of politics.

We also cannot ignore the fact that we are in Canberra. If we have people in the community willing to stand up and speak to politicians and we are not funding them at the ACT level, they can very easily start advocating to the federal parliament instead. We need to have a budget that ensures the voices of people with disabilities are represented. Considering some of the frustration I have heard from the sector, I am still not convinced that is the budget we are looking at.

I also wish to speak in my capacity as the Greens spokesperson for young people. Of course, issues impacting young people sprawl all through the budget. So, with the indulgence of members, I will simply put all my main points here for the sake of brevity. The current approach to youth homelessness and the services that address it is one of the big challenges I keep hearing about. The problem, I think, is that we are just holding on. There are definitely changes that need to be made, but this government does not yet perceive youth homelessness as a crisis in the making.

If we want to ensure young people are safe, we need a roof over their heads. That means the government must understand what their situation is, and the status of the organisations that provide help is properly tracked by the government. We know we need full sector mapping to ensure that the money invested to address youth homelessness is actually going where it can do the most good. That involves mapping the demand for those homelessness services and actively drawing on our network of community organisations to understand the need that they are seeing on the ground.

We heard this from the Youth Coalition on community day. I was initially excited to see that the government had agreed to the relevant recommendation 31, to undertake sector mapping of the youth homelessness sector, but realised that it is leaving it to the Joint Pathways Initiative to map any service that is not government-funded. It also says nothing about the sorely-needed demand-side mapping for youth homelessness. I would love clarification on whether the government actually agrees to the spirit of this recommendation as well as the letter.

We also need longer-term guarantees for services helping young people who have been homeless or at risk of homelessness. The delay on guaranteeing Our Place Youth Foyer had ongoing funding was needlessly cruel and placed far too much pressure on young people already at risk. I sincerely am glad that the funding did come through, but the communication around it did far more harm than it had to. This speaks to the importance of establishing a budget process that does not leave the renewal of important services till the very last minute—which I think is thematic across a lot of community services.

Additional third spaces is also a key need we keep hearing from young people. The ACT library system does great work providing young people with a place safe from the elements and is a brilliant connecting service to a range of programs they may need access to. The recent spate of library closures and the looming potential of closure of the Civic Library will negatively impact young people in the ACT. If we want to support young people who may have nowhere else to go, we need to ensure we give them somewhere they can be without needing to spend money. I appreciate that I am talking to this in the de-facto social policy section of the budget and that it is ultimately an output decided in planning and infrastructure. But if we never design for social policy outcomes across those areas, where does that leave the people who stand to benefit the most from people-centred planning?

Finally, youth justice is a space that I believe needs more examination, especially in the context of the Jumbunna report. I appreciate that there is a lot to balance to ensure that young people in Bimberi are safe and provided access to opportunities. However, I think the government should, in particular, look at the Jumbunna report, and the inter-directorate recommendations it makes and then fund them. From that report, we know that, in 2023-24, here in the ACT, First Nations children were 14 times more likely to

be in detention relative to non-First Nations children. What an indictment on our system!

By the numbers then, you would hope that funding these recommendations would be particularly beneficial for First Nations children and young people. But we also know that better cross-directorate cooperation to improve outcomes for young people would benefit everyone. Jumbunna suggests increased day release for young people in Bimberi to attend school or work, funding for young people transitioning from Bimberi back into education and a culturally safe youth justice model for First Nations young people. I know that these programs will not be cheap. But, to be honest, neither is detaining a young person that we could be helping earlier and better. I truly believe that everyone in this building wants the best possible city to be a young person in. I think we all have different visions for how to get there. I call on the government to continue to listen to experts, to consult with the community and, more than anything, to make sure young people are heard and taken seriously.

Given that this new directorate incorporates the Office of LGBTIQ+ Affairs, I will speak in my capacity as Greens LGBTIQ+ spokesperson. Having this office in the new directorate does bring the potential to coordinate issues around queer health with broader community health issues, and I look forward to seeing the effect of this over the coming months and years. This is a crucial time to rally around the queer community, with attacks coming from as far away as Trump's America and as nearby as the LNP, which is Queensland. The ACT should be proud of its record as a progressive jurisdiction. But right now we need to see not only appropriate reassuring language but also material outcomes.

I was pleased in estimates hearings to gain reassurances from the office that they would work across government to ensure correct inclusive language, particularly around the full LGBTQIA+ acronym being used consistently. I also hope that the office and the government more broadly work with First Nations queer communities on the appropriateness of incorporating "brothergirls", "sisterboys" and other Indigenous queer identities into their language in this space.

On trans health care specifically, I was also really pleased to hear through the estimates process that the health service has recently employed a new paediatric endocrinologist, noting that that can be a particularly important part of health care for young people who are transitioning and may be prescribed with puberty blockers and/or hormone replacement therapy.

Finally in the LGBTQIA+ space, I want to take this opportunity to give a shout-out to the community sector. The provision of health care should first and foremost be a public good, but it is important to note that queer folks are one of a number of communities who have historically not been able to engage with public services while feeling safe. Queer community specific groups in this regard play an absolutely crucial role in this space, and I commend them on the amazing work that they do. *(Second speaking period taken.*

Finally, I rise to speak on some key areas within the women's portfolio in my role as the ACT Greens spokesperson for women. In consultation with the sector, we were made aware of issues around funding. It is not a secret that we want these amazing

organisations to receive more funding to continue the work they do. However, we understand that currently their funding can be disjointed and incredibly difficult for organisations to plan around in the long term. Rather than funding becoming available based on a large-scale assessment of the needs of the community, we often see small amounts of money being made available for new programs and niches and funding for ongoing programs facing increasing demand being cut.

I have heard from the sector that the programs they offer often end up being dictated by the funding that is available from the government rather than through the demands of the community. We reckon that this is due to a lack of sector-wide mapping. For example, in this moment, how would we know if the sector collectively provides all the services that vulnerable communities need? I have heard that there is little to no funding consideration provided for the children of women seeking support—for example, when they are experiencing family and domestic violence. This lack of understanding leaves the burden on the organisation itself to fund those sorts of wraparound services.

It is the sector, the experts in the field, who can identify what is missing and, when they face funding cliffs and minimal consultation or communication, it is left to the sector to fill those gaps. We as parliamentarians have to consult with those who are affected by the decisions we make. We must understand the demand within the sector and the services that is provided for the most vulnerable people in our community.

Through the estimates process, it was revealed that the funding for the Women's Safety Grants program—funding that was specifically designed for prevention, early intervention, service response and recovery—had been redirected to frontline services. While I will absolutely never dispute that frontline services absolutely need more funding, we also know that you cannot defund one valuable service to sustain another; you have to fund both. We heard the value of these grants from the community and from the minister herself. In fact, my understanding is that one of the reasons officials gave in estimates for redirecting the funding appeared to boil down to insufficient quantum in the grants. We firmly believe the grants should be reinstated without a loss to the funding of frontline services. It is another reason why we need sector-wide mapping with consultation from the experts.

Lastly, I am really concerned that, without a funding guarantee soon, we will not be able to retain excellent programs like the Multicultural Hub's Women's Service, which supports women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who are experiencing family, domestic and sexual violence. Because this budget has not provided renewed funding over the forward estimates, the Women's Service will likely need to wrap up in December unless they can secure an alternative funding line, either from the commonwealth or philanthropic sources.

Ironically enough, this flies in the face of the commonwealth's recent multicultural round table on preventing and responding to domestic, family and sexual violence in multicultural communities. Their listening report outlined six priority actions, the last of which, No 6, reads:

Funding, Investment and Collaboration: Longer term funding that focuses on collaboration and is based on service outcomes, not just numbers and outputs.

This is exactly what the sector has been saying here in the ACT too. The Multicultural Hub really needed that funding security in this budget. I sincerely hope the minister can find them a funding line—and we are happy to do anything we can to assist there. But, in the meantime, it really does put the Multicultural Hub and the women they help in a really precarious position.

I come back to the point that, across all areas of health and community, where there is a demonstrable need for a service and a community organisation is doing an excellent job meeting that need, they should be given long-term funding security! Let them do what they do best and do not assume that, because their service is addressing a community need on an ongoing basis, you can take away the funding and things will be fine. There is absolutely no replacement for long-term funding.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (4.29): I rise to speak in my capacity as the shadow minister for community services, disability, First Nations people, women, youth and families. I just call them “human services”. It will surprise no-one that I and the Canberra Liberals are speaking out against the Labor government’s budget, because we have very different approaches to the management of taxpayer funds. In Margaret Thatcher’s words:

The problem with socialism is that you eventually run out of other people’s money.

ACT Labor loves spending, with no regard to efficiency or evaluation and no regard to the effectiveness of outcomes. This is clearly apparent in this very woeful budget. It announces their economic mismanagement, highlighted by another rating downgrade. In this budget, the Treasurer has made the ill-informed assumption that the cost-of-living crisis is over, and, with that in mind, he has decided that now is the time to start pulling the rug out from under support services. I say to the Treasurer: your assumption that the cost-of-living crisis is over is plainly wrong.

While some Canberrans are doing relatively well, the sad reality for many disadvantaged Canberrans is that Canberra is increasingly a miserable place to live. They are stuck in intergenerational cycles of poverty, with increasingly dire access to housing and employment. Many of our fellow citizens are now relying on food relief and other charitable institutions for basic fundamental needs in life. We are seeing a gradual obliteration of the middle class and a push further down to the poverty line. Many middle-class families are reconsidering their spending, with decisions to discontinue their health insurance or other insurance policies being seen as a necessary step in the short term to rein in the family budget. But this places these families at risk, with a small event becoming a huge crisis.

The removal of key budget supports such as the Rent Relief Fund, the Women’s Safety Grants and the general constraints and broken promises regarding supports for the community sector will only make the outcomes for Canberrans far worse. I welcome the minister’s comments around an upgrade to the rent relief program. I will wait to see what that will look like. I particularly note the broken election promise to fix the community sector funding indexation rate to ensure it adequately accounts for the rise in all employment costs and to ensure the organisations are sustainable. The short-term supplementary funding cannot be a substitute for genuine reform and community sector funding. Even Labor acknowledges that the demand for services will exceed funding.

Seriously, Labor has had the reins of power in Canberra for over two decades. This problem is solely their own making.

Before those on the other side say that I am calling for increased spending, the solution is not necessarily that. It appears that it would not even matter how much Labor spends, because they have created a monster of a system that is riddled with inconsistencies, silos, duplication, ill-considered process and chokehold rules. One example is the ACT's domestic and family violence response, which generally works from nine to five. The implication of this is that, if a person requires support after five o'clock, they would need to call the 24-hour Domestic Violence Crisis Service helpline—a non-government and not-for-profit organisation. This results in delays and a lack of continuity of services.

Our responses need to be better coordinated. We need to make reasonable, sensible and practical decisions about the provision of funding for services. We cannot be driven by ideological imperatives to insource at all cost. Getting the right balance in our public and private partnership will go a long way towards delivering more effective services in a more sustainable way.

On the issue of youth, I would like to reflect on the way our young people have been treated in this budget. I note that, during an appropriations committee hearing, the Minister for Children, Youth and Families said words to effect that he has confidence that most directorates are reasonably attuned to the needs of young people. Subsequently, when his officials were asked about the potential development of a youth strategy, they advised that there is no plan at this time, despite the imminent expiry of the ACT Children and Young People's Commitment, which goes from 2015 to 2025.

I completely agree with the appropriations committee's recommendation 50—that the ACT government develop a youth strategy in order to establish a whole-of-government focus on children and young people. The Youth Advisory Council continues to call for system-wide mapping and planning of the youth homelessness system to better understand current gaps, assets and opportunities, including how the existing and new Youth Foyers are intended to function together within the wider system. I also agree with the committee's recommendation 51—that the ACT government ensure recommendations from the ACT Youth Advisory Council are made public to ensure the minister is representing their advice accurately. There continues to be an issue with young people with mental health issues being placed in adult facilities. Similarly, there have been issues with young people being placed in inappropriate housing. I urge the government to do what it can immediately to address these inappropriate placements.

At a time when multicultural communities feel threatened by racism and intolerance, I was incredibly disappointed at the limited support provided for multicultural communities in the budget. By all means, let's condemn racism, but, beyond that, the Labor government have to ask themselves: "What are we really doing, practically, to ensure that the multicultural community receives proper support to help them integrate and be meaningful contributors to society?" These communities regularly raise with me the cost of facilities and the inability of community groups to access larger venues appropriate to their needs. I note that even the cost of hiring rooms in public libraries went up in this budget, with not-for-profit organisations paying the commercial rate for library room hire, whereas previously they paid a discounted fee. It is even more

imperative in these times that we provide affordable options for communities to gather, support each other and allow them to reach into the broader Canberra community.

On disability, the outcomes Canberrans are seeing through the NDIS scheme are deteriorating according to the CEO of ACT Disability, Aged and Carer Advocacy Services. With basic items such as wheelchairs no longer being funded, the estimates committee called for the ACT government to investigate the removal of this item from Canberra's NDIS plan with minimal notice. ADACAS continues to advocate for the federal government to stop this practice. We must ask ourselves why individuals are receiving such shabby treatment, but all our Labor colleagues can say is: "There's nothing to see here. It wasn't us." Governments are responsible for the delivery of the programs they administer. For vulnerable groups like those with disability, the government needs to do better to get on the front foot, advocate, and explain to us what is going on.

The disability sector has long been concerned about the NDIS reform project, with fears that the considerable benefits of the scheme are being frittered away by poor system design that allows systemic fraud and financial abuse of participants. The ongoing uncertainty around foundational supports continues to cause anxiety. I will have more to say about that this week.

There are many things we should be doing, including reviewing the functions and funding of Official Visitors to conduct disability visits and assessing the adequacy of Official Visitors' funding to do this critical work. Sadly, it is not apparent that the Labor government is committed to doing this.

On Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs, there are many issues with the Labor government's approach. We have seen the results in Closing the Gap reports—that issues are not improving at the rate that Canberrans are comfortable with. We need to do better. Canberra expects the outcomes to lead the nation and are rightly disappointed that our performance on some measures lag behind other jurisdictions. Again, the Labor government has held the reins for so long. These outcomes are solely their responsibility.

The Jumbunna report into the over-representation of First Nations people in the ACT criminal justice system is a significant piece of work and Canberrans want the government would draw a line in the sand. Reports of systemic discrimination and lack of cultural safety are identified as significant drivers of over-representation. This is abhorrent and must be addressed. One of the key issues the Canberra Liberals are concerned about is the accountability that seems to have disappeared between multiple ministers. We call for a single whole-of-government accountability framework that is focused on enabling early and coordinated action and reform to implement the Jumbunna report. (*Extension of time granted.*) The framework should address the full range of systemic barriers faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT, with clear coordination, oversight and a reporting mechanism.

To conclude, the issues I have raised here are only a snapshot of the broader concerns we have with this budget. I was pleased to see that Labor "blinked" on the Working With Vulnerable People card fee when Mr Cocks and I sponsored a disallowance motion. I can only hope that they are seriously reflecting on the woeful impact of this

budget, will consider their misguided presumption that the cost-of-living crisis is over and will start seriously focusing on delivering quality community services and support in a more cost-effective manner. While we can see what needs to be done, we have no confidence that the ACT Labor government will listen or change direction. Why? Because there have been no consequences for doing exactly the same thing for over 23 years.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (4.40): Pregnancy and birth are cherished life experiences. The ACT Greens want all women and pregnant people to have positive and fulfilling experiences through pregnancy, birth and parenting so that they and their babies can have the best trajectory for a good life. That is why it is great to see policy decisions in this year's budget which address some of the policies the ACT Greens took to the election to make pregnancy, birth and parenting a much more wholesome, supportive and exciting experience than what people would otherwise have had without these programs.

The ACT Greens have been strong advocates for a freestanding birth centre in Canberra. The community has been calling for it for a really long time. Birth is not an illness, but the simple reality is that most women and birthing people currently have no choice but to give birth inside a hospital. The ACT Greens committed to a freestanding birth centre two elections ago, and last term we secured agreement for a standalone family birth centre as a priority in our agreement with Labor. The Greens motion later won the support of the Assembly, in February 2023, and that committed the ACT government to conduct early design and feasibility work on a freestanding birth centre for Canberra.

It led to the government's announcement earlier this year that they will deliver a standalone birth centre as part of the new North Canberra Hospital. It is a really welcome announcement. Some women and birthing people want to birth in a hospital, but others want to birth in a home-like environment with a known midwife, and this will help a lot more women access that. The direction is giving people much better options and choices than they otherwise would have had.

A lot of people also need continuity of care, and it is really important that we are offering that to as many women and birthing people who want to access it. Without continuity of care, people see different doctors and different midwives throughout their care, and that means they do not have someone who understands what is going on in their lives, what is going on in their bodies and what is going on in their pregnancy, and they do not have the support that they need. Midwife-led continuity of care is really important to offer to everybody who wants it.

Our current birth centres have waitlists of hundreds of women and birthing people, and that is in part because those birth centres offer continuity of care, which is great. It is a testament to how that model of care much better supports individual needs. The ACT has agreed to a target—that 75 per cent of women and pregnant people should be offered continuity of care by 2032, and we would love to see that extended so that anyone who wants midwife-led continuity of care can access it.

As part of that, we would love to see the government expand our existing midwife-led continuity of care to include early pregnancy and six weeks postnatal, as well as providing continued midwife support following pregnancy loss. We hope to work with

the government to achieve this by also giving privately practising midwives admitting rights in our public hospitals, enabling them to provide continuity of care in the event of a home birth transfer to a hospital, and allowing women and pregnant people to choose to give birth in hospital under the care of their chosen privately practising midwife.

Midwife-led continuity of care is also really cost effective. It has been found to much better support people's needs and their birthing outcomes. It is particularly important for women and birthing people in certain communities, women and birthing people with a disability who are culturally or linguistically diverse, those who are experiencing domestic or family violence and those experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage. Midwife-led continuity of care is also essential for culturally safe birthing models of care for First Nations women and for people who are pregnant with First Nations babies. The Greens would love to see the government make more urgent progress on getting towards the goal of allowing every woman and birthing person access to midwife-led continuity of care if they want to access it.

Pregnancy, birth and early parenting are really challenging times, especially for those who do not get the right care or for those who have traumatic birthing experiences. More broadly, for everyone, it changes routine, sleep patterns, hormones and the way they do everyday things. Those who need additional support might face lengthy wait times and cost to access help through perinatal services like Tresillian.

The ACT Greens went to the election with a platform to deliver more free services to parents in need of mental health or emotional support, to give them and their families the best start. There is a real need for these services, with around one in five new mums and around one in five new dads experiencing prenatal and postnatal mental health conditions. The best outcomes for families impacted by perinatal and mental health issues are when they are supported as a whole, by nurturing their relationships and helping them grow together.

We welcome the ACT government's policy to conduct a feasibility study for a public health six-bed perinatal and mental health mother and baby unit in this year's budget. It is good to see. The ACT Greens promised this at the election and we look forward to working with the ACT Labor government to ensure it progresses beyond a feasibility study, because it is clear that there is need. We would also love to see the ACT government go further in future budgets in order to provide more free community support for parents who are at risk of becoming unwell or for those who are transitioning back into the community from inpatient units, at a pace that best supports them and their family.

A perinatal step up, step down service or a perinatal safe haven model are the next logical steps for the ACT government to investigate beyond an inpatient unit, to keep families connected with the right supports and keep them out of clinical settings. Early intervention and prevention will support people before they reach a crisis point and before they have to go to a hospital or go back to a hospital, and that means quicker recovery times. It also means more available beds in hospital for people who medically need one. Given the increase in visits and admission to hospital have blown out the budget, we are very much looking forward to steps that emphasise prevention and early intervention in all of our future budgets, to reduce the pressures and costs on our public

hospital system and to give people much better options to keep them at home and out of hospital, in a way that gives them much better support.

I also want to briefly touch on the Baby Bundle program that is delivered by Roundabout Canberra in Holt. It is providing essential items for families and newborns who are facing incredible socioeconomic disadvantage. This is a great way to ensure families most at risk have access to some of the support that they need. It is a really good example of how we can address a significant issue in our community, while also reducing waste to landfill and offering a great volunteer opportunity for people who would like one. Hannah and Roundabout do such a fantastic job. You can volunteer. I would encourage everyone to spend a morning doing that. It is really good fun packing up gift boxes for people who need them, and it is a great way to support our local community. It is a good partnership with the ACT government and is a testament to the joy, care and kindness that Roundabout is spreading across our region.

It is really good to see movement on some of the things the community has been calling for over a very long time, particularly in a budget that contains a lot of less good news for a lot of people. We are looking forward to working with the government to improve birthing choice, improve the empowerment of women and birthing people, and improve the care for families across Canberra.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (4.48): I want to make a couple of brief remarks. My colleagues have already spoken about quite a few of the issues in this space. On the estimates committee, there was quite a lot of discussion—and I wanted to reflect on this—around issues of community sector funding. We know that, across the city, community sector organisations are the vital glue in holding the city together. I know that it sounds like a cliché, but it is very true.

The diversity of services that they deliver and the clients and community members that they support are almost beyond comprehension. It is hard to describe, in a speech like this, everything that the community sector contributes to this city. Yet we see them struggling on several fronts. One is funding. ACTCOSS put together a paper prior to the election that talked about the fact that, whilst organisations had seen indexation over the years, they had not seen a commensurate increase in funding levels to match population growth.

Everybody involved in the discussion—and I have been involved in quite a few chats about this—recognises that a simple, population-based funding metric is not the answer. But we have seen a failure to reflect that growth in demand in the way that community sector organisations have been funded. The ACTCOSS analysis, certainly for me, was a really helpful way to focus my mind on that pressing issue.

We saw in the ACT budget a commitment of \$10 million over two years across 160-odd or 170 organisations. This is welcome respite, to some extent, but the reality is that, spread across all those organisations, it averaged out in the tens of thousands. In the way it has been applied, some organisations are literally getting just over five figures; some are getting a little more. Whilst this will help around the edges, it does not fundamentally address these questions.

I am never one to cast aspersions on a positive step—this was a positive step—but it

can only be seen as a holding mark. It cannot be seen as the end of the road. Our community sector organisations are under enormous pressure, and they need a greater level of support, because they deliver a value-for-money proposition that government can only dream about, in terms of delivering the services itself. We need to get behind our community sector and provide a better level of funding.

The other issue that came through was the question of certainty and continuity of funding. Obviously, we have seen a range of processes like commissioning in recent years, which are designed to produce longer term contracts and the like, but we are seeing programs getting, say, another 12 months funding or another two years funding. Sometimes there are reasons for this, but the uncertainty is unhelpful to the sector, and particularly with the way that our budget has been delivered later in June, in recent years. These two issues sit together.

Through the estimates process, we got some really clear evidence on this, and there were some interesting discussions. With respect to the first outcomes of this, the estimates committee recommended that the ACT budget be brought forward as much as possible, certainly to early June at the latest. The point has been made that we have public holidays in early June. We do, but the Assembly could sit from Wednesday to Friday. The budget does not have to be presented on a Tuesday. I know it is habit, or perhaps convention, but we are the parliament, and we can change these things. We should look at bringing our budget forward and delivering it earlier, while being mindful of the federal budget timing. This would help.

An interesting discussion with the Treasurer during estimates involved the prospect of moving some of the contracts off a 30 June cycle and onto a different cycle, whether it be 30 September or some other date. It is in order to avoid the situation where groups are coming up to the end of the financial year, and currently they do not know whether they will get funding. Sometimes it is not until a week or two weeks before the end of the financial year. Sometimes there are early budget announcements, they are told informally through the public service, or whatever processes are available, but not everybody is able to do that. We have a situation where organisations are struggling to plan for their staff.

Staff are, at times, leaving because there is no job security for them. They have to pay their bills, pay their mortgages, pay their school fees, or whatever it is. The staff of community sector organisations are under pressure. Already, people often work in the community sector for less salary than they might get somewhere else. That is often because they are there because of the commitment, the passion and the contribution they want to make, and they are willing to do that. But they do not deserve, on top of that, to get close to the end of the financial year and not know whether they will have a job in a few weeks time.

I was pleased with how the recommendations of the estimates committee landed in this regard. I think there are some practical options, and we need to work together as an Assembly to deliver on some of those. I say “as an Assembly” because while some of this sits in the government’s remit, the Assembly sets the sitting calendar. Certainly, one of the key things that I will be looking for, when we set the calendar at the end of this year, is: what are we doing with the budget in 2026 to make sure that we do not leave the community sector with the same uncertainty that they have experienced in

recent years?

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (4.54): I rise to speak in support of the 2025-26 budget appropriation. I am proud that, in the 2025-26 budget, my first as Minister for Women and Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, the ACT has continued to invest in programs and initiatives which address the crisis of domestic, family and sexual violence.

Despite decades of work, the rates of domestic, family and sexual violence remain stubbornly high and continue to increase. In the recently released report by Women's Health Matters, based on their biannual survey of women's health in the ACT, 30 per cent of respondents said they had experienced violence from a family member, 27 per cent said they had experienced violence from an intimate partner and 40 per cent of respondents said they had experienced some form of sexual violence in their lifetime.

This is absolutely unacceptable, and the ACT government continues to work with the community sector to improve responses, deliver critical support to victim-survivors of domestic, family and sexual violence, and assist people choosing to use violence to change their behaviour and prevent violence before it occurs or escalates. This is an issue which all Labor governments are prioritising. This budget includes the implementation of commonwealth funding provided through the Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses 2021-30 Federation Funding Agreement.

I am also proud that, in this budget, we have implemented for the first time the new Safer Families Levy principles. The Safer Families Levy is one of the funding sources that the ACT government uses to fund activities which prevent and respond to domestic, family and sexual violence. It comes directly from ACT ratepayers, reflecting the fact that doing this work is incumbent on all of us. This is a whole-of-community and whole-of-government issue.

In March 2025, the ACT government agreed to all four of the Auditor-General's recommendations to strengthen administration of the Safer Families Levy and has begun to implement those recommendations. The seven Safer Families Levy principles will govern expenditure of funds raised through the levy. The principles were developed in consultation with key community sector organisations.

Since 1 July 2024, the levy has been funding frontline services only. The levy is expected to raise around \$54 million over the four years to 2028-29, which will support the continued improvement of responses to domestic, family and sexual violence, including through the development of the domestic, family and sexual violence strategy. The strategy, which will include a monitoring and evaluation framework, will provide a road map for coordinated, effective and sustainable responses to gender-based violence.

In this budget, the government is prioritising investment in frontline services. Over the next four years, \$24.5 million will be invested in frontline services. These services are often the first point of contact for victim-survivors needing urgent support, as well as the provision of longer term recovery and healing activities. These services include

specialist support for children and young people, who are victim-survivors in their own right, with their own needs and interests. It also includes funding for the Family Violence Safety Action Pilot, which brings together critical government and non-government agencies to ensure coordination and information sharing to promote safety in the most high-risk family violence cases in the ACT.

Through the 2025-26 budget, the Domestic Violence Crisis Service will receive \$4.8 million over four years to meet growing demand, expand services and support continuation of this critical service that is responsive to the safety, recovery and healing needs of victim-survivors. This funding will assist DVCS to better meet demand for emergency accommodation and expand the Criminal Justice Advocacy Program, which provides support to clients who are victims of family violence offences progressing matters through the criminal justice system.

DVCS will also receive \$1.4 million to contribute two workers to the Family Violence Safety Action Program, delivered by Victim Support. FVSAP will receive \$8.2 million over four years to continue their critical, life-saving initiative. This includes \$6.8 million for frontline workers in Victim Support ACT to provide intensive case coordination between government and non-government agencies to address high-risk domestic and family violence perpetration in the ACT. It includes \$1.4 million for DVCS to contribute two workers to the program.

Continuing FVSAP will ensure women and children at greatest risk of harm will have access to specialist support and multi-agency responses focused on keeping the perpetrator visible.

The Canberra PCYC will receive \$2.1 million over four years from 2025-26 to continue and build on the success of the Solid Ground program. This supports young people aged 11 to 18 years who are affected by domestic, family and sexual violence or at risk of using domestic, family and sexual violence. From 2026-27, Solid Ground will expand to also include counselling for young people.

Solid Ground will continue to provide young people with a safe and supportive environment to foster emotional awareness, healthy connections and improve wellbeing through therapeutic learning activities. The program aims to reduce the prevalence and impact of domestic, family and sexual violence in the ACT and promote healing for children and young people.

YWCA Canberra will receive \$1.3 million over four years to engage two specialist children's workers within their domestic violence support service to work with children and young people. This investment will increase YWCA Canberra's capability to provide a holistic, trauma-informed and preventive response to children and young people who have experienced or witnessed domestic and family violence. This funding is in addition to YWCA Canberra's \$2 million provided over four years for their domestic violence support service to 30 June 2027.

The Canberra Rape Crisis Centre will receive \$7.1 million over four years to expand service capacity in response to rising demand and complexity of cases. This funding will support additional crisis and counselling staff, a policy and partnerships officer, education and communications functions, operation manager, and ICT upgrades and

emergency brokerage. This will strengthen CRCC's ability to support victim-survivors' safety, recovery and healing and respond to recommendations from the specialist services review.

Another key priority of this budget was to better address the impacts of violence on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. While all violence is unacceptable, rates of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is a national shame. Three in five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have experienced physical or sexual violence perpetrated by a male intimate partner. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 33 times more likely than other Australian women to be hospitalised for domestic and family violence injuries.

This violence is a product of and entrenched by the ongoing impacts of colonisation and dispossession. One of the priorities identified through the development of the national plan was to "recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must lead responses for their communities and deliver those responses". This was clearly reflected in the ACT context through the Domestic Violence Prevention Council's Expert Reference Group.

We must learn from the wisdom and expertise of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and be led by the community in understanding how to respond, effect change and encourage healing. This epidemic of violence cannot be addressed without leadership from within the community. *The long yarn* is a community-led report authored by the Domestic Violence Prevention Council Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Expert Reference Group. It updates the original 12 recommendations of the *We don't shoot our wounded* report to prevent and address the unacceptable rates of family and domestic violence.

The government is committed to working in partnership with the community to implement the recommendations of *The long yarn* report, and I look forward to presenting the government's formal response in due course. In this budget, there is an initial commitment to implementing *The long yarn* report. The government has made a significant investment of \$6 million in funding over three years, commencing from the 2026-27 financial year, in Aboriginal community-controlled organisations who work to support victim-survivors to address the impacts of domestic, family and sexual violence.

Yhurwun Bullan will receive \$1.932 million over three years to continue the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Women's Outreach Program, providing intensive, holistic case management services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children impacted by violence. This includes providing cultural safety when navigating mainstream services and justice responses, and delivering services in culturally safe and trusted settings.

Sisters in Spirit will receive \$1.645 million over three years from 2026-27 to continue to provide individual and systemic advocacy services to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children impacted by violence.

WhISPers will receive \$183,000 over three years to engage in the community and deliver healing activities through sports and cultural events to support improved

awareness and healing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people impacted by domestic, family and sexual violence. This recognises the important role of sport as an opportunity for both primary prevention and healing.

Yerrabi Yurwang Child and Family Aboriginal Corporation will receive \$1.661 million over three years to continue to deliver their Narragunnawali Strengthening Families Program, which provides specialist crisis and intensive case management to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children impacted by domestic, family and sexual violence.

Finally, the government is investing \$600,000 over two years to develop a community and professional education campaign communicating that “violence is not our way”. It is currently in conversation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. This campaign will be designed and implemented by the community, and it aims to encourage victims and perpetrators to seek help and emphasise positive role models for men, women and children.

The investment in local ACCOs is a key pillar of the government’s response, and I look forward to watching these organisations continue to do incredible work with their communities, providing culturally safe and appropriate services.

The development of the 2025-26 budget highlighted the significant intersections between my portfolios. This is obvious today, when we have spoken about the sexual violence response as part of the Justice and Community Safety section of the appropriation bill. That initiative will see the establishment of a new SACAT team within ACT Policing, as well as a team of sexual assault advocates. This crossover highlights the whole-of-government approach which is required to make progress towards a safer community where people of all genders can live free from violence.

All of this work supports the government’s commitment to achieve gender equality in the ACT. My role as Minister for Women is to oversee this work happening across government to promote—to quote from the federal government’s Working for Women Strategy—“an Australia where people are safe, treated with respect, have choices and have access to resources and equal outcomes no matter their gender”.

Quite rightly, very little of the investment in this goal sits within the Office for Women. Instead, many of my colleagues will speak today about initiatives in this budget within their portfolios, across health, sport, education and housing, to name a few, which aim to improve the lives of women, girls and gender-diverse people in the ACT, and therefore promote gender equality.

This work is also reflected in the women’s budget statement, which reflects the government’s commitment to promoting gender equality by prioritising investment which improves the lives of women and girls. We continue to improve our approach to gender-responsive budgeting and to the development of the women’s budget statement over time, ensuring that policy proposals are assessed in terms of possible gender impacts as early as possible.

More directly, in this budget we have continued funding for community sector organisations who support women in the ACT to reach their potential. Fearless Women

will receive a total of \$772,000 over the next two years to continue delivering free education, mentoring and counselling programs for girls and young women as part of their Empowerment Program. We have also seen the successful rollout of free period products across many schools and health facilities, marking the completed implementation of a key initiative from the 2023-24 midyear budget review.

This budget reflects the government's ongoing commitment to addressing gender-based violence and promoting gender equality. These are the goals which will improve life for all of us by creating a fairer, safer and healthier community.

I commend the appropriation for the Health and Community Safety Directorate to the Assembly.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (5.08): Poverty in the ACT is a real and growing issue, and it has been here for a long time. It has been hidden, but it is becoming more visible, it is becoming more widespread, it is becoming more systemic, and it is being experienced across the spectrum by a range of different people. We know that one in 10 children in the ACT are living below the poverty line—9,000 children. Around 1,000 children in the last year sought help from homelessness services. Almost 200 of them did so alone, without the company of a guardian or other family member.

We have the second highest rate of childhood developmental vulnerability in the country. Other members have spoken about the challenges faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT, who continue to experience disadvantage, entrenched disadvantage and cycles of poverty, incarceration and trauma, which are often reflected on in this place. If you are living here on income support payments and JobSeeker payments and you are not living in secure housing, your chances are very low, unless you are fortunate enough to be housed through the social housing system, where waitlists are long.

The minister has just spoken. For people experiencing violence, it is another category of violence in their own homes. Many of them have nowhere to go, and for that reason they are not able to escape, because of the poverty they are experiencing concurrently. There is a lot of work to do in this portfolio area. Work is being done by the government and by members of our community sector, who deserve constant recognition and appreciation in this place. Thankfully, often they are getting it from across the political spectrum.

We are told Canberrans enjoy the best quality of life in the world. Which Canberrans? That is the question, though. It is certainly the case for me. I love living here. It is a fantastic place to live. But quality of life for whom? It is important that we continue reflecting on that question in relation to this and future budgets, when we are considering the role particularly of the community sector in addressing poverty and working with the most disadvantaged people in the ACT.

Mr Rattenbury reflected earlier on challenges faced by the community sector when it comes to funding. We have often heard of the starvation cycle, where the funding that is provided is often spread across a range of organisations, and no-one has quite enough to do a good job of what it is that they are trying to do. Everyone gets a little bit, and I can understand the temptation to do that, but it leaves these organisations in a constant

state of not quite having enough, and wondering whether they will have enough going into the next financial year.

It is not just for their sake, and for the sake of the overworked, often under-appreciated staff within these organisations; it is for the sake of the people that they are aiming to help. That is always their priority, and it is for that reason that so many community sector workers are not just staff, not just paid employees in the community sector, but volunteers as well, working extra hours, whether paid or unpaid, bringing food items into the workplace to offer emergency food relief in an unstructured, informal way to clients who are there for something else, whether it is for sexual violence crisis support or otherwise.

These are the stories that we will often hear when visiting community organisations, as many members in this place frequently do. At the same time, we see this kind of understandable drive for competition in the community sector—the drive for efficiency, which I can understand; it is important that funding is being used, and that every dollar is going as far as possible, as Ms Barry was discussing earlier in the debate. But there is a risk that we lose one of the key strengths of the community sector in these commissioning processes, which is their capacity to collaborate, to understand what is happening, because they have boots on the ground, and to connect people to different services and apply a “no wrong door” policy by saying, “You come to my service, and it might not be the right one, but I know where to send you.”

The risk of always setting the community sector organisations against each other is that natural collaborators become competitors. This is a frustration that I am sure we all hear from members of the community sector, who want to work together, but are also competing for contracts, competing for a little bit more funding to get themselves and their teams out of that starvation cycle.

At the same time, on the topic of efficiency, there seems to be a lot of inefficiency in contract management on the side of the organisations, which express their frustrations at acquitting a range of different contracts with different contract managers across different parts of government, many of which have different requirements and different reporting times and expectations, and those can shift over time.

I am hopeful that the machinery-of-government changes that are expressed in the line item we are discussing today, the merger of ACT Health and Community Services into the one directorate, will help with that. But it will take concerted action and effort to have organisations not just reporting to different people within now the same directorate, but hopefully reporting to the same contract managers, with unification of some of the contracts that are there. That would save a lot of time for the sector—this is something that I hear repeatedly—and for the government.

Mr Rattenbury spoke earlier on the importance of funding certainty, and we cannot stress that enough. The situations that Mr Rattenbury described seem unacceptable to me. We heard earlier this year, including in relation to the Our Place Youth Foyer, for example, which has been discussed here frequently, that that is part of normal budgeting processes. It seems to me that that should be abnormal. This is solvable. This is something that can be solved without additional investment, and just with some more forward planning and a commitment to provide certainty as soon as possible.

I do not see why we cannot renew contracts a year out, before they expire. I do not think officers in this place would find it acceptable that their staff members did not know what their fate would be in the next financial year, a month before the current one ends. That is something that we can address. I hope to see that addressed, and I do welcome some changes to contracting arrangements, where we are seeing longer contracts with options for extension, which is a positive move from the government. I would love to see plenty more of that.

We often debate investing more in the community sector. I understand that there are limits on how much can be expended in the sector, but so much of what that sector does is preventive work. What prevents and reduces the strain further down the line on acute services is what we can do upstream. Maybe there is an opportunity here for a pathway towards budget repair that involves greater investment in the community sector—not just funding for the community sector, support for the community sector, which is the language we often use, but support for the people that the community sector supports, who end up costing more for public services if they are not engaging early with the services and the support that they need, and that the community sector is uniquely positioned to provide.

On that, we are deeply dependent on the community sector. Governments and people experiencing disadvantage in the ACT are fundamentally dependent on the community sector. They have a lot of power, and they could perhaps use that more than they do at the negotiating table, in pushing for the kind of funding that is needed to deliver the important services that they deliver across the ACT.

I note ongoing reforms in this area. Mr Rattenbury touched earlier on the \$10 million funding increase spread across community sector organisations, which is welcome. Certainly, it is a holding mark, with more work needed. I appreciate the minister's engagement on that reform, and acknowledgement that that does need to be ongoing, to ensure the sustainability of a sector that is so vital to making Canberra the best place to live in the world, not just for those of us in this building, but for people who have not had the same opportunities and face so many challenges when it comes to enjoying the quality of life we have here in Canberra.

I also briefly acknowledge the food relief action plan that is under development and the funding for the food relief bank provided through this budget. Again, I want to thank Minister Orr for her positive engagement on my first private member's motion brought to the Assembly on this matter, and for following that up with funding and commitments to build a more coherent food relief system across the ACT. What could be more important than meeting the basic needs of as many people as we possibly can?

I look forward to further discussions around ongoing reforms in this area, in this directorate. I very much welcome as much commitment as we can possibly manage with a forward-looking approach to what is needed, not just for our city but across the life span of the people who are facing disadvantage in the ACT.

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi—Minister for Business, Arts and Creative Industries, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations) (5.17): As Minister for

Multicultural Affairs and Children, Youth and Families, I am pleased to provide information on the ways this budget will help deliver our election commitments across these portfolios to continue building an even better Canberra.

The ACT government recognises the importance of multiculturalism and the significant value Canberra's growing cultural and linguistically diverse community contributes to our city. Everyone is welcome here, and we unequivocally condemn acts of hatred, racism and discrimination, including Islamophobia and antisemitism.

One of our biggest expressions of how we, as a community, celebrate diversity is the National Multicultural Festival. This budget provides \$4.6 million to continue this celebration and meeting the ACT Labor election commitment to improve and expand the festival. Earlier this year, we saw an incredible event that expanded the footprint and had so many exciting stalls and performances. I, like I think all members, cannot wait for the 2026 festival.

This budget delivers on another ACT election commitment, funding the continuation of two key programs for refugee and asylum seekers. The Humanitarian Family Settlement Assistance Grants Program provides one-off grants to newly-arrived refugee families or individuals to help secure long-term accommodation and meet immediate living expenses. The program supports pathways to housing, education and economic participation, enriching the lives of all Canberrans. The second program is the Humanitarian Funding Program, which provides a further \$150,000 to support community organisations working with refugees and asylum seekers, particularly those who are ineligible for other forms of support. This is just one way we demonstrate our commitment under the Multiculturalism Act to foster an inclusive and compassionate community.

I am pleased that this budget also includes services to meet our important obligations under the Children and Young People Act to care for children and young people experiencing significant disadvantage, vulnerability and harm—continuing to demonstrate our support for some of the most vulnerable Canberrans. The ACT government is reforming child and family services to ensure we strengthen families and keep children and young people strong, safe and connected. As part of this, we are progressing a new service system to shift focus and investment to improve support for families and keep children and young people safe at home, while reducing the need for costly statutory interventions. This sits as part of key actions under the government's Next Steps for our Kids strategy and action plan and aligns closely with our commitments to the Safe and Supported national framework and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

This financial year, we have allocated approximately \$13 million in 2025-26 to fund additional costs for out-of-home care services. This will ensure we have accommodation and support services to care for children and young people with very complex presentations. The cost of providing intensive specialist and bespoke residential care is high, but it is worth every penny. It is crucial that this government provides bespoke residential care to meet the complex needs of these children and young people. Some of the funding allocated in this year's budget will go to bespoke placements for at least 20 children and young people with intensive complex needs, be it disability and/or comorbid mental health conditions. Canberrans wants the best for

kids in need, and we will do everything we can to continue to support them.

The 2025-26 budget also continues to support the young people that are in Bimberi as well as the dedicated staff who work in the facility. This includes funding to continue an additional six youth workers for Bimberi Youth Justice Centre. Since mid-2022, Bimberi has operated all four residential units. This requires adequate staffing levels to meet the minimum standards necessary for the safe and effective care of young people while upholding human rights and legislative responsibilities. These staff will assist in meeting our obligations and progressing recommendations from our important oversight bodies.

This investment complements initiatives in recent budgets that see us deliver our Next Steps strategy, including actions under the action plan 2022-26. These initiatives focus on strengthening families and reforming child, youth and family services to deliver a broader reform effort. It is being implemented through ongoing collaboration with government and non-government partners. They also include supports for young people with complex needs, including additional funding in place for young people transitioning to adulthood and independence and building a more fit-for-purpose property portfolio to enable delivery of contemporary specialist therapeutic residential care. These projects are already delivering, and we will see the fruits of this labour over the next few years with better outcomes for young people leaving care.

I also want to use this opportunity to thank the Child and Family Reform Ministerial Advisory Council, which was established in September 2023. This council plays an important role in shaping policy advice, fostering collaboration across sectors and ensuring that community voices are reflected in decision-making. Their work is helping to set the priorities and inform and influence decisions made in this budget—so thank you. There is incredible work being done across the ACT government that is for children, young people, families, and our multicultural communities. This budget continues to support that work now and into the future.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (5.24): I move amendment No 2 circulated in my name [*see schedule 2 at page 2938*] and I table a supplementary explanatory statement.

This amendment is one that has been considered by the reconstituted estimates committee and which people have been expecting and was previously circulated. As has already been spoken about in this place and publicly, the government's amendment to the appropriation bill enables the ACT government to complete the arrangements for a deed of settlement and release with Calvary Health Care ACT and related entities.

I want to thank members of the estimates committee who engaged positively in the additional estimates hearings. I trust the information provided through the process has addressed most, if not all, of the outstanding questions about the settlement. Thank you also to officials who appeared at the hearings and prepared responses to questions on notice with a tight turnaround. I particularly want to recognise the quick work of the committee and secretariat for providing the report from the inquiry for members well in time for this debate.

The report made three findings. I was pleased that the committee found that the approach of amending the Appropriation Bill 2025-2026 provides greater transparency than other options that may have been available to us. This amendment to the Appropriation Bill 2025-2026 provides for additional appropriation for controlled recurrent payments to the Health and Community Services Directorate. This amendment is necessary to facilitate a payment of \$65 million to Calvary Health Care, which will settle the outstanding matters between the territory and Calvary in relation to the acquisition of Calvary Public Hospital Bruce. This will in turn enable us to conclude the just terms compensation process. Assuming this amendment passes, the consequential amendments I will move later in the appropriation bill debate make adjustments to the totals in the bill and the Treasurer's Advance to reflect the increase in the overall appropriation.

The settlement with Calvary releases the territory from other current claims or claims that ought to have been reasonably known at the time of settlement. As has been well canvassed, the settlement includes the payment of \$65 million in addition to the \$23.2 million the territory previously paid to Calvary in early compensation to enable Calvary to cover payments which became due as a result of the acquisition. The introduction of the Health Infrastructure Enabling Act 2023 made provision for claimants to seek compensation for costs incurred as a result of the transition, including just terms compensation for the acquisition of the land and buildings and termination of the Calvary Network Agreement. The cash payment agreed with Calvary is in line with the projections and provisions made by the territory at the time of the acquisition.

In coming to a settlement, as has been outlined in some detail over recent weeks, the territory has also waived some debts, liabilities and other financial offsets and entered into an operations agreement with Calvary to support ongoing collaboration in relation to the Bruce campus, reflecting Calvary's importance as an ongoing partner in the delivery of health and hospital services in the ACT. The acquisition was made to facilitate the planning and delivery of the more than \$1 billion new northside hospital to be owned by Canberrans and operated as part of a truly integrated public hospital network. I look forward to continuing to get on with this important project.

I did not speak in the debate in part 1.6, but I want to take the opportunity while I am up to recognise that this is the first time we have debated the combined Health and Community Services Directorate. I want to recognise that this is a challenging time for staff that are coming together through a machinery of government change and to thank them for the work that they do for our community each and every day, whether they are working in policy and negotiations with the commonwealth, working in the frontline of child protection and youth justice or working in the delivery of public health services or housing.

So many critically important services are delivered by our public servants in the Health and Community Services Directorate and through our partnerships with non-government organisations delivering services on the ground for the community and bringing together those voices of consumers, of carers and of the sector to advocate for those who need the services of ACT government and those who are delivering them.

Bringing together these different parts of our human services delivery and policy organisation across ACT government gives us a real opportunity, which I know that

many staff are looking forward to grasping, to even better integrate across our services. For me, of course, having spent eight years as Minister for Children, Youth and Families in various guises—as Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, six years as the Minister for Health and many years as Minister for Disability—I am really looking forward to the opportunity to bring together our service delivery conversations, our policy conversations and our negotiations with the commonwealth into one directorate. The ACT government is small, and people have collaborated well over the years. But we know how easy it is for silos to develop, and I am particularly looking forward to the opportunity to develop more coordinated and integrated approaches to those people whose complex lives mean that they interact with many parts of ACT government service delivery.

While there has been a lot of criticism and a lot of opportunity for better ideas and more spending, one of the great things about this particular debate has been that, ultimately, what it all boils down to is we all actually have the same objectives in increasing and improving the support that we deliver to some of the most vulnerable people in our community, the people who rely on our services across the board and the people whose complex lives we have the opportunity here to improve in the work that we do every day. So I want to thank everybody who has participated in the debate on part 1.6, because I think it demonstrates the Assembly's broad commitment to health and community services. I also want to thank all of the partners who continue to work with us and all of the public servants who work so very hard to deliver these services every day. Thank you.

MS ORR (Yerrabi—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water, Minister for Disability, Carers and Community Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (5.31): I rise today to speak on the investments the ACT government is making in support of our community and non-government health and community services sector. This government remains committed to a sustainable, vibrant and diverse community sector that supports community members when they need it most. We value the social cohesion, advocacy and service deliver functions the community sector provides every day.

We also recognise that non-government, non-profit organisations operate in a complex environment and not every service they provide in our community is directly funded by the ACT government. The 2025-26 budget included approximately \$252 million in funding to not-for-profit community sector organisations to support the delivery of health and community support services alongside government. A significant majority of these contracts receive annual community sector indexation, or CSI, to maintain their value. That funding is complemented by the key \$10 million dollar boost for community sector organisations with multiyear contracts eligible for indexation in the 2025-26 budget. The ACT government is providing this funding because it recognises the vital role the community sector plays in our city. It provides breathing space for these organisations, allowing them to maintain stability while government continues to lead the important reform work.

Today, I can further confirm details around how this funding boost is being provided to eligible community sector organisations. Letters of offer have been sent to 140 eligible organisations, and we expect that payments to these organisations will be received in

October this year. The organisations with larger government contracts will receive a greater portion of this funding. Most will receive almost \$39,000 each for each payment, which reflects the scale of the services those organisations provide. A smaller number of organisations holding only small funding contracts will also receive their fair share of support—annual payments of \$5,000 or \$10,000, depending on the amount of ongoing government funding they already receive. This approach ensures that all eligible organisations feel the benefit of the \$10 million funding boost.

Community organisations use this funding very flexibly to relieve key pressures in human resources, information technology, safeguarding their operations, improving their premises, business development and fundraising. I am advised that a large number of eligible organisations are also using this opportunity to meet with their contract managers in the ACT Health and Community Services Directorate to discuss the use of these funds to address sustainability needs.

To capture the impact of this \$10 million funding, eligible organisations will complete a short survey before and after they receive their funding. This feedback will demonstrate to government how the funding has made a difference to community organisations and could inform future decision-making. The process for distributing the funding boost has been planned to minimise administrative burden and provide an equitable distribution of funding to eligible NGOs. This \$10 million funding boost is only part of the journey. Achieving lasting change will require government and the community sector to work together in shaping a community services system that is sustainable and able to adapt to future challenges.

These reforms support the ACT government's ability to continue to make considered evidence-based decisions about the services it delivers and assist non-government organisations to deliver for those with the greatest need in our community, especially as those needs evolve and change. It is not simple work. It will take time, commitment, and collaboration. But, if we succeed, the result will be a stronger, fairer and more inclusive Canberra, where everyone can get the care and support services, they need to live a life they value.

I was very proud to see pass in the previous term of the Assembly, the ACT's Disability Inclusion Act, which enshrines a social model of disability and broadens the inclusion accessibility agenda across more of government. I am pleased to work with our disability community representatives, and soon we will welcome new members of the Disability Advisory Council, which has been established under the Act. This new council builds on and elevates the Disability Reference Group. With the changeover, we are seeing a few people move on and a few new people come in. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the outgoing members of the DRG for their service and contributions.

This budget provides resources to establish a consultative panel to support the increased consultation engagement with the disability community members and their peak advocacy bodies, as government agencies develop and implement their disability inclusion plans as well as the other reform work across the disability policy area. We also have money to assist people with disability and disability service providers to undertake consultation and engagement work on some of the larger reform work locally and federally.

The ACT government's new ACT Food Relief Action Plan is also progressing. This will be a strategic road map to direct a connected and effective response to food relief across the ACT. As outlined in the budget, starting from the 2025-26 financial year, we are establishing the \$1.5 million Food Bank Fund, providing \$500,000 per year over the next three years to support food bank providers to meet reported levels of increased demand. The Food Bank Fund will be implemented in line with the staged approach for the development of the action plan.

In the first year of the fund, \$500,000 will be provided to maintain the Uplifting Food Relief funding delivered in the 2024-25 financial year. This includes support for food supply distribution and transportation. Funding for the remaining two years of the Food Bank Fund, totalling \$1 million across the next two financial years, will be guided by the priorities outlined in the action plan. This makes sure that future allocations are informed by sector feedback and reflect the most pressing and emerging needs in our community at any point in time. We are working closely with the Canberra Food Relief Network and the Food and Emergency Relief Advisory Committee as well as other stakeholders in this process.

I am pleased to have recently become the responsible minister for LGBTIQ+ affairs. I will note just one example of many in this area of work that is going on under the budget. In this budget, the ACT government has committed \$166,000 to extend funding for the Gender Pathways Peer Navigation Service for an additional year. This service plays a vital role in supporting trans and gender-diverse people in the ACT by providing information, referrals and peer support across social, legal and medical gender affirmation pathways.

The service is delivered by A Gender Agenda, a peer-led and community-controlled organisation based in Canberra recognised for its expertise and trusted relationships with the community. With the initial funding due to conclude in June 2025, this one-year extension ensures continuity of support for trans and gender-diverse Canberrans. The continuation of this service directly supports the commitment of the Capital of Equality Strategy 2024-29 to support the LGBTIQ+ peer-led organisations to meet community needs.

That is just a brief overview. I think we will continue to debate many of the wider circumstances, issues, programs, projects and reforms that have been outlined in here. It is quite a big piece of work, and it is one that we will continue to work together on. I certainly welcome the input from those in the chamber who are looking to take a constructive approach to balancing all the needs of our community in making sure that our programs are getting there.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (5.39): I would like to support the comments made today about supporting our community sector to ensure that they can provide the services that our vulnerable Canberrans need. I would also like to speak to the government's amendment to the appropriation that brought forward funding for the Calvary hospital settlement. I was on the re-formed estimates committee and, while the committee found that amending this appropriation provided more transparency than other methods of securing the funding, I would like to highlight my concern that the directorate did not provide the 2025-26 budget addendum to the committee until after

the hearings. This removed the committee's ability to ask questions about the transaction and the budget addendum, leading to a lack of transparency.

During the hearings, we were told that the \$65 million required for settlement of the Calvary hospital purchase would come from borrowings and attract interest payments. When we received the budget addendum, we found that the \$65 million payment would come from deposits and reduced interest receipts. We asked questions about the wrong transaction. Question taken on notice No 2 shows a reversal of \$89.6 million from the central provision, which also had a \$26.6 million asset component. Neither can be found in the 2025-26 budget addendum. The budget addendum shows a \$66.2 million net asset provision liability gain that has a positive impact on the headline net operating balance and offsets the settlement expense. The committee did not have the appropriate documents at the hearings, so it was unable to scrutinise the transactions thoroughly and ask questions about them. This is a concerning lack of transparency.

Ms Stephen-Smith's amendment No 2 agreed to.

Proposed expenditure, as amended, agreed to.

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate—Part 1.7.

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (5.42): As this directorate contains all of my portfolios, with the exception of infrastructure, I will seek to cover all of those areas in this speech, which, for the benefit of the manager of government business and whip, I will try to do in 15 minutes, not 45 minutes as originally intended.

The budget continues the government's investment in international engagement, driven by our International Engagement Strategy, and provides the resources necessary to continue our trade agenda as well as our cultural and diplomatic agenda. Funding in the budget supports: diplomatic and trade missions; the costs associated with the Office of International Engagement hosting dozens of international delegations that visit Canberra; strengthening ties with key partner governments, cities and institutions; and building capacity for Canberra businesses, universities and cultural institutions to participate in global opportunities.

International engagement is critical to our city's future economic growth. The ACT is a tiny economic market and Australia is not a particularly large one in the global context, so our growth in the longer term relies on more global partnerships. International education, tourism, research and service exports are some of our fastest-growing sectors and some of our biggest employing sectors. This budget ensures we will keep building on Canberra's strengths, but, of course, our efforts are supported and really underpinned by strong partnerships with the Australian government, particularly through the support of Austrade and Tourism Australia, who have extensive global networks and expertise that are very helpful for a small jurisdiction like the ACT to extend outreach. They have people in market in dozens of countries where we can have no possible presence, so we rely very heavily on that network.

Austrade's global networks, market intelligence and trade facilitation services amplify our local efforts. They provide local businesses with practical advice on entering and

succeeding in international markets. They connect Canberra enterprises with trusted partners, distributors and investors abroad, and they support the government in designing and making sure that our trade missions have the highest possible impact. This partnership ensures our international agenda is 100 per cent aligned with the national trade strategy, avoids duplication and seeks to maximise opportunities.

The government's focus in 2025 and going into 2026—having completed successful missions in China, the Pacific, New Zealand and Japan—is to focus our trade mission program particularly strongly on ASEAN member nations. The ASEAN Summit was held in Melbourne last year. One of the key outcomes was for further and deeper engagement at a subnational government level with our ASEAN partners.

We recently had a large delegation from Vietnam here, with whom I met last Friday. Our trade mission priorities for 2025-26 include Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam, as well as India and EU-UK. We will seek to continue to support businesses in preparing for international markets through trade readiness programs. We will strengthen Canberra's hosting of international delegations, conferences and cultural events. With that insight, Windows to the World resumes this year in the middle of October. We will work closely with the Australian government on diplomatic missions based here in Canberra and partner jurisdictions to, with a very limited resource base, seek to maximise Canberra's international impact. That feeds into tourism and our objective under the T2030 tourism strategy to grow the value of our visitor economy to around \$5 billion by the end of 2030.

Through the Aviation Stimulus Fund we will seek to connect Canberra to more destinations, with the overall objective of making it cheaper and easier for people to travel to Canberra. That is critical to unlocking further growth in both domestic and international tourism, business travel and trade. Through further investment in the Aviation Stimulus Fund in this budget, we will drive efforts—in partnership with Canberra Airport, Visit Canberra and Tourism Australia—to grow new routes and capacity to and from Canberra Airport.

Pleasingly, this December will see the return of Qatar Airways, which is a major win for the territory. We are establishing direct daily links between Canberra and many international markets via Doha. In addition to this direct international connection, we have one to North America via Fiji, thanks to our partnership with Fiji Airways. Domestically, regional airlines have commenced direct flights to Coffs Harbour and Avalon, which expand leisure travel opportunities. We will continue our partnership with the two main airline groups in Australia, the Qantas Group and Virgin, with a particular focus on low-cost carriers and making it cheaper and easier to get to and from Adelaide, for example, as a priority for the Aviation Stimulus Fund.

The budget also provides continued support for the Canberra Convention Bureau, which plays a vital role in attracting high-value business events, conferences and incentive travel. These are significant economic drivers that also contribute to Canberra's knowledge economy in positioning our city as a centre for research, education and public policy excellence. Through our partnership with the bureau, they will continue to secure high-impact conferences that not only fill hotel rooms and stimulate the night-time economy but also showcase Canberra's world-class dialogue venues.

The events space will continue with the delivery of events through the Major Event Fund and the Event Fund. This includes additional funding for Floriade, the return of NightFest this year, Windows to the World, which I touched on, and supporting events like Spilt Milk in December, Summernats over the summer period and an enhanced Enlighten Festival in 2026.

We will be investing in event venues as well. The budget provides support for stage 1 of the Stromlo Forest Park Tracks and Trails Masterplan, undertaking design, planning and construction of mountain bike trails. This will ensure that the park continues to offer new experiences for mountain bikers and other users. We are partnering with the commonwealth in investment and improvements in Commonwealth Park as a major event venue. Across Commonwealth Avenue, the West Basin-Acton Waterfront Precinct is another important event space for the city. The budget in totality delivers a clear and confident vision for our trade, tourism and events sectors. It supports our growing visitor economy with targeted funding to further expand aviation access, to bring new events to Canberra and to showcase our city's knowledge strengths.

We are backing local tourism operators and our major festivals by providing targeted investments in tourism events and business that will deliver economic returns for the territory. Whether they are new or expanded events, more flights or major destination projects, which I touched on in the infrastructure debate, such as the new convention centre, we are making sure Canberra is well placed to grow as a visitor and business hub.

Turning to the university sector, the government is committed to supporting a growing higher education sector in the territory, recognising it as a foundational pillar of Canberra's innovation ecosystem, our economy and our international reputation. Let's be frank, the recent period has not been without challenges, but, looking ahead to academic year 2026, we can have more confidence now. Canberra is proud to be Australia's education capital, knowledge capital and home to world-class institutions, and growing ones at that. The government understands the critical role that higher education plays for the territory's economy, not just as an employer and educator but also as a driver of skills, research and export value.

The commonwealth government's recent changes to raise international student caps acknowledged the strategic importance of international education across the nation, but this is particularly the case for Canberra. International education remains our city's number one export, generating over a billion dollars annually for our local economy and supporting thousands of jobs across education, accommodation, hospitality and retail. The government aims to build on this and welcome even more international students to Canberra by expanding housing and accommodation supply, including international student-specific residences. We are also excited to see the University of New South Wales Canberra recently receive works approval for their development: a world-class research, education and innovation campus located in the south-east of our city centre. The new campus is expected to generate 2,000 jobs and significant economic benefit for the territory.

We seek to support integration services for international students as part of this growth agenda, from mental health support to employment access, and we will work collaboratively with our higher education partners to promote Canberra as a safe,

inclusive and high-quality study destination. We welcome the increased flexibility announced by the commonwealth and acknowledge and welcome the leadership of Minister Clare and Assistant Minister Julian Hill in this space. But there is more work to do, so we will continue to advocate for stable and predictable policy settings that allow our higher education institutions to plan and invest with confidence.

A key part of our focus here is our Study Canberra program, in partnership with our tertiary education institutions, to raise awareness of Canberra as a study destination and to help international students have the best experience they possibly can. Some of the areas of priority focus include: undertaking cooperative marketing campaigns with our tertiary institutions; implementing content partnerships with education content and specialist guides to a large international student audience; engaging with international education agents—more than 400 of them; initiatives to support destination promotion for students and families, particularly in the Indian market; and partnership with Austrade on many initiatives to position Canberra's higher education institutions competitively in what is a tough global market.

At a local level, we are supporting the Australian International Education Conference to take place in Canberra next month, from 14 to 17 October. This is the international education sector's flagship annual conference. We can expect around 1,200 education professionals to attend. Study Canberra is the destination partner and is working closely with our higher ed institutions to deliver a key and exciting program in Canberra. That will not only boost our business events sector but also align strategically with our objectives across higher education growth.

Before I close on tertiary education, I want to acknowledge the need to further strengthen governance. The commonwealth retains primary legislative and funding responsibility for universities. I am not seeking to overstep our remit in this regard, but the government is actively engaging in the national reform processes, including implementation of recommendations from the Universities Accord. We are committed to being a constructive voice in these reforms and ensuring that ACT institutions are well represented and well supported through periods of change. We think that reforms in the tertiary education sector can help to build economic resilience in the wider economy. We would welcome a greater focus on using funding agreements to incentivise and promote more research and commercialisation of ideas and to contribute to teaching and research elements of the productivity agenda.

Additionally, for businesses to be more productive, they need access to a skilled workforce through new starters but also engagement in continuous upskilling of the existing workforce. At the heart of the issue is the structure of qualifications within our higher education sector and the lack of harmonisation at times within the sector. Whilst a lot of work is underway in this space, the government considers there is scope to accelerate these reforms to increase the flexibility of post-secondary education and support productivity in the economy.

As the tertiary sector navigates significant national reforms and global shifts, the ACT government seeks to play an active role in supporting our local institutions, empowering students and ensuring the sector remains a source of great strength for our economy and our community. Together with our commonwealth counterparts and with institutions and students, we aim to build a more connected, equitable and productive tertiary

education system.

I will now turn quickly to wellbeing. Over the past five years, the government has put wellbeing at the heart of decision-making, guided by what Canberrans value most. Budget decisions are now assessed on their impact on people's lives. This year's wellbeing budget focuses on the areas our community is most concerned about: the cost of living, housing, health, reducing marginalisation, supporting women, and helping children with their start in life. These are the areas where government action can make biggest difference, especially for the most vulnerable.

By addressing the underlying causes of disadvantage, we can design more integrated services that deliver lasting improvements. What we are seeking to strengthen is the evidence base to measure what matters. We do so through initiatives like the Life Course Data Initiative and partnerships with our universities, so that we can have evidence to support policy development and policy evaluation, to ensure that the good intentions and great ideas that emerge from government and from this place are actually improving people's lives. We believe this is what a responsible, future-focused budget looks like—one that invests wisely, measures impacts and puts the wellbeing of Canberrans at its heart.

Another key element of responsibility within the very broad mandate of the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate is cross-border and regional engagement, so I thought I would take this opportunity to update the Assembly on the work to enhance the Canberra-Sydney rail corridor. It continues to be a priority for the ACT government. I can update that the ACT and New South Wales governments have established an executive-level steering committee, and they are working through short-term improvements to actually reduce the travel time between Sydney and Canberra. This meets a shared commitment under our regional MOU. A key deliverable for this steering committee is to produce a joint report to be provided to both governments that identifies immediate options that can be delivered in the short term, at relatively low cost, to deliver improved connectivity and customer experience, whilst at the same time continuing broader investigations into longer term improvements.

I have raised this with the commonwealth infrastructure minister, who has indicated support for the two governments to progress these investigations. Of course, the ACT, in geographic terms, is small, but we are a very significant part of the region. The heart of the region consists of four diverse sub-regions—city, coast, alpine and tablelands—which together provide a unique Australian experience. Collaboration is continuing between the ACT and New South Wales to develop the Regional Futures Framework which will aim to define a shared vision, a long-term vision, not only for Canberra but for the surrounding region in New South Wales. This cross-border work is important. We continue to engage actively with the Canberra Region Joint Organisation, and Regional Development Australia Southern NSW and ACT.

Before I close, I will touch on some integrity in government matters and work of policy and cabinet. We continue to deliver on the legislative reform agenda recommended in the 2023 independent reviews of the ACT Integrity Commission Act and Public Interest Disclosure Act that were conducted by Mr Ian Govey and will provide capacity to address issues raised in those reports. We will continue to work progressively through those, but this budget aids that work. It provides the support for central agency

coordination and a role in strategic planning, social, economic and regional policy, as well as other high-priority reforms, particularly including engagement with the commonwealth.

I would note that the team that does all of this work—intergovernmental, regional and otherwise—is the same group that does the bulk of the work in preparing 213A submissions, which have become a recent focus of this Assembly. This has been covered in previous debates. This is not a large team. Of course, the Assembly will determine priorities under 213A, but I think we would all agree that some of the things I have listed are important. I would love it if that small team could spend more of their time on the agenda I have just outlined and less of their time trawling through hundreds of thousands of documents. So, when we consider the scope of requests, as we have done with the new standing order 213B, we will be mindful of the amount of time and work necessary to respond to those requests for documents. That is not to say that we expect there will not be more from the Assembly—of course there will be—but there is not an unlimited supply of public servants. I think the agenda that I have outlined in these 15 minutes is important and worthy. It is what people voted for last year, and I would love that team to be able to get on with delivering it.

Having said all of that in half the time I was proposing, I commend this section of the budget to the Assembly.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (6.03): I rise today to talk on a few areas in this directorate, which includes business, the arts, creative industries, skills, sports and recreation.

Economic development is the backbone of any city and must be prioritised if we want to build on the vision for Canberra, as a better Canberra, and as our national capital. Canberra should be the first place entrepreneurs want to start or expand their business. It should be the first place of choice for the national and international productions, sporting events and tours. Canberra should be a city with state-of-the-art facilities, training and resources for those wanting to upskill and practise a trade.

First, I want to speak about economic development and business. It is clear that businesses have been struggling in Canberra: from the expansion of the light rail on London Circuit—and I must say, I have been advocating for these businesses that have been affected by the light rail construction, dating back to the first stage in Gungahlin—to the latest figures from the ABS showing that the ACT has the lowest business survival rate among states and territories.

The 2025-2026 budget only proves that the ACT government is picking and choosing winners when it comes to supporting business. The “boosting business and the economy” policies—particularly the initiative where they are reducing annual liquor licence fees by 50 per cent for two years only benefits the mid-sized hospitality venues that are focused on live music and culture. Many other hospitality businesses, and indeed other industries, have been excluded.

Canberra is made up of multiple industries, not just hospitality, so why is support being limited to only just a select few? The ACT government must engage more widely with businesses across all industries to understand why it is so difficult to do business here in the ACT.

I agree with recommendation 5 from the committee's report: that the ACT government routinely analyse and model potential behavioural impacts of fees and taxes that they introduce. This would go a long way towards addressing some of the decisions that the government makes on how their new fees and charges may impact businesses and consumers.

Shifting now to the arts and creative industries, these are crucial to our way of life. They enrich us by connecting us to the passion of others, whether it is local fashion designers, performance, sculpture or painting. Art gives meaning and culture to our lives. It provides thought-provoking entertainment, driven by creativity and self-expression.

However, from my meetings with stakeholders in the arts and creative industries community, it is clear that the ACT government does not prioritise arts, performers, and Canberra-based arts and creative industries. This is reflected in the \$3.28 million cut to the arts funding under the Economic Development Functional Cost in the 2025-2026 budget.

While the government has allocated funds for projects like the Canberra Theatre Centre, Kingston Arts Precinct, and the Tuggeranong Arts Centre Theatre, it has failed to support the very people who use these facilities. Building infrastructure is important, but it must be done hand-in-hand with the community to ensure the facilities are fit for purpose and affordable.

Without investing in the arts community itself, these grand projects risk underuse, continuing the stereotype of the struggling artist. The ACT government must invest in the arts and creative industries community, and Canberra-based organisations, to ensure that there are plenty of performances, galleries and shows for the infrastructure projects being built and expanded. I agree with recommendation 42:

... that the ACT Government clarify and strengthen the policy alignment and advisory roles between the Cultural Facilities Corporation and artsACT to ensure strategic planning and arts infrastructure meets the needs for community art across the territory.

Moving to the skills portfolio, while the CIT is obviously the focal point, skills development goes far beyond that. Canberra has multiple registered training organisations that do provide quality training, yet many are struggling due to low apprentice numbers and retention rates. These issues were not addressed as priorities in the budget. For example, the CIT has failed to meet its 2024-25 enrolment target by about 10,000 people, so the 2025-2026 target has been dropped by 10,000 students to just 90,000. According to its own operating statement, also, the institute expects to remain in deficit for the next four financial years.

Referring to sport and recreation, I have had that portfolio since the Ninth Assembly, 2016, and I have strong connections out in the community. I have been advocating on these issues that are still relevant today. The benefits of an active lifestyle are well-researched, including physical, mental, emotional and social gains. Supporting community sport and recreation is a net benefit for Canberra as a whole. Therefore, it should be straightforward for the ACT government to continue supporting these

organisations without, again, picking the winners and losers. Feedback from the sports and recreation community states that they are feeling left behind, with key projects like the Stromlo District Playing Fields, the Wanniasa Playing Fields, the Gungahlin tennis centre and the Lakeside Leisure Centre upgrades receiving unsatisfactory responses during budget estimates.

Mr Speaker, in conclusion, the recommendations I have outlined from the estimates committee must be fully implemented to increase transparency of future budgets. Greater transparency around where taxpayer dollars are being directed will only build public trust. It will also improve accountability and enhance the effectiveness and the efficiency of this government. This is not just about improving future budgets; it is about building a better Canberra for all.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (6.11): I rise to speak on the sport and recreation part of this budget. As we all know, sport and recreation is the heartbeat of our Canberra community. It brings us together, promotes health and wellbeing, creates spaces where everyone belongs and it is fun too. Whether you are a player, coach, volunteer or supporter, or you are just there for a bacon and egg, sport connects us.

The ACT government's sport and recreation strategy, CBR Next Move, recognises the vital role that places and spaces play in enabling participation. Accessible, safe and high-quality facilities are central to encouraging Canberrans to get involved and stay active. As our lives become busier and leisure options more varied, expectations around sporting experiences and what that looks like have evolved. Sports have adapted, offering shorter formats, seasonable flexibility and more inclusive uniforms. Facilities are evolving too, with modern lighting, inclusive design and accessibility for all genders and abilities. Sustainability and climate resilience are also key considerations in how we build and upgrade our sporting infrastructure. The ACT government is committed to leading this change, investing in new facilities and renewing our aging assets to meet the needs of sports participation of today and tomorrow.

In this year's budget, the ACT government continues our strong investment in sport and recreation. In Taylor, \$11 million has been committed to expand the Taylor District Playing Fields. This will deliver two new synthetic rectangular fields with LED lighting and amenities that meet our family-friendly guidelines, including public toilets. I know this is a welcome boost for Canberra's far north and will especially be embraced by the Gungahlin Bulls Rugby League Club. There has been \$34 million committed to support stage 1 works at Stromlo District Playing Fields. This includes new synthetic grass fields suitable for AFL, football and ultimate frisbee, with LED lighting and a pavilion. This infrastructure will support the growing Molonglo community.

The ACT government recognises the importance of maintaining and improving our existing assets as well. Over the next 12 months, female-friendly changeroom upgrades will be delivered at 15 locations. Pavilion and lighting upgrades will be included in upgrades to Latham as well as oval, changeroom and toilet upgrades at North Curtin Oval; improved lighting at Waramanga Oval; new cricket nets at Bonner and Gowrie; a portable grandstand at Gordon Oval; and water meter upgrades at Charnwood District Playing Fields.

That is on top of the everyday upgrades and maintenance to sports fields and facilities, including line markings, irrigation and, mowing. I want to acknowledge the important work that the sports field team do and their ongoing dedication to this work. We are also investing in our skateparks, with renewal works at Tuggeranong and Charnwood, and planning is underway for future upgrades as well as a broader ACT skate strategy. I know this is eagerly anticipated by the skatepark user groups and I look forward to consultation with them in this space.

This is all part of our rolling program of renewal. Currently, 31 per cent of floodlit ACT government sportsgrounds use LED lighting and over half of our pavilions have undergone female-friendly upgrades. The 2025-26 program will further improve these numbers. Members in the Assembly will know that not all facilities are government-owned or managed, which is why the ACT government has injected an additional \$1 million into the Sport and Recreation Investment Scheme, bringing the annual minimum to \$2 million to support community-led facility upgrades.

Recent successes included a new start gate at Tuggeranong BMX Club, an upgrade of toilet and change rooms at the Tuggeranong Southern Cross Club and Belconnen basketball stadiums, as well as a clubhouse improvement for the ACT Waterski Association, and Belconnen Netball's much-needed upgrades to come. This funding empowers clubs and associations to create welcoming, inclusive spaces for all Canberrans. The ACT government is also proud to enhance support for our elite women's teams, UC Capitals and Canberra United, who inspire the next generation of athletes, especially young girls.

Sport and recreation is more than just games; it is about community inclusion and opportunity. This ACT budget continues our strong record of investment, supporting a diverse sector, building quality places to play and fostering a more inclusive sporting future. I commend the budget to the Assembly.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Cheyne**) adjourned to the next day of sitting.

Papers

Mr Speaker presented the following papers:

Bills, referred to Committees, pursuant to standing order 174—
Correspondence—Bills—Not inquired into—Workplace Legislation
Amendment Bill 2025 (No 2) and Workplace Legislation Amendment Bill 2025
(No 3)—Copy of letter to the Speaker from the Chair, Standing Committee on
Economics, Industry and Recreation, dated 12 September 2025.

Committee Reports—Schedule of Government Responses—
Eleventh Assembly, as at 19 September 2025.
Tenth Assembly, as at 19 September 2025.

Statements by members

Australian National University—School of Music

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (6.17): The ANU has said there will be no more forced redundancies, and that is welcome, but we need to go further and restore the School of Music so that it is building and supporting our future musicians; otherwise we will lose that talent, those skills, the culture and our musical community.

Music is really powerful. It is one of the many ways that we are understanding and connecting with each other at the moment. There is a lot to process and understand. It is also a way to explore our differences, and to connect with our own culture and our background. There is a lot of pain, suffering and division in the world, and we need those healthy ways to express ourselves and to bond us.

I am worried that we cannot possibly house the leading university in Australia and become the nation's arts capital whilst we are seeing the School of Music cutting its performance courses and the ANU cutting courses, subjects and practice. That is diminishing our cultural scene and diminishing us as a city. It means that our students will face additional barriers if they want to pursue professional careers or professional arts in Canberra.

Tertiary education is public good, and music is public good. We need the foundation to develop the skills and expertise for our collective future. We cannot simply view it as some kind of profit-making industry and put money above all other decisions.

Rosh Hashanah

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.19): I rise to speak about the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah, which, from my understanding, commenced at sunset yesterday and will run to nightfall tomorrow. This is one of the Jewish community's most important and sacred times, marking both reflection and renewal.

The traditions of Rosh Hashanah are deeply meaningful. Families gather together to share prayers and meals. Apples are dipped in honey to symbolise the wish for a sweet year. The call of the shofar, the ram's horn, reminds us all to pause, reflect and consider how we are going to live together with greater compassion, justice, integrity and tolerance.

These values of accountability, forgiveness and hope resonate far beyond faith. They speak to the responsibilities we all hold, even in this chamber, to lead with empathy, to act with integrity and to seek a better future for our society.

I want to acknowledge and honour the Jewish community who are celebrating their Jewish New Year over the next little while and thank them for their contributions to our community.

Education—Rostrum ACT

MR SPEAKER (Mr Parton) (6.20): With members' indulgence, as the patron of Rostrum ACT, I want to remark that I attended the Rostrum ACT 54th annual primary schools public speaking competition, which was held last night at Canberra College in Woden. I want to congratulate the winners. Penelope Chipman from Chapman primary took out the big award, ahead of Rylan Gleeson from Sacred Heart. The people's choice

award went to Mitch Deebank from St Clare of Assisi, and the Randall Falkiner award for research went to Sienna di Pietro from Mother Teresa School at Harrison.

Congratulations to the other finalists, too, including Bella Minney from Maribyrnong primary, Henry Bayada from Marist College, Justin Klempfner from Snowy Mountains Grammar, Jacob Koznjak from Radford College, and Benjamin Todd from Macgregor primary. It was a wonderful night and there were some wonderful communicators. Well done to all.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

Motion (by **Ms Cheyne**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Menslink

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (6.23): I want to speak out in support of Menslink, who have been supporting young men in the Canberra region for over 20 years, offering free counselling, volunteer mentoring and education programs. In that time they have helped thousands of young guys who are going through tough or lonely times. They help young blokes reach their full potential and become the great adult men they want to be, because Menslink believe everything is possible for them, their families, their mates and our community.

Unfortunately, young men are overwhelmingly represented in adverse community statistics. School dropout rates are nearly double, youth unemployment is 15 per cent higher, the juvenile justice system has a 9:1 ratio, rising to more than 50:1 in the adult system. Four in five suicides are men and it remains the leading cause of male death in every age group from 15 to 44. Each year, more young men die by their own hand than our entire national road toll. The statistics above demonstrate an enormous and devastating impact on young men and their families, as any parent of a young drug user, offender or suicide victim will tell you.

There are also economic impacts that flow from this. A 2009 Victorian study on youth mentoring showed that the economic costs of disaffected youths can be high. For example, it is around \$500,000 for a high school dropout, between \$600,000 and \$1.5 million for a heavy drug user and around \$2 million for a typical career criminal. A later study by KPMG highlighted that the Australian economy loses around \$1.5 billion each year from male suicide, based on the estimated number of deaths in 2012. In the ACT alone, \$21 million was lost.

These days, social skills like teamwork and customer service are increasingly important in finding a job and building a positive and fulfilling life. Unfortunately, large numbers of young men find themselves socially isolated and without adequate male role models to teach them the social skills required of an adult man in today's world. This lack of social engagement can cause problems not only for the young man and his family but also for our community as a whole. Menslink counsellors and a team of volunteer

mentors show these young men, amongst other things, the social skills they need to develop and grow into positive adult men. Importantly, they involve them in our community to alleviate some of the social isolation they feel in their lives.

Menslink's belief is that everything is possible and that there are many doors open to you at every stage in your life, no matter how hard things are now and no matter what you may have done or had to experience. Menslink, in talking to school students, mentoring young guys and providing counselling, help young blokes identify their own options for the future and to find the doors that are open to them, because everything can be and is possible.

Bluebell SDN

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (6.25): I rise to speak about the important recent update on the future of the SDN Bluebell early childhood education centre in Belconnen. Members may recall that earlier this month I spoke in this chamber about the distressing news that Bluebell was facing imminent closure. The centre's lease was due to expire at the end of this year, with no alternative premises secured. Families, educators and children were facing the very real prospect of losing a service that had been trusted in Belconnen for decades.

I am delighted—and I hope all of us are delighted—to hear that Bluebell has secured a lease extension at its current site until December next year or until a new suitable premise is found. This is, without question, a huge relief for families and staff. It provides them with the breathing space they so desperately needed. This is a testament to the tireless advocacy of parents, educators and community members who rallied together to make their voices heard. I include several MLAs in this place, including myself and Ms Barry and I think the Greens MLAs as well, Miss Nuttall and Ms Clay. In my view, every petition signature and every letter has played a part in securing this outcome, and I want to thank those families for their persistence.

But, while this is worth celebrating, it does not need to be the end of the matter. An extension is not the same as certainty, and our families still need to know where Bluebells' long-term home will be. Educators, many of whom have dedicated decades of service, need to know that their careers will not be swept aside by the uncertainty of shifting lease arrangements. We have examples that show what is possible. At the old Flynn Primary School site, government land was made available to house a community-based early childhood centre. Parents in Belconnen are asking why can't the same be done for Bluebell? Why can't we not put underutilised government-owned properties, such as the old Cook Primary School site, to use in the same way?

This is not simply about one centre; it speaks to a broader challenge across Canberra. Not-for-profit early childhood education providers are under increasing pressure. So, while today we celebrate this important reprieve for Bluebell, we also want to call on the government to act decisively and ensure that community facilities are made available for community purposes. The government has a clear choice: it can allow a certainty to linger until 2026 or it can take steps sooner to provide Bluebell with the security of a permanent home. Families are not asking for a miracle; they are just asking for a facility to be available that is not currently being used.

I want to thank the community, the families and the staff for their strength and determination. I also want to acknowledge the work of Bluebell in fighting for its staff and families. I urge the government not just to take this recent news as the end of their involvement, but to really take up the opportunity to provide a site sooner perhaps than even the end of next year.

I will just make a closing note that the petition that I sponsored from the Bluebell families has reached 580 at this stage, which takes it above a committee inquiry consideration threshold. I certainly would encourage all those who are here to keep adding to that number. As we all know, we politicians look carefully at the numbers that are behind any petition or motion.

Ovarian cancer—Frocktober

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (6.29): It should be no shock by now that women's health is a topic very close to my heart. You have all heard me talk at length about the invisible struggles of women: the pain we go lifetimes enduring silently, taboo topics and medical misogyny. Today I have not come to simply talk, I have chosen to dress with purpose, to stand in solidarity and to shine a light on a cause that I have followed and cared about deeply for many years.

Next month is Frocktober, and for the eighth time I will be a Frocker. Every October the Ovarian Cancer Research Foundation encourages us to transform the simple act of choosing an outfit into a powerful statement. Fittingly named "Frocktober", the campaign aims to raise awareness of ovarian cancer and to raise funds for research into an early detection test by inviting participants to wear a different dress every day of the month. That is 31 dresses for 31 days. By committing to this challenge, participants stand out and open the door to conversations about a disease that is both under-discussed and underfunded.

Frocktober was started back in 2007 by friends who all shared a common concern: the lack of attention ovarian cancer receives. What they saw was a familiar theme in health: the neglect of health issues predominantly affecting women, which leaves testing, diagnosis and treatment lagging significantly behind. I first took part in Frocktober in 2011. This cause is deeply personal to me and holds a really special place in my heart. My grandmother had ovarian cancer. She passed away when I was only 18 months old. That was over 30 years ago, and in that time, treatment for ovarian cancer has barely changed.

The symptoms of ovarian cancer are similar to other conditions women regularly face: bloating, fatigue, changes in appetite, indigestion, nausea, abdominal pain, abdominal cramps—the list goes on of things we are used to being dismissed and ignored. And with no early detection test, they often go ignored until it is too late. A Pap smear cannot detect ovarian cancer.

Mr Speaker, did you know that ovarian cancer is one of the most lethal and complex cancer types? In Australia, one woman dies every eight hours, and only 49 per cent of women and girls with ovarian cancer will survive more than five years after diagnosis. But the prognosis is much worse when diagnosed late: 70 per cent of women diagnosed are already at advanced stage, where the five-year survival rate is only 29 per cent. This

is unacceptable.

Without decisive action and greater investment in research, the World Ovarian Cancer Coalition projects an alarming 81 per cent increase in deaths in our region by 2050. That is why the work of the OCRF is vital. By filling the funding gap left by historic underfunding, and by investing in innovative science and supporting research, the OCRF works to bring hope to women and girls. They aim to improve the five-year survival rate by increasing access to new and innovative personalised treatments. They aim to drive the development of an accurate and accessible early detection test to identify ovarian cancer sooner. They aim to improve survival outcomes for women and girls affected by ovarian cancer today, for the next generation and for every generation that follows.

Frocktober is essential to this mission. Last year, the campaign raised over \$1 million. This year, like I have for many years before, I plan on contributing to this effort by frocking up every day in October. I invite my fellow members in the chamber today, and anyone listening at home, to join me in doing so. I look forward to seeing how many in the chamber frock up with me.

The money raised will help fund the necessary research into making the OCRF's goals come to fruition. It is a cause that touches us all—a fight that affects families, friends and communities. That is why I am committed to raising awareness and supporting the search for early detection, better treatment and, ultimately, survival.

Frocktober is the perfect occasion to dust off those gowns begging to be worn. If you want to participate, you can go to the Ovarian Cancer Research Foundation website to learn more or reach out to my office about different ways to get involved. I hope to see you all on 1 October, dolled up and ready to take on this exciting month of fundraising and awareness raising to support an early detection test. Thank you.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.33 pm.

Schedule of amendments

Schedule 1

Appropriation Bill 2025-2026

Amendments moved by Ms Clay

2

Schedule 1, part 1.5

Page 5—

omit part 1.5, substitute

Part 1.5	465 769 000	57 740 000	283 730 109	807 239 109
Justice and Community Safety Directorate				

Schedule 2

Appropriation Bill 2025-2026

Amendments moved by the Minister for Health

2

Schedule 1, part 1.6

Page 5—

omit part 1.6, substitute

Part 1.6	608 441 000	32 672 000	206 692 000	847 805 000
Health and Community Services Directorate				