



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

4 February 2026

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 **Friday, 20 February 2026**.

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Wednesday, 4 February 2026

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

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

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.

Petition

The following petition was lodged for presentation:

Margaret Timpson Park—petition 9-26

By Mr Cain, from 33 residents:

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

This petition of certain residents of the Australian Capital Territory draws to the attention of the Assembly that the ACT Government intends to develop Block 45 Section 54 Belconnen, adjacent to Margaret Timpson Park, for social housing.

The Belconnen community strongly supports the need for more social and affordable housing although believes this particular site should instead be incorporated into an extension of Margaret Timpson Park: a long-standing and widely supported community priority.

Extending the park would preserve much-needed green space in a growing town centre, enhance community wellbeing, and reflect the vision set out in the Belconnen Town Centre Master Plan.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to:

1. Rezone Block 45 Section 54 Belconnen to public open space for the purpose of extending Margaret Timpson Park.
2. Identify and prioritise alternative, more suitable sites for new social housing within Belconnen; and
3. Commit to meaningful community consultation on the design and future use of the expanded parkland.

The Clerk having announced that the terms of the petition would be recorded in

Hansard and a copy referred to the appropriate minister for response pursuant to standing order 100, the petition was received.

Ministerial response

The following response to petitions has been lodged:

Ginninderra Falls—petitions 20-25 and 74-25

By **Ms Berry**, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs, undated, in response to petitions lodged by Ms Clay concerning reopening Ginninderra Falls.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Clerk

Thank you for your letter regarding petitions E-PET-020-25 and PET-074-25, lodged by Ms Jo Clay MLA which calls on the ACT Government to work with the New South Wales (NSW) Government and the future landowner of the Ginninderra Falls, to develop a five-to-ten-year plan to establish a national park to include Ginninderra Falls as well as the Murrumbidgee and Ginninderra gorges, facilitate public access and ensure ecological and heritage protection.

Ginninderra Falls is located on privately owned land within Lot 61 Deposit Plan 801234 in NSW. The Ginninderra Falls site was listed for private sale via an Expression of Interest (EOI) process in late 2024, with EOI submissions due in early 2025. The EOI occurred during the ACT election caretaker period and the ACT Government did not make a submission. However, the ACT Government understands that Riverview Developments (the private developer participant in the Ginninderry Joint Venture) and Ginninderry Conservation Trust made a submission. It is understood that the EOI process has not yet concluded.

The ACT Government has no authority to require the existing or future landowner to ensure that Ginninderra Falls is made publicly accessible. This is at the sole discretion of the landowner and out of the jurisdiction of the ACT Government.

In 2020, the NSW Parkwood Planning Proposal facilitated the rezoning of land surrounding the southern side of the Ginninderra Falls as C2 environmental conservation land. This is only one zoning level below C1 which applies to National Parks and Nature Reserves.

The Commonwealth Department of Energy, the Environment, Climate Change and Water revised the Ginninderry Joint Venture's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conversation Act* 1999 development approval conditions in December 2024. The development condition relating to a legally binding mechanism for securing the conservation of the NSW Conservation Corridor land, is currently considered as met based on the 2020 Parkwood rezoning process which protects the Ginninderra Falls area.

The ACT Government is confident that this rezoning ensures the conservation of Ginninderra Falls and surrounding land in perpetuity, regardless of future ownership.

Motion to take note of petitions

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

That the petition and response so lodged be noted.

Margaret Timpson Park—petition 9-26

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (10.02): It is unusual to see a petition mentioned twice in our notice paper, but these are the 33 signatures that were posted to me—the manually, filled in signatures that were posted to me and received yesterday, which have been tabled. It is why I am there again.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Government priorities

Ministerial statement

MR BARR(Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (10.03): Mr Speaker, I rise this morning to outline the government's key priorities for 2026. These priorities are broad ranging across the territory government's areas of responsibility, and all align behind a goal to enhance the overall quality of life of Canberrans, as measured through our wellbeing framework.

As I am sure everyone in this place is aware, investment in our health system has been, and will continue to be, the largest area of expenditure for the territory government, totalling \$2.9 billion this financial year. This is an investment that reflects the importance that the government places on maintaining access to quality health care, where and when Canberrans need it.

Last week at national cabinet, settlement was reached on a five-year National Health Reform Agreement, which, as I mentioned yesterday, included additional funding for ACT public hospitals under a small-jurisdiction funding agreement that also supports the public health systems of the Northern Territory and Tasmania. This agreement provides much greater certainty on the commonwealth government's contribution to public hospitals in Australia over the next five years.

Beyond this, the government is focused on the delivery of community health facilities across the territory. Next financial year we will open the South Tuggeranong Health Centre, providing additional public health care to Tuggeranong residents. Work will also progress to deliver the inner south health centre over the next twelve months.

Through the calendar year 2026, the Health and Community Services Directorate will develop a mental health services plan to guide future system planning and service delivery, alongside the mandatory review of the Mental Health Act. The Minister for Health will outline further priorities for the year in her update to the Assembly shortly.

Turning now to education, over the past few days tens of thousands of parents dropped off their children at a local ACT public school for the commencement of the new year. The 2025-26 budget committed over \$1 billion to our public school system. This is the

largest education investment in territory history.

This week marked the opening of our 93rd public school—the Strathnairn School in Ginninderry. This school will cater for 780 students from preschool to year 6, as well as 130 early learning places. We will invest in major infrastructure projects across the city’s public schools. Work is well advanced on the Garran Primary School upgrade. Work will also occur at Telopea Park School, Narrabundah College, Majura Primary School and Lyneham High School, amongst others. The Minister for Education will outline further priorities for the year in her update to the Assembly shortly.

Beyond school education, the ACT’s position as the knowledge capital of Australia has been strengthened by the commencement of construction on the new University of New South Wales Canberra city campus. Once complete, the campus will attract 6,000 more students and educators to our city, with a focus on cybersecurity, defence, artificial intelligence, climate, and public policy.

As members are aware, our tertiary education sector is one of the ACT’s largest employers and it is our territory’s largest export industry. It is also fair to observe that in the post-COVID era it has been challenging for universities, and institutions have had to make some difficult decisions in recent years.

It was therefore pleasing that the federal government increased the international student caps for ACT universities, so 2026 is an opportunity for enrolment recovery and growth. This is not only a significant boost for our local universities, but it will also have a positive impact throughout our local economy. Increased student enrolments also increase the demand for student accommodation, and the government will be working with the student accommodation sector to boost supply this year.

Mr Speaker, there is also going to be an ongoing program of investment into our vocational education and training sector. Following the opening of the new CIT Woden campus, a state-of-the-art education facility in the town centre, the new CIT Yurauna building in Bruce will open for classes next week.

The new facility provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students a modern, culturally safe space to learn, with tailored courses, study support and access to cultural programs. Minister Pettersson will talk further about these priorities in his portfolio as part of his ministerial updates.

I turn now to housing. The next 12 months will see significant progress on our commitment to enable the construction of 30,000 new homes in the territory. Under the National Housing Accord, the government is fast-tracking planning reforms to deliver more diverse housing, including medium- and high-density homes in well-located areas close to transport, jobs and services.

As the Minister for Planning has outlined extensively, the missing middle reforms will expand housing choice, with at least 15 per cent of suitable annual residential land releases dedicated to public, community and affordable housing as part of this program. We look forward to working with Assembly members to pass enabling legislation this year.

The government has announced targeted and technical amendments to the Lease Variation Charge framework and valuation methodology to support our housing supply agenda. It is important in this context to reiterate that the Lease Variation Charge is a key revenue tool, ensuring that the community shares in windfall gains from increased development rights so that these can be reinvested back into the community.

The first element of this work, providing targeted remissions for community housing developments, has already commenced with industry. Further stages of this reform work will be progressively rolled out over this year.

The government will also continue to implement tax reforms to reduce the cost of entry into the housing market. Further stamp duty reductions for first-home buyers, alongside complementary commonwealth measures, will help young Canberrans to get into the housing market.

Turning now to community safety and wellbeing, the ACT has led the nation on how best to measure and respond to community wellbeing. Now more than ever governments must consider the broader community wellbeing impacts that arise from disruptive events around our nation and, increasingly, around the world.

The horrific terrorist attack at Bondi last year shocked the nation and has left a lasting scar on Australian society. In response, we have seen the commonwealth government move to enact stronger laws to combat the impact of hate speech. In the wake of this tragedy, the ACT remains committed to working with all jurisdictions to deliver reforms that protect Australians and strengthen our nation's social cohesion.

Beyond firearms reform, the ACT will accelerate work to strengthen hate crime and vilification laws, building on the election commitment we made in 2024 to review and strengthen these laws this term. This review will be prioritised in the first half of this year and will inform further legislative reforms, including potentially stronger civil penalties and, in the most serious cases, criminal sanctions.

Protecting community wellbeing also means addressing harm where it occurs. That is why the government has committed to working with community clubs to introduce account-based cashless gaming in all ACT venues, alongside other evidence-based harm reduction measures.

We will also introduce legislative reforms to strengthen responses to domestic and family violence and improve community safety. This includes criminalising coercive control as a standalone offence and modernising the ACT's bail laws, thereby delivering balanced reforms that protect victim-survivors and strengthen community safety. Ministers Cheyne and Paterson will talk further about this in their statements.

Turning now to economic development, last year I released an updated economic and tourism strategy for the territory. The strategy—CBR2030—is powered by innovation, education and strategic infrastructure investment.

In good news, our jurisdiction has experienced uninterrupted economic growth for more than three decades now. There is no other state or territory in Australia that has achieved this. We have seen record job creation and a surge in new businesses. Through this

framework, we aim to grow our economy so that there are 300,000 jobs in the territory by 2030. We currently sit at around 277,000 jobs at this point.

The next phase of our Tourism 2030 tourism strategy sets an ambitious target to grow visitor expenditure in the territory economy by an additional \$1 billion by the end of this decade. We seek to deliver this by working with Canberra Airport to expand domestic and international air services, partnering with Tourism Australia to grow international visitation to the territory, and working with our local tourism industry to develop new experiences and to attract new investment.

Already just in the first month of this new year, we have seen the outcomes of this work, with Jetstar adding 19,000 more low-fare seats between Canberra and Brisbane. Virgin Australia has also announced their first-ever international route out of Canberra Airport, providing three flights per week between Canberra and Bali, with the potential for additional flights during peak periods.

The government will continue targeted trade engagement in 2026, with trade missions to India, ASEAN and the EU/UK under our international engagement strategy. These missions will primarily focus on our service export sector—some of which I have mentioned already—on attracting direct foreign investment into the territory and on promoting Canberra as a place to study, to visit and to live.

The government's fiscal strategy supports the delivery of quality services, whilst maintaining a clear pathway to return the budget to balance. This strategy, outlined by the Treasurer in the 2025-26 budget, and our ongoing commitment to the principles of responsible fiscal management, will maintain the strength of the territory's balance sheet.

Constraining expenditure growth rate will be a multi-year exercise to enable budget repair whilst of course delivering on the commitments the government took to the 2024 election, our agreements under the parliamentary agreement with the Greens party, and—as we have now come to expect—other random private members' motions that have a fiscal impact on the territory. But I need to say, at this point, that our economy remains in a very strong position.

The outlook for economic activity is positive. Real gross State Product Growth has outstripped the nation consistently and is expected to continue in 2025-26 before increasing from 2026-27 onwards. Employment growth is also forecast to accelerate.

The Treasurer will soon release the mid-year budget update, which will show that our budget remains on track to return to balance during this term of government. This is consistent with the forecasts that the government set out in last year's budget and in our budget and fiscal strategies. The Treasurer will have more to say about all of this in the coming days.

Steady population growth and more housing, of course, requires new and renewed public infrastructure, and the government is progressing this with a comprehensive pipeline of projects right across the territory. This reflects the reality that our city's population is growing, and we will very soon reach 500,000 people.

Particularly, \$15 million was allocated in last year's budget to new and renewed community infrastructure projects in Tuggeranong, including playground upgrades, shop upgrades, and improved footpath and lighting across the region, as well as improvements to the Tuggeranong Leisure Centre.

A new Emergency Services Station is set to open in the Molonglo Valley in 2026, along with the completion of the Molonglo River Bridge.

The government is also building new sports facilities in Gungahlin, including new playing fields in Taylor. There is also a program of work planned to improve public amenities in the Belconnen town centre. As work progresses on city-shaping infrastructure projects in the CBD, shop upgrades, changeroom upgrades and footpath improvements will be rolled out across the oldest part of Canberra, the inner north and the inner south. It is a comprehensive program of regional and suburban projects, many of which were outlined in Labor's plans for every region across the territory that we took to the 2024 election.

Turning now to Closing the Gap, Mr Speaker. We enter 2026 with a renewed focus on delivering outcomes under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. At the end of 2025, the government and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body agreed to an action plan for the next phase of the agreement. This next phase reflects a strong partnership between the elected body and the government, and a shared commitment to deliver practical and outcomes-focused reforms.

The government will also continue to work to address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our criminal justice system, guided by the Jumbunna Institute's independent review and the board of inquiry process.

Turning now to climate change, it remains one of the most significant challenges we face. I think it is understood that the ACT is a climate leader, and this year we are developing a new climate change strategy and action plan to support our net zero targets and to help the community adapt to a changing climate. The strategy will set a clear direction for reducing emissions, preparing for climate impacts and supporting a fair and inclusive transition to net zero, and a climate-resilient Canberra over the journey between now and 2045. We have built strong momentum on climate action, and a clear framework will help shape where we go next. Minister Orr will talk about this in more detail today and tomorrow, I believe.

In conclusion, our city is continuing to evolve into a diverse and dynamic city of more than half a million people, with a strong public and private sector, with a growing innovation ecosystem and with city-shaping infrastructure being delivered that continues Canberra's enviable record as the most livable city on our planet.

We look forward to delivering on this agenda and working constructively with all members of the Assembly to achieve better outcomes for Canberrans.

I present the following paper:

Key priorities for 2026—Ministerial statement, 4 February 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**Education and Early Childhood, Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs, and Sport and Recreation portfolios—government priorities
Ministerial statement**

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (10.20): 2026 is going to be a big year. The government has an ambitious and progressive agenda, and we are determined to deliver for Canberrans. In the past 18 months, we have been laying the foundations needed to make lasting reforms.

The education of our youngest Canberrans is a priority for this government. We know that equitable access to quality, play-based early childhood education is a powerful way to support children's learning and wellbeing. It is what sets up children for success. This is especially true for children experiencing disadvantage. Participating in quality early childhood education is life-changing and plays a significant role in turning the curve on inequality.

One of the most significant reforms we have already achieved in the early childhood sector was to introduce universal free three-year-old preschool in January 2024. Under this program, Canberra's children and their families can access up to 300 hours of free three-year-old preschool per year. Two years in, we have 145 early childhood services providing free three-year old preschool, and more than 3,000 children reaping the benefits of equitable access to a degree-qualified early childhood teacher. As the program turns three, we are giving services a 21 per cent funding boost, which equates to an increase of around \$480 per child. The ACT government will continue to listen to and work together with the sector to make sure the program is working effectively and that Canberra's children are set up for lifelong learning and success.

There is nothing more important than the safety of children. Earlier this year, the Assembly released nearly 2,500 regulatory documents relating to the early childhood sector over the past five years. These documents will be difficult for people to read. They show that harm has happened in early childhood settings in the ACT. In my conversations with parents, educators and children, I have heard about their experiences here in the ACT. I have heard consistently about the challenges, like corporate providers driven by profit, low educator to child ratios, and providers with limited early childhood experience on their boards.

These are not easy problems to fix, but true change is possible if government and the sector work together. The ACT has always led the way, advocating nationally for urgent reforms to strengthen the early childhood education sector. I will continue this advocacy, but we are also acting locally. Last year, the ACT government strengthened working with vulnerable people processes, including introducing a "no card, no start"

policy. This year, I look forward to bringing forward additional reforms to improve the quality and safety of early childhood education here in Canberra.

We are working to ensure that there is early childhood expertise on governing boards. We are exploring the introduction of mandatory registration for early childhood teachers, reinforcing their professional standing and ensuring only qualified individuals can teach in early childhood education and care settings. And the regulator is conducting unannounced audits to ensure that services are meeting everyday safety expectations. Furthermore, we will be reviewing educator-child ratios and determining how to support effective supervision practices across all services. I will continue to work closely with parents, educators and children to strengthen the early childhood sector and support the important work that educators do with children every day.

In school education, last year we saw \$1 billion allocated to the public school system, the largest investment in public schools in the ACT government's history. In the coming years, I will be looking forward to getting stuck into recommendations from the ACT Public School System Resourcing Review to ensure there is equitable resourcing across our public school system and to make sure that all students are well supported. The outcomes of this review and the government's response will be tabled in this place by May 2026.

Implementing the Strong Foundations program across the public education system will help every school to deliver a consistent approach to learning, including how we teach literacy and numeracy. This year, ahead of day one, we rolled out Strong Foundations professional learning for just over 800 educators. It is a major step forward to ensure every student gets the best learning experience at their point of need.

Everyone here knows that people are the most important part of a school, but the ACT government knows how important the learning environments are, too. That is why this year we continue with our school infrastructure program, which includes refreshing Fraser Oval, master planning for Melba Copland Senior Secondary School, and upgrading the foyer of the college campus. Significant work has already been completed on the modernisation of Garran Primary School. We continue to plan for and work with school communities on future works at Telopea Park, Narrabundah College, Majura Primary and Lyneham High.

As the population grows, the ACT government is committed to ensuring that the public education system is ready to support students to be the best that they can be. In fact, the ACT's 93rd public school, Strathnairn School, has just opened in Ginninderry this week. It was great to be there with the school community on Monday, to feel the excitement of students, staff and families. I know that they will have an awesome week in their beautiful new school.

Mr Speaker, as you know, affordable, secure housing is one of the biggest challenges in the ACT. This government continues to build on its initiatives right across the housing continuum—from homelessness services to public housing, affordable housing and home ownership—to improve housing outcomes for every Canberran. The government is hard at work on its plans to increase public housing stock to 13,200 homes as part of its broader commitment to 5,000 new public, community and

affordable homes by 2030. I am looking forward to sharing more details about this later this year.

While we are working on this, we are still delivering the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program, which saw more than 100 new public housing homes built or bought last year. That is on top of the 17 social housing accelerator-funded public housing homes delivered last year, and there are another 41 under construction and on track. There are another 184 homes in the Growing and Renewing Public Housing pipeline, too. It will be a big year for housing, with the Housing Australia Future Fund round 3 open, and work starting on the 85 dwellings for which we secured funding under round 2.

Reforms to the ACT government's Lease Variation Charge scheme will support community housing providers to apply for round 3 and incentivise private developers to include social and affordable dwellings in their projects. The new Territory Priority Project pathway, passed in the Assembly last year, will also enable the ACT government and community housing providers to build more social housing faster than ever before. Construction is expected to start on many of the 800 community housing sector dwellings funded through the ACT government's \$100 million Affordable Housing Project Fund.

Alongside the expansion of the community housing land tax exemption scheme, which now supports up to 1,000 home owners to lease their home at affordable rates, we are expecting to see many more affordable rentals coming onto the market. Land for home builders and buyers is also coming online, with residential land in Belconnen, Woden, Tuggeranong and Molonglo set for release this year.

Work on new suburbs to enable the government's 30,000 new homes by 2030 is also progressing this year, including in Kenny, Bandler, Sulman, Ginninderry, the broader Molonglo town centre and, hopefully, the CSIRO site, too. And that is just the greenfield areas. In keeping with the government's 70 per cent infill targets, new developments in existing suburbs in the coming years will deliver homes close to existing services, shops and transport links in Watson, Kingston, Macnamara, Gungahlin town centre east and Coombs.

One of the projects that I am most excited about is section 54 in Belconnen, next to Margaret Timpson Park. Mr Speaker, you will recall that last year the government committed to this site—which is expected to yield around 60 dwellings—being open exclusively to development proposals from community housing providers. The expression of interest process is set to open soon, and I am looking forward to seeing the new homes that this will deliver for Canberrans who need them.

As well as a good education and affordable housing, we know how important sport and recreation is to Canberrans. That is why the government continues to invest in sports infrastructure right across the ACT. Some of the projects underway in 2026 include the expansion of Belconnen Basketball Stadium and Taylor District Playing Fields; construction of the Amaroo tennis facility, Throsby District Playing Fields and Stromlo District Playing Fields; and the upgrade works at Phillip District Enclosed Oval, which should be completed early this year. I continue to update the Assembly on work towards a new ice sports facility in Tuggeranong.

Ensuring sustainability is an important part of all these projects. It is also a focus of this government's broader work to maintain safe, high quality playing surfaces. In 2026, the government will continue applying industry best practice turf management programs. This includes improving water efficiency and using technology to monitor conditions for timely interventions that help to protect playing surfaces and maintain usability to the best possible levels.

We also know that the match-day experience matters. That is why the government is working with clubs, like the users of Jamison Oval, to upgrade facilities and improve floodlighting, making it easier to schedule games and training in the evenings and during winter months. Supporting community sport is also essential, which is why, in 2026, infrastructure grants for local sports have been doubled. This will see an extra \$1 million to help upgrade existing facilities, such as a new roof for Netball ACT, change-room upgrades at Belconnen Basketball Stadium, and facility upgrades for the water ski association.

As some members of this place know, 2026 is also a very big year for pools. As well as working through issues and community needs in relation to Big Splash, the ACT government is preparing an aquatic strategy to guide future investment, renewal and service delivery in pools and aquatic centres into the future. This will ensure facility capacity grows alongside population, while enhancing swim safety, recreation and accessibility. I am happy to report that the new hydrotherapy pool in Tuggeranong, which was opened last year, is proving to be a great success, with more than 6,000 visitors since it opened.

Mr Speaker, you might also have heard the government's announcement last week about a 50-metre outdoor pool for Woden. This will be built in addition to the indoor 25-metre public pool and splash play areas being built in the Woden town centre.

The priorities that I have outlined today are progressive, but they are also practical and grounded in what Canberrans have told us matters most: a strong public education system; early learning that is safe and sets up children for life; housing that is affordable and secure; and sport and recreation facilities that keep people active, connected to their local clubs and neighbourhoods, and provide opportunities to excel.

In 2026, this government will keep doing the hard work of reform, lifting quality, building capacity and backing the people who deliver these services every day. This government is determined to ensure that growth in our city translates into opportunity for every child, every family and every community. That is the task that is before us, and that is the commitment that I bring to this place.

I present the following paper:

Key priorities for 2026—Ministerial statement, 4 February 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (10.32): I rise to address some of the issues and priorities that the minister laid out, insofar as they relate to education. It was interesting to hear the minister talk about record funding; but, as you would be aware, Mr Speaker, and as we have seen from recent media reports about the recent budget blowouts across many of our schools, it just demonstrates how badly this government is at managing its finances. The impact of that, of course, is immediate and sobering. The responsibility of finding cuts and savings is thrust upon those that are doing it the toughest in our schools—our teachers and our school leaders. The cuts and savings that they have been forced to find are having an impact that is being felt by our students.

Strong Foundations is finally being rolled out. That was, of course, after many years of advocacy, not just from concerned parents, former teachers and experts, but from the work of the Canberra Liberals, including your time as shadow minister for education, Mr Speaker. But there has been little accountability from this minister when it comes to the rollout of the Strong Foundations program. We have heard concerns from parents, staff and the broader school communities that the results of the year 1 phonics testing will not be made public, and the worry about the transparency—or the lack of—and the worry about the accountability—or the lack of—when it comes to whether the Strong Foundations program is achieving its purpose. This is, of course, despite the fact that other jurisdictions have released their results. It does beg the question: what does this minister have to hide?

Strong Foundations needs adequate funding, system-wide readiness and consistency; but, most importantly, it needs confidence from the public that the reforms are working and that it is delivering better outcomes for our students. To be honest, from what we are hearing, and based on the minister's paper right now, it does not fill me with any confidence as to her ability to deliver on these vital reforms.

The minister promises equitable resourcing, yet we hear all the time that there is a need for greater access to support facilities—basic infrastructure—and the great variance across various schools in the ACT. This has been raised with me time and again, and she will be aware of it, because, of course, it has also been raised in various Assembly inquiries and, we know, directly with the minister, because I have been cc'ed in some of the contact that goes directly to the minister. Yet we still see schools without some of the basics—without adequate heating, without adequate cooling, and some without even basic toilet facilities. Equity must not depend on which priority enrolment area that you happen to live in, or how effective one community might be at advocating or asking for it in the loudest voice.

Whilst the minister has spruiked some of the infrastructure programs that are to get underway this year, I note that there has been no acknowledgement, of course, of the broken promises in relation to Lyneham and Majura—in my electorate—and which have been advocated for very heavily by those school communities.

The minister does say that people are the most important part of a school, yet teacher workload and wellbeing remain unaddressed. The rising instances of school violence are extremely worrying. Again, this is not a new issue. When I held the shadow education portfolio back in my first term, it was a huge issue, a major issue, and it had cried for attention. This impacts our hardworking teachers, our principals, our students and families. The importance of addressing this and getting it right cannot be overstated.

Yet, despite the rising rates of violence, and the minister's own annual report stating that "occupational violence remains the most significant work health and safety risk across the Education Directorate", there is not a single mention of this in the minister's statement about her priorities for education this year.

We can only surmise that addressing rising rates of violence in our schools is not a key priority for the minister. This is unacceptable. Canberrans should have the best education system in the country. Our children deserve nothing less. It is clear that, after more than 20 years of this Labor government, we see the same thing over and over again, and it fills the community with no confidence that anything will change.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Health, Mental Health, Finance and Public Service portfolios— government priorities Ministerial statement

MS STEPHEN-SMITH(Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.38): I am pleased to rise to provide more detail on the government's priorities for 2026 in my portfolios for health, mental health, finance and the public service. In response to Ms Lee's comments, I note that I have not listed every single thing that we will be doing over the next year, because my colleagues also need some time to speak.

Investment in the public health system was central to Labor's 2024 election platform, and Canberrans voted to return Labor members to this place to continue that work. In 2026, we will continue the work to deliver the North Canberra Hospital, which is a facility that will serve Canberrans for decades to come. The design process is well underway, with schematic design progressing throughout the year in collaboration with clinicians and operational staff, consumers, carers, stakeholders and the community. Early works are expected to commence in March 2026, including site establishment and the relocation of services to enable construction. This includes the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Cottage program moving to a new purpose-built facility in Erindale. This will provide a welcoming environment for young people, families and staff, with construction expected to commence in March 2026.

The co-design of the new Birth Centre will also progress, with sessions involving clinicians, consumers and community representatives. This work is happening in parallel with considerations to support expanding the availability of midwife-led continuity of care for women and birthing people. I again acknowledge Ms Clay's advocacy and interest in this policy area, and we will continue to engage with her on it.

Alongside this major hospital build and the ongoing work on the Canberra Hospital Master Plan, we are expanding care closer to home. In 2026 work will continue on Labor's commitment to new health centres across Canberra. As the Chief Minister indicated, construction is well underway on the South Tuggeranong Health Centre in Conder, which is expected to be completed in the second half of this year. The centre will support the delivery of community-based services, including paediatrics, pathology collection and chronic disease support.

We will also progress early planning and design for new health centres in North

Gungahlin and, of course, the inner south, and will continue to investigate sites for the West Belconnen Health Centre. We are backing these infrastructure commitments by continuing to invest in the people who deliver exceptional care across Canberra Health Services every day.

In 2026, 501 new graduate nurses, midwives, allied health and medical officers will join CHS. We have also fully implemented the second phase of mandated minimum nurse and midwife to patient ratios, with ratios now in place across all inpatient areas at Canberra Health Services as of this month. This has required the recruitment of more than 137 full-time equivalent nursing and midwifery staff to support our workforce to deliver the best possible care.

Hospital and health care demand remains significant. Our emergency departments saw increased presentations in 2025, and we do not expect that trend to reverse. Despite this, the latest Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report confirms Canberra continues to perform strongly on ED waiting times, and, at a jurisdictional level, our EDs are now the best in the country when it comes to patients being seen, treated and discharged or admitted in a timely way. CHS is also on track to deliver a record number of elective surgeries in 2025-26, building on the record achieved in 2024-25. This is a testament to our hardworking health professionals and administrators.

Alongside investment, we are focused on making services more effective and efficient. This is not about saving money; it is about providing care at the right time and in the right place and avoiding unnecessary delays and time in hospital. In the year ahead, we will explore virtual care models and ED diversion strategies, building on the success of our walk-in centres and health centres and the commonwealth's investment in urgent care clinics so that Canberrans can access the service best suited to their needs.

As the Chief Minister noted, he and the other leaders of Australian governments, through national cabinet, recently reached a new funding agreement that will see a historic increase in commonwealth funding flow to the ACT's health system. Under this agreement, the ACT is forecast to receive \$4.1 billion in funding from the commonwealth, including an additional \$557 million in public hospital funding. The ACT will receive a further injection of \$150 million over the next two years in recognition of the challenges faced by smaller jurisdictions in delivering health services. Over this period, the Independent Health and Aged Care Pricing Authority will examine the specific needs of smaller jurisdictions in more detail, to inform longer term funding arrangements.

This funding is a direct response to the ACT Labor government's consistent advocacy over a number of years. The Barr Labor government will never resile from fighting for what we believe is right for Canberra, regardless of who holds power in federal parliament. The difference you get with a federal Labor government is that they are willing to come to the table. The new funding agreement, including the uplift for the ACT, demonstrates what it looks like when you have two governments genuinely working together in the best interests of the Canberra community.

In addition to getting a better deal for Canberra's hospitals, we are also focused on doing what we can to address the challenges in primary care, noting that it is primarily a responsibility of the commonwealth. Our advocacy has helped secure \$10½ million

in commonwealth investment to establish three new fully bulk-billing GP clinics in the ACT, as well as funding to keep the former Interchange Health practice operating. Through the 2025-26 budget, we are also supporting general practice with more than \$7 million in ACT government investment for professional development and wellbeing initiatives, improved access to bulk-billed GP care for children, and general practice training opportunities for junior medical officers.

In mental health, we remain committed to a more integrated system. In 2026 we will continue to support accessible services for Canberrans through treatment and recovery, guided by the Mental Health Strategic Investment Plan. We will consider recommendations arising from the Legislative Assembly's inquiry into men's suicide rates. We will also progress implementation of the ACT government's response to the royal commission into defence and veteran suicide—which is something I know you take a strong personal interest in, Mr Speaker—to strengthen suicide prevention pathways for defence personnel, veterans and families.

By the end of 2026 we will deliver on our commitment to a co-designed mental health services plan to improve integration and care pathways across the system, including stronger connections between mental health, alcohol and other drugs services, suicide prevention, and primary and physical health care. This will include investigating options to strengthen access to public mental health services for people with intellectual disability, including children and young people.

We are also advancing our commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Over the next five to 10 years, 30 per cent of the ACT mental health non-government organisation budget will shift towards Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, alongside work to improve the cultural responsiveness of mainstream services. In addition, the important work of developing a Birthing with Country model for maternity services and a First Nations perinatal mental health response will continue in 2026.

Turning to the public service, the ACT Labor government believes in strong public services that are delivered by frank and fearless public servants with well-paid, dignified and secure jobs. We are building a more inclusive public service by removing barriers for people with disability, addressing institutional racism, and closing the gender pay gap. A key focus for 2026 will be finalising the current round of enterprise bargaining, which commenced in July 2025. We are working with staff, unions and representatives to strengthen employment arrangements and retain top talent.

We will also continue investing in technology that delivers modern government services and efficient public administration. The establishment of Digital Canberra and the successful delivery of key PC-HRM milestones provide a strong foundation to continue strengthening the delivery of complex ICT projects across government and getting the most out of the technology we already have access to. As in so many spheres, the rapid expansion of artificial intelligence capabilities presents both opportunities and challenges for the public service. We will continue to engage with the workforce to ensure the adoption of AI is underpinned by the principles of human, societal and environmental wellbeing; human-centred values; fairness; privacy protection and security; reliability and safety; transparency and explainable contestability; and accountability.

Finally, in the finance portfolio, the government's fiscal strategy, outlined in the 2025-26 budget, returns the budget to surplus by 2027-28. To support this, we have introduced an expenditure prioritisation framework and strengthened budget controls and reporting to cabinet on spending trends, to ensure funding is focused on current priorities and the most pressing needs of our community. I will also continue to work with the ACT Revenue Office to improve its compliance processes and ensure that the important work of maintaining a fair and sustainable revenue base is balanced with the need for transparent and trauma-informed engagement with taxpayers.

It is shaping up to be another busy year for the Barr Labor government. This is just a selection of the things I will be focused on. No doubt there will also be some curveballs along the way. I thank in advance my staff and the dedicated public servants who work so hard to deliver for Canberrans right across government.

I present the following paper:

Key priorities for 2026—Ministerial statement, 4 February 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.48): I was really pleased to hear the minister's update today about progressing work on the new birth centre. I want to give a reminder about the journey that has taken us to this point and what the Canberra community has said repeatedly over decades about what they are looking for from their standalone birth centre.

In 2023 I tabled petitions with over 3,200 signatures calling for a freestanding birth centre, separate from the hospital. That call came from decades of campaigning from midwives, women and birthing people. A lot of those women began campaigning when they first had babies. They are now grandmothers. The Tenth Assembly then passed a Greens motion calling for a feasibility study to find out which model of freestanding birth centre would suit us best. That feasibility study has been done. I would love to thank the minister for her work. It recommended a standalone birth centre that is fully separate from the main hospital building. It also looked at some other options, including a freestanding birth centre in the community. That option was also rated highly.

The reason people are asking for a freestanding or standalone birth centre is that the place of birth matters. The evidence shows that the further removed someone is from a hospital, the fewer interventions are required and the better the birth outcomes. Providing different options gives women and birthing people freedom of choice; but, more importantly, it gives them better outcomes for them and their babies.

Canberra's C-section rate is becoming really worrying. I have heard media reports about the increase in our rate. C-sections are lifesaving. They are absolutely necessary interventions and I am so glad that we have them, but the World Health Organization says that they are medically necessary in about 15 per cent of cases. We are now hearing reports in the media that Canberra's C-section rate is over 50 per cent. That means most

of our women and birthing people are giving birth via Caesarean. I have not yet been able to confirm those numbers. The ACT government maternity data portal's latest numbers are from 2023, so I am not sure if that is what we are actually seeing in the government figures. Back in 2023, that rate was already up to 42 per cent. That is a lot higher than the 15 per cent that the WHO says is what we need.

I have submitted some more questions on notice this week to try to see if it is correct that we have gone from 42 per cent up to 50 per cent. Even if we are at 42 per cent, and certainly if that number has grown, if giving birth by Caesarean is now the most normal way in Canberra to give birth, it shows us that we are pushing our women and birthing people to take the most drastic medical intervention available. We are not supporting them with the options that they need. A lot of impacts come from interventions. It is great that we have choices and that women and birthing people have access to them, but possibly sometimes people do not have all of the information about the impacts of some of those choices.

Every single intervention increases your risk of having more interventions, and it also increases your risk of lifetime impacts. Women can get lifetime impacts from a lot of these interventions. Surgery is quite serious. It cuts through the muscles. There are lifetime impacts from that. Some of the other interventions can leave women with sexual function problems. They can leave women with long-term disability and dysfunction problems. There is a lot of literature now on trauma and PTSD that happens to women and birthing people, particularly when their choices are not respected in these areas. And there is a lot of evidence about the easiest way to start life—the best ways to get really good breastfeeding connections and breastfeeding commencement at the start. We have to give people more choices than we are currently giving them.

A freestanding birth centre that is separate from the hospital building is a really great preventative health measure. It will improve outcomes for women and birthing people and will improve choice for women and birthing people. It will also lower medical costs in the context of a health budget blowing out. It is a no-brainer. We have to have better preventative health care and provide our women and birthing people with much better choices. It is also very popular with our midwifery workforce. We know that we have problems in attracting and retaining our medical workforce at the moment. Consistently, every midwife I have ever spoken to has said that they would love to work in a midwife-controlled birth centre, so I think it is one medical facility where we will not have any problems attracting and retaining talent.

Part of the original call is for this to be midwife-led and led by women and birthing people at the design stage, because that is also another great way to make sure that it is a different option to the ones we already have. We really want midwives, women and birthing people at the heart of this design. It was great to hear the minister talk about co-design in the options that she is looking at. If we have midwives, women and birthing people at the heart, we will get a more home-like place to birth. That is a genuinely different choice from giving birth in a hospital. That is what we are trying to do: we are trying to come up with a new option, something that we do not currently have.

For a birth centre to meet the calls and commitments that were made, it is important that it is standalone or freestanding in the community. We already have birth centres inside hospitals. We have two of them at the moment. Of course, you would expect that,

when a hospital is demolished, you would probably reproduce what you have already, but I think recreating our birth centre inside a hospital does not really meet the evidence or the community calls that have been made for a genuinely freestanding or standalone birth centre.

I am also really worried about the medical evidence that we are seeing on our outcomes of birth. There are lots of different ways you can look at outcomes of birth, and one of the key indicators is the very high Caesarean section rate, and it looks like it is growing quite rapidly. It is a good indicator that we should not simply keep doing what we are doing now. Whatever we are doing now is probably not getting us the best outcomes, and it is certainly not giving women and birthing people much choice.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Treasury, Planning and Sustainable Development, Heritage and Transport portfolios—government priorities

Ministerial statement

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (10.55): 2026 is a key year for the delivery of our Labor government's priorities across transport, housing, productivity and the economy. The government will continue our approach to responsible fiscal management, which has supported a generational infrastructure investment program and delivered targeted investments in transport, health, education, cultural amenities and other facilities to support the needs of our growing city while maintaining our quality of life. The government's fiscal strategy, updated in the 2025-26 budget, provides a clear pathway to returning the budget to surplus this term, and we will continue progress against this strategy in the 2026-27 budget. I look forward to commenting on our progress when I release the 2025-26 budget review tomorrow.

The government remains committed to the principles of responsible fiscal management and will ensure that the financial position of the territory remains strong alongside our commitment to reform and to support economic growth and productivity. The ACT government will continue to progress our productivity agenda in the ACT construction sector in 2026. We will build on the tranche 1 reforms announced last year and deliver further reforms to our planning and building systems that are aimed at reducing regulatory burden, streamlining the approval process and supporting innovation in the construction industry. We remain committed to working closely with the building and construction sector as we look to implement these reforms.

Alongside regulatory reform, the government is also looking at our administrative processes. In 2025 an end-to-end review of processes identified overlaps and delays in development assessment systems. The first tranche of changes to address this commenced in January 2026, delivering streamlined approvals for low-risk works, improved pre-application advice and simplified documentation. Further stages of reform will continue throughout 2026 to strengthen the housing delivery pipeline, including streamlining major development pathways, lifting submission quality and enabling real-time development application tracking. These changes will help meet our commitment to enable 30,000 homes by 2030 and contribute to broader productivity

and competition policy objectives.

The ACT government will continue working with our commonwealth, state and territory partners to deliver stronger competition and productivity outcomes through the National Competition Policy reform agenda. We will progress two key initiatives under this agenda—liberalising and standardising commercial zoning rules; and focusing on initiatives to lower barriers to the uptake of modern methods of construction, such as prefabricated and modular construction. This will reduce development costs and accelerate construction timelines, helping to support the delivery of new housing.

In addition, the ACT government will examine the suite of new reforms added to the national reform agenda in late 2025. This includes work towards a single national approach for workers and goods, encompassing nationally consistent occupational licencing and the application of standards to goods, among other work. The ACT government is committed to collaborative, scale-driven approaches to improve construction productivity and support housing supply, by participating in the National Competition Policy reforms. This work will strengthen and complement the ACT government’s broader construction productivity agenda.

At the end of last year, the Chief Minister announced that the ACT government is considering sensible amendments to the Lease Variation Charge framework and valuation methodology to help meet our commitment to enable 30,000 new homes by 2030, better support housing delivery and provide greater certainty to industry. Over the coming months, the City and Environment Directorate and Treasury will look at changes to support the delivery of missing middle housing, social and affordable homes and generating administrative efficiency. This work is in the early stages and will be progressed throughout 2026, with community and industry feedback vital to ensuring that the LVC framework supports the planning, housing, social infrastructure and housing equity that we want to see across the city.

The government’s commitment to boosting housing productivity is demonstrated by our planning reforms that are underway. Work will continue this year in updating the Territory Plan to unlock more housing supply and enable 30,000 new homes by 2030. In 2025, the government consulted widely on our missing middle housing reforms, which included the draft Missing Middle Housing Design Guide and draft Major Plan Amendment. These reforms will enable the development of well-designed, sustainable and affordable missing middle housing—a crucial step in delivering more housing choice and housing supply in existing residential areas.

Following an Assembly inquiry into the Territory Plan changes, the missing middle housing reforms will be finalised and implemented so that more homes can be accommodated within our existing suburbs. The ACT government will progress further work to enable the missing middle. This will include the development of a “Canberra house” pattern book, which will support a streamlined pathway for pre-approved missing middle homes that are well designed and suit Canberra’s environment.

The government is also planning for greater housing choice and density around rapid public transport corridors, further strengthening our focus on a sustainable and compact urban form and reducing car dependence through higher-density development near public transport. We are exploring these opportunities for increased density within the

walkable catchments of strategically located centres close to existing and planned light rail routes and rapid bus routes. This includes the Northern Gateway area located along the existing light rail corridor in the Inner North District, with two Major Plan amendments being considered for adoption later this year in Lyneham, Downer and Watson.

Later this year the government will also consult on a draft Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework with the community. Similar to the City and Gateway Urban Design Framework in the north, the focus in the south will be to establish an integrated land use and transport vision for the Woden light rail corridor to Woden and down Athllon Drive. This may include more housing, commercial activity, active travel and public transport connections, as well as improvements to landscape, streets and public spaces, and the improvement of social infrastructure required for sustainable communities.

Central to supporting well-located homes in a growing city is mass transit infrastructure. In 2026 we have already seen strong progress on the light rail stage 2A extension to Commonwealth Park with a “construction blitz” throughout January. Nearly 400 workers worked around the clock to install the first light rail tracks and track slab, plus new kerbs, pavement, streetlights, traffic signals, garden beds and more than 2,000 cobblestones. This stage of the network will transform our city centre and open up further opportunities for urban regeneration, better public spaces and improved pedestrian and cycling infrastructure. In the coming months, Canberrans will begin to see three new stops taking shape along London Circuit and Commonwealth Avenue, as well as tracks being laid through the corridor. I want to thank Canberrans for their patience as our delivery partner, Canberra Metro, carries out these works in the city centre.

Only a Labor government will deliver stage 2B of light rail to connect the north and south of our city. In 2025 extensive stakeholder and community consultation helped to inform the draft Environmental Impact Statement, the EIS. The submissions we received through the exhibition will guide the final EIS and concept designs this year, ahead of submission to the relevant authorities for consideration and approval.

Affirming Woden’s role as a key transport hub for our growing city is the construction of the new Woden Interchange, which is expected to be completed in the first half of this year. This modern interchange will be a light rail-enabled interchange and have the capacity for our expanded bus network, future-proofing the precinct for future public transport needs as Woden continues to grow.

The government will continue to work towards a stronger, more reliable and better connected public transport network. While the territory’s public transport network will be constrained by the National Capital Authority’s works on the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge until the end of 2027, the government is not stepping away from our commitment to improve the frequency of services and introduce new rapid services.

During this temporary period of disruption, the government will plan and consult on a significant program of improvements to our bus services and public transport infrastructure across Canberra in order to deliver these improvements in this term of government. This includes replacing current peak-only services with a new rapid bus

connection between Lanyon and the city to provide Tuggeranong residents with a frequent, all-day rapid transport option, alongside work that we will undertake with South Point Tuggeranong to improve access and amenity for the thousands of passengers interchanging through the town centre every week.

Planning is also underway to provide a new rapid bus service connecting the future Molonglo town centre interchange to Belconnen and the city, which will leverage the future Molonglo Bridge and form a key part of the fast-growing region's long-term transport system. We will also consider a new rapid service for Ginninderry in west Belconnen—another rapidly growing area—to replace the existing small-bus connector with full-size rapid services running through to the city, with opportunities to service suburbs in Belconnen's south. To further support reliability and journey-time improvements, we will progress bus priority measures between Belconnen and the city, informed by the updated transitway feasibility work that is underway. These upgrades will help provide faster, more predictable trips for commuters travelling along this heavily used corridor.

To deliver these service uplifts and provide more comfortable, quieter and cleaner journeys, the government continues to invest in the renewal of our bus fleet and our transition to zero emissions. All 106 battery electric buses are now out in service, with the delivery of the 90 purchased Yutong E12 vehicles being completed and delivered a year ahead of schedule. This year we will procure the next tranche of 30 battery electric buses—funded in the budget last year—and progress the planning and design for a fourth bus depot on the north-side, to ensure that we have the capacity and energy infrastructure required for a larger, fully electric zero emissions fleet.

To support our expanded network, we will also continue to recruit more bus drivers, strengthening Transport Canberra's capability and ensuring that we can reliably deliver more frequent services in the future. The government will also develop a Transport Canberra Customer Service Plan, which will be informed by a new customer survey of bus users and commencing this year—and is similar to the regular surveys already undertaken on light rail—to guide passenger-focused improvements to our bus services. Last year the government recruited a dedicated team of Transport Enforcement Officers to support safety and accessibility on our bus network, with the visibility of these officers over the past couple of months already having an encouraging impact for our drivers and passengers.

With on-bus MyWay+ validator usability consistently being over 99 per cent since last year, work will begin on the first stage of fare compliance on buses early this year, together with Canberra Metro on light rail services. Through our engagement with Get Skilled Access, continued improvements will be made to the MyWay+ system to improve its functionality and usability at the customer interface. At the back of house, work is underway to reinstate public transport patronage data now that the data feed has been received into the ACT government data lake. While this has taken longer than expected, work is currently in the final stages to assimilate this data into NetBI ahead of publication on the Open Data Portal. Together, these initiatives represent a comprehensive program to deliver a safer, cleaner, more frequent and more accessible public transport system for every region of Canberra, despite the temporary constraints on the network created by the vital Commonwealth Avenue Bridge renewal.

As we look ahead to the work this year, the government remains focused on delivering the housing, infrastructure and planning reforms that will shape Canberra's future. We know our city is growing, and we are determined to ensure that that growth is well planned, well connected and sustainable. Through the priorities I have outlined today, we are building the foundations for a stronger, more inclusive and more resilient Canberra. This agenda is a significant undertaking, and it will require continued collaboration and prioritisation across government, the Assembly, industry and the community. But the rewards are clear: more homes for Canberrans, better transport services, a planning system that is easier to navigate and a city that remains one of the most livable in the world.

The government has a clear and practical plan for the future of our city. We will continue this work with purpose, transparency and a firm commitment to delivering the services, infrastructure and opportunities that Canberrans expect and deserve.

I present the following paper:

Key priorities for 2026—Ministerial statement, 4 February 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (11.09): I want to make some brief remarks about the minister's stated priorities in the public transport domain or, perhaps more pertinently, what is missing from those priorities or has not been fully spelled out. As the ACT government has reached the end of its previous targets to acquire 106 electric buses, it is important that the next rounds of procurement targets get set, and are set in a way that will also get us to net zero emissions in public transport. As the minister observed, provision in the budget has been made for an additional 30 electric buses to be acquired in the next financial year. Unfortunately, that is where the current targets end.

Despite the acquisitions to date, we can see the size of the fleet continues to underdeliver on overall demand. The commonwealth's disruptions to Commonwealth Avenue Bridge have introduced delays into the network and we are lacking the bus volumes to keep up with peak demands on existing services, to the point where the government's commitments to the Greens on service frequencies in our supply and confidence agreement are being called into question.

That is on top of the decision to mutilate the R2 and R3 rapid services to Fraser and Spence, undermining any sense of stability in the rapid routes and the promise that people could plan their lives around those connections. I note that the minister has just told us that the government is planning for greater housing choice and density around rapid public transport routes. The way he has cut back on R2 and R3 raises doubts on how that will factor into west Belconnen.

These decisions risk incentivising people to move off of public transport, not onto it. During periods of traffic disruption, and particularly extensive ones of up to two years, we should be taking steps to encourage more people onto public transport, not fewer. The government should therefore be accelerating its investment in public transport

infrastructure and the associated workforce. That includes bus depots. In the annual reports it became clearer that the government is substantially less advanced on its plans for a new north-side depot than the Greens had hoped. In fact, the Belconnen depot has been revealed to be unable to handle an upgrade for electric bus charging infrastructure.

This suggests that the government will now need two new north-side depots in the medium term. The first becomes increasingly urgent in the short term, because we will need to scale up zero emission buses to comprise 100 per cent of the fleet in support of our emission reduction targets, but only a small handful can be parked in Belconnen. Woden has added excellent capacity, but it will still have its limits in both size and geography. Transport now comprises the largest slice of Canberra's emissions, and the government cannot drag the chain on its own operations. A Belconnen depot stuck on diesel infrastructure is not an option.

Further enhancing the public transport network also requires getting on with light rail. The approvals for stage 2B still need to go through the commonwealth parliament. The National Capital Authority are known for being extremely particular about the preservation of heritage vistas within their triangular bubble. Any neglect of that relationship and to progressing those approvals risks further delays to the project. The Greens continue to remain of the view that the stage 2B contracts can be signed before the next election, but that also means progressing to a commonwealth works application as quickly as possible. The minister says he is working on it but, if it does not appear soon, I have to question the minister's commitment to the project. Parallel to that, planning for stage 3 should be commencing this year. There are engineering challenges along the route from the airport all the way out to Kippax that need to be examined. If we do not get that started, it will undermine our ability to secure the workforce benefits of a continuous build of light rail.

Last but not least, there is ticketing. MyWay+ remains in a state that is well below expectations. Linked accounts for families are still not live, even though they should have been ready for the commencement of the school year—that is, last year's school year. I would hope Transport Canberra is on top of this, although an executive on radio yesterday morning asserted, "For all intents and purposes, the MyWay system does operate as it is intended." I am not sure if the Canberra community would agree with that sentiment.

Speaking of the new school year, there was a lot of confusion and stress on Monday morning. The timetable changes failed to make it into the MyWay+ app in time for the 2026 network update. The government attributed it to a data transmission glitch associated with the length of a file name. This is the sort of glitch that you would identify with an adequate level of system stress-testing and user-acceptance testing, which we happen to know was barely present in the MyWay+ development. Contract management of NEC and the apparent lack of testing once again rears its head as an issue.

It would be fair to say that I have my doubts about the performance of the City and Environment Directorate on transport matters, for which the minister is directly accountable. His statement of priorities today still continues to have gaps. As he is also the Treasurer, I would expect him to pick up on the hypocrisy of saying there was no money left in "fare free Fridays" to be redirected into concession discounts, while also

tipping in new money for “fare free party nights” over the summer. If this was an initiative of his directorate rather than his own, it should beg two questions: is Transport Canberra not paying attention to motions of the Assembly that have government support; and why isn’t the minister ensuring that Transport Canberra pays attention to motions of the Assembly that the government has also supported?

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Attorney-General, Human Rights, City and Government Services, and Night-Time Economy portfolios—government priorities

Ministerial statement

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) (11.15): I am pleased to speak to the service delivery, infrastructure delivery and policy reform areas that will define the priorities for my portfolio in the second year of this term: progressive, practical and positive decisions, investments and efforts in the areas that affect Canberrans’ daily lives and their way of life.

Madam Assistant Speaker, whether it is renewing your driver’s licence, hosting an event on public land or accessing the justice system, service delivery translates good policy foundations to tangible, fair and effective outcomes for Canberrans. One example where this is realised every single day is in our service centres and our contact centres through Access Canberra. These critical hubs operating across our community are in many ways our quiet achievers in how they support Canberrans to complete transactions that facilitate their daily lives.

The first day that service centres and our contact centres open each year is always a busy one and 2026 was no different. At our service centres more than 1,500 customers were supported with more than 2,000 transactions, and similar numbers of calls went through our contact centre. Truly going above and beyond, each of our service centres stayed open longer than Monday so that customers in line were served. Our contact centres prepared for the spike, with more team members available during the expected peaks so that wait times were manageable. This was a great use of data, previous experience, preparation and planning so that, ultimately, the experience with Access Canberra on such a busy day was as seamless as possible.

The numbers tell one story, but it is the feedback from that day—while far from a surprise to me—that makes me so proud. I do wish to put some of what we received on the record:

Went to Access Canberra Belconnen and was really impressed with the service centre staff that were outside in advance of 9am, checking on people and making sure their documents were all in order. The four staff members who were outside were really helpful.

Another:

I want to pass on my sincere appreciation for the brilliant efficiency and customer service provided by the Access Canberra team at Tuggeranong. It was incredibly busy—must have been close to 100 people there—but the entire team worked like clockwork precision, showing genuine warmth, compassion and patience towards customers.

And another:

We attended the Gungahlin shop front on 5 January. I would like to thank and compliment the team who, despite the long wait, made sure everyone was ready with all the appropriate paperwork and supporting documentation. Once being served it was a quick and easy transaction. The team were calm, efficient and kind. Excellent customer service. Thank you.

While it is not in the ministerial statement, I do want to just quickly reference another instance when many staff at our service centres went above and beyond. It actually occurred on my birthday when I received a quite distressed email in our inbox from a constituent who needed certain transactions to occur and needed them to occur quickly; but with the service centres not opening until the 5th and this was 30th December, she was at an absolute loss and truly beside herself. Several staff, who were on their own break—came in, opened up the service centre and got that transaction done for that person who, otherwise, may have had a very difficult five or six days without it. That is Access Canberra through and through. There are so many examples like that, but that is going to stay with me for a long time.

Responsive service delivery, of course, is not a static concept, though. It is something that requires constant attention. In that vein, Access Canberra commenced a new structure on 1st February. Public service structural change may not necessarily set the world on fire, but structure does support function, productivity, output and, ultimately, outcomes for our community. Regulatory functions are now co-located and compliance functions are linked by sector.

Having transferred into the Access Canberra structure mid-last year, coinciding with the conclusion of the Independent Working Group's review, Libraries ACT has seen a stark improvement. For the community this means stability and reliability in the service offered, including the opening hours. For our amazing staff this has been through transparent recognition of the issues—some really longstanding and, frankly, quite awful issues, but the government's open recognition of those—and then iterative consultation and their incredible willingness to identify, own and implement solutions. Many, many of the working group's more than 30 recommendations have been implemented and those that remain outstanding will be implemented—again, with staff—not for staff or to staff, but with staff—this year.

I think it can be easy—especially in this place and especially when there is lots of scrutiny on government—for scrutiny to often just focus on the negative, and we did spend quite a lot of time talking about libraries last year. But sometimes when it is going really well, we do not spend any time talking about the things that are going really well. We often spend so much less time talking about the things that just hum along, so I do want to take a moment to note the turnaround for Libraries ACT and the culture there. Again, this is not static; there is certainly more work to do, but that turnaround has been pretty remarkable and it has been achieved only through the staff trusting and engaging

with the process, and I am truly thankful. I think they had every reason to be sceptical and cynical, but they engaged and the difference is palpable. I could not be more thankful and I trust that they are going to have a really brilliant year ahead.

Of course, the management, protection, conservation and presentation of our natural assets is both a privilege and a significant responsibility. Not one Canberran is unaware of the beauty that surrounds us, or how lucky we are to have ready access to nature reserves at our doorstep; a magnificent national park steeped in cultural significance; and parks, playgrounds and open space that is the envy of so many cities. Bringing together our land management functions in the one City and Environment Directorate is beginning to open the door for more opportunities for our crews to collaborate, to share knowledge and to achieve the very best outcomes across our natural estate.

Again, it can be easy to focus on efforts when there is a crisis, but we should make no mistake that the fortunate conditions, the safety and the recreation that we have been able to enjoy this summer is due to ongoing maintenance, prevention and preparation. Again, they are things that do not get a lot of attention when it is all going right: from proactive suppression of pest animals and plants; the implementation of disaster recovery initiatives, including new nature trails; our proactive fuel reduction burns; determining our weed management techniques thanks to years of mapping effort and then the outcomes of that effort; to the care that is afforded to our facilities. I think about the people who litter pick and the people who clean our toilet blocks, more than 70 of them every single day. They are remarkable human beings.

Fortunately for us, this means that our natural environment is safer and more accessible. It is easier for us to participate in it and enjoy it than it has ever been. And yes, the weather has been largely favourable for our mowing conditions; but it is the enhanced baseline staffing level of our crews—now in place for the past two years—a greater schedule of horticulture maintenance over winter and dedicated investment in equipment renewal that has allowed for adherence to a program that, for the first time in a long time, has had little downtime and also limited use of overtime. That means our suburbs are neat and our crews are rested. It has been a long time coming.

We know that justice must not only be done, but it must be seen to be done. So much of this relates to how it is accessed—from the physical, to the participation, and to the understanding of the what is happening and the why. As I have undertaken what I have likened to a first year intensive in the role of Attorney-General, I have first sought to hear and to understand, but not at the expense of real reform. My decisions and the policy and legal direction that this government takes will not always find unanimous support, but I hope that my actions demonstrate an Attorney-General listening and acting. I have the utmost confidence in our local profession, and I think that has been borne out by the many significant appointments in the past year across the justice system, with our merit processes continuing to produce candidates and appointees from the community, ready and able to serve their community.

Clarity, efficiency, timeliness and experiences that do not cause further harm will continue to drive our service delivery investments in the justice space. What this translates to is better supports for those who are victims and those who are vulnerable court users, including accused persons, and those who are attending coronial matters; and better use of the pathways that can help direct and divert someone away from a

future of continued contact with the justice system.

Infrastructure that is fit for purpose—fit for the needs of Canberrans and for the future of our city—is something that Labor governments will always prioritise. Across my portfolio, the achievement of major milestones for infrastructure projects that will make a meaningful difference to Canberrans' lives, whether directly or indirectly, will feature heavily throughout this year.

Last year demolition of the former Materials Recovery Facility was completed. This clears the way for the construction of a new, larger facility that will process up to 115,000 tonnes of recyclables each year, which is more than double the capacity of the previous plant. The previous facility's education space is something I know that is sorely missed and the return of one will be warmly welcomed. The quality of recycled product that the facility will be able to produce creates real value, and we do certainly look forward to educating the community about that, too, in addition to the economic and, of course, environmental benefits it will provide.

We are progressing the delivery of a large-scale FOGO facility. I know that Ms Clay in particular has a great interest in this and will bemoan the time that it has taken, but I think that we have canvassed ad nauseum in this place about why that is the case. I am pleased to say that a two-stage procurement process is underway. This is a policy and initiative that I have long championed; it is sensible, it works, it is a fundamental part of a circular economy and it reduces emissions. The growing momentum nationwide is encouraging and we are firmly part of that momentum.

We have made the decisions, and in many instances enjoyed the investment support of the Australian government, in improving how Canberrans move around our growing city. The duplication of William Hovell Drive will begin in earnest this year. The Molonglo River Bridge continues apace. Enabling works and new path connections mean that the Athllon Drive duplication is ready to move to its next stage. The Sulwood Drive upgrades have delivered tangible benefits, and I am so pleased to hear the feedback that Ms Tough and Mr Werner-Gibbings have been receiving about that. The Monaro Highway upgrades that are so eagerly anticipated are continuing, with progress well advanced.

The ACT and Australian governments continue to prioritise active travel. We have a pipeline of improvements, with projects across the city in feasibility, design or construction phases. This means delivery is continuous and sustainable and means we are always ready to respond to opportunities to enjoy the Australian government's contributions. I note the Assembly motion last year, our agreement to which provides additional clarity about how the work on connecting the Belco Bikeway to west Belconnen will occur, and I thank Ms Clay for bringing that to us and for the work that we have been able to progress jointly on that.

Widening our popular paths and progressing our cycleways in the inner north and the inner south will also deliver tangible benefits for commuters, visitors and recreational users alike, together with a major focus in Tuggeranong on footpath improvements, and improved lighting right across our active travel network. The care and maintenance of our much-loved public facilities will continue, and new or renewed playgrounds, shopping centres and toilets that featured across our regional plans for Canberra will

see progress, including through to completion in a number of cases.

Finally, I have made no secret that I am not in this role to warm a seat or maintain the status quo. I am here to progress reform. I am ambitious for my portfolios, and I am grateful for the support and enthusiasm for the initiatives we have already progressed and for those for which we have indicated the direction we intend to take.

Last year I introduced important amendments to improve efficiencies in criminal matters heard in the Magistrates Court and to enhance how ACT laws respond to domestic, family and sexual violence, including in relation to child victims. Work to progress bail reform and to implement the priority recommendations of the *Jumbunna Independent review into the over-representation of First Nations people in the ACT criminal justice system* is well underway.

I know that the time it takes to deliver reform—from government commitment through to the passage of legislation—can be frustrating and disappointing to the community. I, too, can get impatient with the process. I am mindful, however, that developing legislation, particularly amendments aimed at changing settings in the criminal justice system, must be done carefully, with regard to upholding human rights, and in close consultation with justice stakeholders. I acknowledge that justice stakeholders, especially our key ones—policing, the DPP, the courts and the legal profession generally—require time to meaningfully engage with proposed reforms, often afterhours and effectively volunteering their time. I do commit this year to better respecting the time that they require.

Equally, priorities sometimes need to be adjusted. We have limited resources, including human hours in a day. This is especially the case when there is urgent reform required to respond to an emerging situation, a crisis or, as we have recently experienced, an incident that has devastated and irrevocably changed our nation. To that end, I acknowledge that for our policy development and legislative drafting teams, the summer break was anything but that.

We have sought to work with resolve and with care to achieve the direction that national cabinet set for us and while paying due regard to our community's values and our human rights. The first element of that work is being introduced this morning by Minister Paterson. It is those same public servants who have produced this bill who are also supporting the priority that we have given to the review of our hate laws, of which there will be a lot of progress to talk about by the end of this month. Again, this is the same team that has been in the final stages of refining the Bail Act amendment bill, for which I gave an update in the final sitting week last year.

With the commitment shared across our nation to respond in the wake of the Bondi attacks, it is a regrettable necessity that the bail reform act bill will be slightly delayed from an intended introduction date of March to May. I appreciate, for anyone who reads that or is listening, that looks like a two-month delay; but there is the sitting week in March, none in April and then the sitting week in May. So that is effectively the change. It is a one sitting week change. It is unfortunate, but there is nothing to be done when there are so many other priorities that have needed to be progressed first.

Work will continue on the major review of the Public Unleased Land Act, which is

developing a modern and more integrated legislative framework for managing public land. This is more than a decade overdue. And while like many, not least those who administer the current complex legislative framework, I want this to have occurred yesterday, we are well advanced in the engagement we have had across stakeholders and across government. I believe each of us invested in this wants to do it once and to do it right. While I do want it to have happened yesterday, I am also prepared for the time that this will take to get it done so that it is right.

As a result of our work on the Urban Forest Act, the government will look to progress targeted amendments to improve the act's efficiency and to ensure that it continues to protect our canopy while also supporting broader environmental and planning priorities. This work is now well advanced, and I thank the stakeholders who have engaged so constructively so that we will soon have something that is complementary to government priorities, without having undermined the original intent of the strategy and the resulting legislation.

Finally, while much of our night-time economy agenda progressed in 2025, it is the enhanced data collection, expansion of entertainment precincts and a focus on a new noise complaints framework that will mean this critical part of our environment—and what it means to be a livable city—will continue to mature and to expand. Perhaps what is most exciting is a collaboration between New South Wales and the ACT, something which began with what we believe was the first meeting in the world of night-time economy ministers this past weekend, held in Sydney. I look forward to welcoming the minister for the night-time economy from New South Wales to the ACT in return for his generous hospitality as we continue to work together on what we can achieve together to expand this economy, but also the ecosystem of our two jurisdictions.

Madam Assistant Speaker, none of this work could be achieved without the thoughtful engagement and advocacy of the Canberra community, which ultimately is enabled through the inspiring efforts of our public servants. It remains a privilege to be associated with a public service that embodies enthusiasm, passion and pragmatism, and brings renewed commitment every day to serving Canberra and to serving Canberra's future.

I present the following paper:

Key priorities for 2026—Ministerial statement, 4 February 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Climate change—adaptation and emissions reduction—update Ministerial statement

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) (11.36):

Development of the next ACT Climate Change Strategy is well underway. The new strategy will build on the work of the previous ACT Climate Change Strategy 2019-25, as well as community and government actions to help the ACT adapt to a changing climate and reach net zero emissions by 2045. The importance of the built environment and keeping our city cool by encouraging and protecting the natural environment is acknowledged. It will serve as an overarching framework for 2026 to 2035, setting out clear outcomes, highlighting existing work already underway, and identifying gaps and opportunities to focus future emissions reduction and climate adaptation efforts.

The new Climate Change Strategy will be supported by shorter term action plans, spanning two to four years. These plans will be published as needed, will focus on immediate priorities, and will allow flexibility to respond to emerging issues and evolving community needs throughout the decade. The government is currently developing the first action plan and will continue to carefully consider what will be needed to support ongoing climate action in the territory. There continues to be coordination and collaboration across government, to develop and implement policies to support increased resilience across the community and mitigation actions.

In the next Climate Change Strategy there will be three key focuses. Firstly, equity. We will work to ensure our transition is fair and equitable and does not leave anyone behind. This principle applies to all planning decisions and actions to ensure that the transition equitably benefits the wellbeing of all segments of our society.

Secondly, adaptation. The ACT needs to prepare for the likelihood of a world that is two to four degrees Celsius warmer and the significant increasing impacts this will bring over the coming years and decades. Early planning and action will be essential for the community—and the services and infrastructure it relies on—to successfully adapt and build resilience to climate change impacts.

And, thirdly, mitigation. Although we have achieved a lot and Canberrans can be proud of the ACT's climate efforts to date, we have not met our interim target of 50 to 60 per cent emissions reduction by 2025. Recent projections show that we are not on track to meet our future interim targets, nor our 2045 net zero target. The ACT government remains committed to achieving these targets. It is therefore vital that we continue and accelerate emissions reduction efforts.

As part of the development of the new strategy, the government has commenced community consultation. The government undertook targeted stakeholder consultation during October and November of 2025, and a discussion paper has now been released for broader community consultation. All Canberrans are invited to have their say on the ACT's next phase of climate action. Through this community consultation, the community will be asked how climate change affects their daily lives; what they think about proposed opportunities to build resilience and reduce emissions; and what actions they are willing to take at home or within the community to support wellbeing, protect the environment and strengthen local resilience.

Our goal is to design a strategy that is ambitious, inclusive and reflects the latest climate science and lived experiences of our community. ACT residents wishing to have their say on the ACT Climate Change Strategy 2026-35 should visit the ACT government's YourSay Conversations webpage. Following community consultation, we will seek to

finalise the strategy, considering community input and aspirations for climate action. The government will also take into account feedback heard throughout recent extensive consultations on climate-related topics such as energy, zero-emissions vehicles, sustainable buildings and disaster resilience. We anticipate that the new strategy will be released in mid-2026, subject to all government processes and procedures being on time, as anticipated.

I present the following paper:

Status of new Climate Change Strategy—Assembly resolution of 23 September 2025—Government response—Ministerial statement, 4 February 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (11.40): Over the past week, Canberrans have sweltered through record high temperatures into the mid-40s. These heat waves and extreme heat events can be explained by only one thing: climate change is making our summers hotter, longer and more dangerous. It is the reason I welcome the minister's update on the Climate Change Strategy, prompted by my motion last year.

Needless to say, the Canberra community has been disappointed with the pace of action on climate by this Labor government. This climate strategy is running behind time. The minister should have started a consultation process 12 months ago to replace the strategy that just expired. Instead, a discussion paper has only just been released for community consultation.

I must echo the concerns of community groups on this discussion paper. Their feedback is that what has been presented fails to set out meaningful action, measurable targets or genuine ambition for tackling the climate crisis. While consultation and discussion are important, the consensus view is that we need to work quickly to build on the important work that has already happened. The community wants bold policy, firm timelines and real leadership.

While there are concerns around the delay of this consultation, I still encourage the Canberra community to have their say on what should be included in the government's next strategy. They can rest assured that the Greens will be advocating for the kind of bold, transformative action that Canberra needs. Canberrans are proud of the territory's record on climate, but under Labor the ACT is in serious danger of dropping from a nation leader on climate action to falling behind.

My motion last September called on the government to ensure that the upcoming Climate Change Strategy adequately addresses adaptation. Adaptation is how we make sure that Canberrans stay safe in the face of the severe weather we can expect as climate change worsens. From Canberra's plan for tree canopy cover to our health systems preparedness for extreme heat events, to where we plan to build our city in the future, the city needs to work together to ensure we can adapt to our new climate future, and this should be reflected in our new Climate Change Strategy. Canberrans can always rely on the Greens to advocate for this. I welcome further work on these important

issues, including further updates on the aspects of my motion concerning specific adaptation strategies and the ACT's landscape plan's objectives. While climate adaptation is important, we still have a huge task ahead of us to get to net zero emissions. As Anjali Sharma said yesterday at the Extreme Heat event I held here in the Legislative Assembly, climate adaptation has a role; surrender does not.

We have missed our emissions targets for 2025 and we are not on track to get to net zero by 2045. The climate change strategy needs to include bold action to get our emissions reductions back on track and prevent the worst from unfolding. The community can rest assured that, for the Greens, climate action will always be our priority.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (11.43): I did not intend to speak and I am not going to speak very long. I just refer Mr Braddock to the comments that Mr Rattenbury made on radio last week in relation to the ACT government's record on climate change action, and I ask him to compare that record to the record of the Canberra Liberals in relation to climate change action and, similarly, in relation to light rail.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

MyWay+—patronage data—order to table documents

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (11.44): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) since the launch of MyWay+ on 27 November 2024, over 430 days ago, no data on the patronage of public transport has been published by the Government;
- (b) the Government attributes this non-publication to difficulties in validating and cleaning the data for transformation into decision-grade data;
- (c) in a question on notice, Mr Braddock requested the provision of unvalidated tap-on data, plus light rail door-count data to support interpretation, which the Minister for Transport refused to provide, claiming that the unvalidated data was incomparable to other available datasets and its release would risk misinterpretation;
- (d) the Government has also removed public access to almost all public transport patronage data from the previous MyWay system dating back to mid-2019; and
- (e) arguments about the sensitivity of unvalidated data are reasonable, however these are not sufficient to justify denying the Assembly access to information which supports its role of Government oversight, nor does it justify the removal of historical and validated patronage data from public access;

(2) in accordance with standing order 213A, orders the Government to:

- (a) produce a database of MyWay+ tap-based patronage data for the ACT public transport network, with sufficient detail to identify:
 - (i) the date of embarkment and disembarkment activity;
 - (ii) concession status; and
 - (iii) whether the category of travel is on a
 - (A) local route;
 - (B) rapid route;
 - (C) light rail service;
 - (D) peak service;
 - (E) school service; or
 - (F) other service; and
- (b) produce a database of passenger counts on light rail derived from light rail door sensors, dating back to the commencement of services for Light Rail Stage One; and
- (3) makes the following qualifications to this order:
 - (a) this order seeks the best available version of the data as at the time of the order, does not require it to be fully validated or cleaned, and expects some limitations on its reliability;
 - (b) this order does not require the publication of any personal and private or identifying information of individual travellers;
 - (c) nothing in this order prevents the Government from providing explanations to the Assembly regarding the difficulties of data collection or matters that should be considered in the interpretation of the dataset;
 - (d) nothing in this order prevents the Government from producing a dataset with additional dimensions to those described in (2), including as would support a more fulsome appreciation and understanding of the data by the Assembly; and
 - (e) nothing in this order requires the Government to publish unvalidated data on the ACT Government Open Data Portal.

I feel a little bad about this motion, but it has to be done. It has come to the point where I unfortunately need to call out the abysmal attitude towards the provision of data to the public by Transport Canberra, for which the transport minister is directly accountable.

My motion is quite self-explanatory. MyWay+ launched over 430 days ago. In that time, no proper data has been published by the government on public transport patronage. Not only that; historic data on patronage under the previous MyWay system has been deleted from ACT's Open Data Portal. I note that, since the drafting of this speech, it has been reinstated on that portal, for which I am very grateful.

I have sought the underlying raw data in what should have been the easy way: through questions on notice lodged in annual reports hearings. I asked for it with an indication that I understood unvalidated or cleaned data might have limitations on interpretability, because I wanted to see what the government was working with. The response the minister gave me was quite obstinate in refusing to offer the data precisely because of the interpretability limitations. This is not transparent behaviour. Worse, it is deliberate

obscuring of data and demonstrates disrespect for the parliament's role to provide government oversight. It is actually the sort of tactic you see from governments that are trying to control the conversation rather than allow civil society and the media to scrutinise and judge the government on the evidence's merit.

I was offered a briefing by directorate officials last week, facilitated by the minister's office, to discuss the patronage data status. I offer my gratitude to the minister for helping to conduct that. Suffice to say, the contents of that briefing left me unimpressed. What I saw in that briefing was an inability to explain why there have been such substantial delays. It revealed to me a significant shortcoming in Transport Canberra's attitude towards data. The government should have had a clear understanding of what their data requirements with MyWay+ were from day dot and worked to secure them, be it through the NEC contract or otherwise. Instead, it looks like it has been an afterthought that we are scrambling to patch in more than 430 days since MyWay+ went live.

Unfortunately and even worse, it was suggested during that meeting that Transport Canberra were the only people who made decisions using the data. I was struck by how naive such a statement was. It demonstrates a complete lack of understanding or appreciation for why data is made open and accessible to begin with. Other people do analyse and make decisions using patronage data, such as urban planners, prospective business owners deciding where to base a new business, and public policy advocates in the community who are looking to promote public transport uptake.

Patronage data, notably journey data, is a critical dataset upon which the government is reliant to support planning for network realignments and disruptive events. In the continued absence of decision-grade data, officials have been forced to base their decisions for the 2026 bus network on data from the previous MyWay system, which is now 18 months out of date. Those decisions include mutilating the R2 and R3 to manage congestion on Commonwealth Avenue Bridge. That said, the government's underinvestment in buses and drivers as would allow a response to any major disruption event will be a conversation for another time.

It is worth observing that on day one of buses replacing light rail during the summer's intensive light rail works, there was a good deal of chaos, with an insufficient number of buses replacing trams. I can offer credit to the officers who responded to the situation and enhanced services over the following days, but this initial shortfall is one of the things that can happen when your original modelling is of low quality or has outdated data. Maybe MyWay+ should have been designed to produce this data from day dot. I digress. Anyway, I am at the point where I am fed up with waiting. Transport Canberra and the minister keep telling us that validated and decision-grade data is coming soon and that it is supposedly in its final stages of preparation, but the promise keeps sliding into the future.

We know that the government has raw tap data. This is a dataset which, despite not being comparable to past patronage datasets, now contains over a year's worth of data that can be analysed for variations and insights within its 15 months of operation so far. They also have door sensor data for light rail that goes back even further. I have asked for both datasets the easy way, and I am fed up with waiting patiently, so now I am asking for it the hard way.

This motion demands delivery which the minister cannot simply evade. It offers some safeguards, such as not requiring the directorate to publish it through their normal channels, so that they can remain in control of what datasets end up on the Open Data Portal.

I also wanted to call on the government to restore the datasets that it irresponsibly pulled down, but unfortunately the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure ruled that would have been out of scope for Assembly business. I note that I am very happy to see that this data has magically reappeared on the Open Data Portal. I am grateful to see that transparency come back to light. There was no reason whatsoever for the government to remove those legacy datasets before it had something to replace them with. It is a basic failure, and you cannot help but wonder what is going on. Who is running the show, in terms of the responsibility for providing open and transparent data from the public transport system?

The Assembly has oversight responsibilities which need to be respected. I want to see the best data the government currently has. I know it will be incomplete and imperfect, as it is at the moment, until it reaches decision grade, but I want to be able to see and appreciate what they are working with, because I want to be able to do my job of holding this government to account.

MR STEEL(Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (11.50): I rise to say that the government will be supporting Mr Braddock's motion. We have always said that we would like to publish the patronage data of the MyWay+ system as soon as possible—and, of course, we previously published data of the MyWay system on the Open Data Portal as well. But I want to start by rejecting the premise in the motion—that is, the suggestion that the government is actively denying the Assembly access to information.

As I stated earlier in my ministerial statement, Transport Canberra and the government's delivery partner, NEC Australia, are working to reinstate public transport patronage reporting, using the new MyWay+ data. I acknowledge that this has taken longer than anticipated. Though in order to make well-informed decisions, it is paramount that we have full confidence in the querying, validation and extrapolation of raw system data as it is processed into these reports. This requires a comprehensive and validated process of data transformation. It is necessary to take the time to go through this process to ensure that we can make the best decisions for our public transport network and passengers in our community.

The MyWay+ system currently produces two distinct data categories: fare and revenue data. This data is currently production grade and used to calculate customer charges and entitlements, and is designed and suitable for reporting on things such as total validations, the first validation or tap-on per account, mode of travel across bus and light rail services, and revenue caps and entitlements.

This means that we have no issue in providing information requested through this order; however, derived journey and patronage data requires additional transformation and validation before it accurately represents customer behaviour. This is somewhat

acknowledged in the qualifications in this order, which make note that matters should be considered in the interpretation of the dataset. We know that you can bend data however you choose to get the answers you want; but it is really important that we undertake those processes so that we also have comparable data to the old MyWay system data in the future, so that both the government and the broader community have a dataset that can be relied on.

For the benefit of the Assembly and Mr Braddock, I will outline the data transformation pathway that Transport Canberra and NEC are progressing through to ensure the truest information possible is communicated through published reports, which should also be considered when interpreting the information provided in response to this order. Transport Canberra is currently progressing the integration work between the ticketing system, NEC and the data warehouse Intermoda, ensuring the underlying data structures are reliable and fit for purpose.

The timeline between now and the reinstatement of public reporting depends on several factors, including the stability of the data being collected through the system and how accurately and reliably it represents actual customer journeys—and the significant improvement in the reliability of validator usability since late last year goes a long way towards this, although passenger behaviours in tapping on and off remain the greatest variable in its collection; the ability for Intermoda to process, transform and align the data with Transport Canberra historical reporting so that those results remain comparable, and this will include integrated data components aligning with the agreed business rules and customer behaviour comments; the application of a journey reconstruction layer, which aligns transactional data with other system information to provide deeper information on passenger journeys, such as by route, their transfer and the kilometres travelled; and, as best as possible, filling missing pieces of journey stories in instances where they may be missing or they are delayed tap-offs, transfers between services, flat fare services or offline devices and back-filled events.

Each step in this process relies on the one before it. Once completed, the intention is for the directorate to undertake up to one month of testing and validation, with the goal of being able to publicly report data early this year, including past results since MyWay+ went live in November 2024.

I can also advise that the full suite of historical MyWay patronage and transactional data generated prior to the introduction of the MyWay+ ticketing system—so under the old MyWay system—has been successfully reactivated, reinstated and made accessible for external stakeholders through the ACT government's Open Data Portal. This reactivation supports ongoing transparency, enables longitudinal analysis across multiple ticketing eras, and facilitates both robust modelling for transport planning and service optimisation.

We will continue the work needed to ensure that we can confidently provide reliable, accurate and informative reporting on the performance of our public transport network, including patronage, to this Assembly and the public. We support the motion put forward by Mr Braddock today, and we are happy to continue to provide him with the information that he needs about the progress of that work.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (11.56): The Canberra

Liberals are in support of Mr Braddock's motion. I like the way that Mr Steel rejects the premise of every question. "Is it Wednesday?" "I reject the premise of the question." "Were you speeding, Mr Steel?" "I reject the premise of the question." You cannot reject the premise of every question. A great eyeroll there, Mr Werner-Gibbings.

The Canberra Liberals are in support of Mr Braddock's motion. Mr Steel seems hell-bent on hiding most relevant information in the transport space. I guess you can understand that.

I am an old man. I do not know how many people in this chamber remember watching *Funniest Home Videos on the Nine Network*.

Ms Orr: You have just made us all feel really old.

MR PARTON: Mr Steel's highlights reel from this portfolio space looks like an episode of *Funniest Home Videos*—but I can see that Mr Braddock certainly is not laughing. Canberrans have been continually let down and left standing at the bus stop by this minister and this government—and we share Mr Braddock's disappointment and his exasperation.

For a government that likes to preach its transparency, it is a shame that there needs to be an order of the Assembly to table basic information that was previously available under the old MyWay system. The transport minister can blame NEC Australia all he wants, but the fact is that we are nearly 18 months into the MyWay+ nightmare and basic user data is not really a big ask.

We are sick of the minister playing the blame game. Given the information has not been published for quite some time, you cannot help but wonder whether the government is scared of what the data tells us or, given the decline in the number of passengers who are actually tapping on and off, whether there are so many holes in the data now that it is no longer of use to anyone?

The Canberra Liberals will be supporting Mr Braddock's motion. This is the sort of transparency in data reporting that should be considered a non-negotiable by government. If the government is hiding basic information about "NoWay+", it begs the question: what other issues with "NoWay+" is the government hiding?

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (11.58): I also rise today to support Mr Braddock's motion. Unfortunately, as we have heard at length in this place, the introduction of MyWay+ has been anything but smooth. Multiple system outages have affected real-time service information, and card reader outages are happening across the network on a daily basis. This week we are seeing disruption to the capacity on our busiest bus routes for two years due to the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge replacement strengthening project. None of this is making public transport in Canberra a more attractive choice for commuters or for other Canberrans needing to get around town.

As our city continues to grow, making public transport more attractive is essential to achieve the significant mode shift that is needed to keep people moving around the city and to reduce emissions from our largest single local source. In this context, it is critical that Canberrans have access to transport usage data to see what is actually happening

across our public transport network, particularly while major changes to routes and capacity are happening. I understand that the decision not to install MyWay+ readers on many older buses leads to gaps in the data, gaps that are exacerbated by widespread reliability issues with card readers. These gaps in the data make it even more critical that the government release the data that they have. I will therefore be supporting Mr Braddock's motion.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (12.00), in reply: I would like to thank all members here for their support for my motion, in the interest of transparency and in the interest of ensuring that we have suitable data to inform the debates about public transport in this place. We know it is an issue that is of great interest to many Canberrans. It is also of great interest to a number of members in this place. It is important that we ensure that we have transparency and are talking with the data that we can see, because a good data culture in the government and transport culture is critical to maintaining confidence in government decisions in the performance of our public transport system. So thank you to all members for their support today, and I look forward to seeing the information.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee Report 5

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (12.01): I present the following report:

Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee—Report 5—*Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2024-25*, dated 20 January 2026, together with extracts of the relevant minutes of proceedings.

I move:

That the report be noted.

This is the fifth report of the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders for the Eleventh Assembly. The 2024-25 annual and financial reports were presented in the Assembly on 21 October 2025. Clause 4 of the establishing resolution refers all calendar and financial year annual and financial reports to the relevant standing committee for inquiry and report by 12 May of the year after the presentation of the report to the Assembly, pursuant to the Annual Reports (Government Agencies) Act 2004.

The committee held public hearings on 10 and 14 November 2025. Witnesses took 14 questions on notice. The committee's sole recommendation pertains to concerns regarding the Australian Bureau of Statistics population projections, insofar as they are used to inform electorate redistributions.

On behalf of the committee, I thank all witnesses for their assistance to the committee and their significant contributions to this inquiry. We also thank Hansard and broadcasting staff for their work in supporting the committee. I thank the other members of the committee, Mr Andrew Braddock MLA and Mr Taimus Werner-Gibbings MLA.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Economics, Industry and Recreation—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (12.03): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation relating to statutory appointments, in accordance with continuing resolution 5A.

During the reporting period 1st July 2025 to 31st December 2025, the Eleventh Assembly Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation considered a total of nine appointments and reappointments to the following bodies: the ACT Building and Construction Industry Training Fund Authority; the Gambling and Racing Commission Governing Board; the Assessor of Racing Appeals Tribunal; and the Canberra Institute of Technology Board.

I now table the schedule of statutory appointments considered during this reporting period:

Economics, Industry and Recreation—Standing Committee—Schedule of
Statutory Appointments—11th Assembly—Period 1 July to 31 December 2025.

Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (12.04): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on the Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders relating to statutory appointments, in accordance with continuing resolution 5A.

For the reporting period of 1 July 2025 to 31 December 2025 the committee did not consider any statutory appointments.

I now table the schedule of statutory appointments considered during this reporting period:

Integrity Commission and Statutory Office Holders—Standing Committee—
Schedule of Statutory Appointments—11th Assembly—Period 1 July to
31 December 2025.

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (12.04): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs relating to statutory

appointments in accordance with continuing resolution 5A.

For the reporting period of 1 July 2025 to 31 December 2025, the committee considered a total of eight appointments and reappointments to the following bodies: the Legal Aid Commission Board; the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal Board; the ACT Official Visitors; and the Victims Advisory Board.

I now table the schedule of statutory appointments considered during this reporting period:

Legal Affairs—Standing Committee—Schedule of Statutory Appointments—
11th Assembly—Period 1 July to 31 December 2025.

Firearms (Public Safety) Amendment Bill 2026

Dr Paterson, pursuant to notice, presented the bill, its explanatory statement and a Human Rights Act compatibility statement.

Title read by Clerk.

DR PATERSON (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services, Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (12.06): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to come before the Assembly today to present the Firearms (Public Safety) Amendment Bill 2026. Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the victims of the horrific attack against the Jewish members of our community that took place at Bondi Beach on 14th December 2025. What should have been a night of light and celebration became a scene of unthinkable darkness. Today, as we did yesterday, I wish to acknowledge and remember the 15 lives that were tragically taken—mothers, fathers, sons and daughters—and the dozens more whose lives have been changed forever.

But, even in that darkness, we saw the very best of the Australian spirit. We saw heroic members of the community run towards danger to do whatever they could to protect others, demonstrating a level of courage that has moved this nation to its core. Those heroes did not wait for permission to act; they saw a need and they stepped forward. Out of respect and admiration for the deeds of these heroes, the government is moving today to take legislative action to ensure that the firearms laws in the ACT are strong and resilient against those who seek to harm our community. Australia has a proud history of leading the world in proactive firearms reform, and the ACT government is working in unity with federal and state governments to take critical action on how guns are possessed and used by individuals.

This bill represents the first step in strengthening the ACT's gun laws by amending the Firearms Act 1996 to limit the number and types of firearms that can be possessed or used by individuals. The bill also addresses the emerging risk of 3D-printed weapons by criminalising the possession of firearms blueprints. Firstly, the bill will impose a limit of five firearms for every firearm licence holder, subject to certain exemptions. A

person who requires firearms for a genuine reason, such as sports shooting or primary production, will be permitted to have up to 10 firearms. By introducing clear numerical limits on firearm ownership, the bill directly promotes public safety by mitigating the scale of potential harm if firearms are misused or fall into the hands of dangerous actors. This measure ensures that ownership is aligned with genuine need rather than unchecked accumulation.

While these reforms are significant, the bill also provides necessary room to allow the government to fine-tune regulations after passage. We are focused on achieving a balanced outcome that prioritises public safety without unfairly or unduly limiting the use of firearms for those with legitimate and genuine reasons. The government is dedicated to consulting closely with the firearms sector and affected stakeholders on the development of these regulations, to make sure that these amendments are applied fairly and effectively.

We recognise that, for composite entities, firearms dealers and collectors, firearms are part of professional operations and a commitment to historical preservation. Because these licence holders already operate under strict legislative and regulatory oversight, they will be exempt from the new numerical caps. This recognition ensures that legitimate business requirements and conservation efforts can continue without the restrictions placed on recreational firearms users.

Secondly, the bill will also limit the types of firearms a person can possess or use. The bill re-categorises several types of firearms to restrict high-risk features, including stricter controls on magazine capacity and rapid-fire mechanisms. The bill also includes a complete prohibition on belt-fed firearms, which were originally designed to provide sustained, suppressive fire on a battlefield.

The lessons of Bondi are clear: the lethality of an attack is multiplied when a shooter can fire rapidly and continuously without reloading. We are imposing rigorous restrictions on firearms with these capabilities, because the safety of our community is non-negotiable. By strictly limiting firearms with these high-risk features, we are proactively shielding our community from the potential of mass harm.

Finally, the bill also introduces a new offence to criminalise the possession of digital blueprints for the computer-aided manufacture of firearm parts. As 3D printing technology becomes more sophisticated, there is an increasing risk that unregulated firearms can be independently manufactured. The unauthorised manufacture of firearms, including via 3D printing and other computer-aided manufacture processes, is already an offence under the Firearms Act 1996. The new offence in this bill for the possession of digital blueprints will give police additional powers to intervene and disrupt illicit production processes, thereby preventing the proliferation of firearms in our community.

While there is an urgent need for these reforms, we are committed to ensuring that they are implemented smoothly and safely. This is why these amendments will commence on the date fixed by written notice, to ensure that our agencies and the public have the necessary lead-in time to prepare. This period will allow the government to stand up policies and procedures required for the implementation of the proposed National Gun Buyback Scheme; engage in ongoing consultation with our key stakeholders; and

ensure that clear protocols are in place for the surrender and disposal of firearms. We are dedicated to a transition that is safe, transparent and respectful of the practicalities of firearms ownership in this jurisdiction.

I would like to thank our ACT police, who regularly put themselves and their lives in danger when responding to crimes involving firearms. I note that there have been at least two incidents over the past few months where ACT officers have turned up to calls for help and have been met by an active shooter. These incidents are a clear demonstration of the very real threat that ACT police face in simply doing their job.

I would also like to thank the ACT Police Registry officers, who do a fantastic job in managing the registry. The consultation and stakeholder work I have done in preparing for this bill has meant I have had direct feedback from the community about their interactions with the registry. The feedback has been outstanding. I have heard stakeholders say that the personal interaction between those who work on the registry and community members is what stands out in our system in comparison with other jurisdictions. They are always there to answer questions or address concerns. So thank you to the team. We have an exciting time ahead with the eventual implementation of the National Firearms register.

Ultimately, the bill today lays a critical foundation for future firearms reform, which we will progress throughout the year. The landscape of public safety requires dynamic reforms, and we will continue to work to progress nationally consistent firearms reform, as well as reform that speaks to responses to new and emerging risks as they arise. To that end, the government is already progressing work on a subsequent package of reforms to address the other priorities identified by national cabinet and ensure that the ACT keeps pace with national improvements to gun safety.

I commend this bill to the Assembly.

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

Sitting suspended from 12.14 to 2 pm

Questions without notice

North Canberra Hospital—business case

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, the government's website for the new northside hospital states that a business case would go to the government for approval in early 2026. Has the business case for the new northside hospital been to cabinet for approval yet, and, if yes, will you table it in the Assembly?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: No. We have had, I think, two cabinet meetings in 2026—a couple of expenditure review committee meetings. The business case has not yet come to cabinet, but even if it had, it would be part of the budget process and would not be tabled in this place before it had been considered appropriately through the budget process.

MR PARTON: Minister, what is the updated total cost of the new northside hospital project?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Clearly, I cannot answer that question, and neither can I take it on notice, because, as I indicated, the whole business case will be considered through the budget process.

MR COCKS: Minister, why are you hiding the total cost of one of the most expensive health infrastructure spends in territory history?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am not hiding the cost of this project. In fact, the ACT Labor government has already provisioned more than \$1 billion in the budget for this important project, a project that the Canberra Liberals only decided to commit to in the last couple of weeks of the 2024 election campaign and which they now appear not to support at all.

Canberrans support investing in important health infrastructure, renewing the hospital infrastructure in Canberra's north to deliver a modern, state-of-the-art facility to support patients, carers and families, and the fantastic staff that work at North Canberra Hospital, and to meet the needs of the growing community and the aging community in the north of Canberra.

If the Canberra Liberals do not support a new northside hospital, then they should come out and say so. ACT Labor will always support investing in health infrastructure. We have recently delivered the critical services building at Canberra Hospital, and I get incredible, positive feedback about that.

We are currently partnering—through the very early contractor involvement process—with Multiplex, our partner in delivering the critical services building, in the early stages of work for the new northside hospital. We are consulting and engaging with the community, with staff and with other stakeholders to ensure that, similarly to the critical services building, the new northside hospital will deliver modern, state-of-the-art facilities to meet the needs of Canberrans into the future on Canberra's north side.

Swimming pools—ACT aquatic strategy

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, on 8 December 2025, you received a letter from 26 community and sporting organisations requesting that you actively consult with all aquatic pool users and urban swimmers in the co-design of an aquatic pool and urban swimming strategy. On 24 December, you responded, declining the offer to co-design the strategy; rather, you indicated that the government would engage a consultant. Why is the government unwilling to work with the community to undertake a co-design process, given the willingness and expertise of many aquatic organisations to assist you?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Rattenbury for his question. It is simply not true that the ACT government is unwilling to work with sporting and aquatic organisations. I have written to over 30 aquatic user groups with regard to the strategy and the process going forward. They will be very much deeply embedded in the consultation process.

It is important that we have an expert to gather all the information, the data, and the most up-to-date, modern methods of building pools, as well as understanding the data

for ACT usage and across the region. This is some of the information that the consultant will bring together to develop a document for all the aquatic users to be able to look at. It will not be confined to aquatic users. Other sports user groups might be interested in the development of this strategy as well. I am very much open to discussing, consulting, engaging with and including anybody who is interested in pools with regard to the development of a strategy. To suggest that I am not is simply not true.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, do you appreciate the difference between a consultation process and a co-design process?

MS BERRY: Yes. However, in this circumstance I am putting forward a process to the aquatic user groups, including other user groups that might be interested, as well as broader community groups, children, families and others that use pools for recreation and/or for formal or informal sports use, to ensure that as many people as possible are engaged in the development of a strategy. It could include parts of a co-design process. However, the engagement of a consultant is an important part of developing the strategy going forward, to bring all the information together so that everybody in the aquatic user groups and others can have some information to work with, and so that we can come to the development of a strategy from a really good and informed position. That is not to say that any of their expertise or knowledge does not form an important part of that. Of course, it does. That is why we are engaging with them.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, why will the ACT aquatic strategy focus exclusively on built facilities, and why will it not extend to urban lakes and waterways, given that community organisations are informing you about the growth of urban swimming?

MS BERRY: Again, I have considered the work that the minister for the environment and water is doing with regard to different strategies and approaches to addressing health within our various lakes and facilities across the ACT. The focus will be much better aligned with our built facilities, like aquatic facilities, in the ACT. It does not mean to say that a future, broader aquatic strategy that included other water usages could not be attached to the strategy. But the focus for the main part of this work is on built facilities.

Swimming pools—Canberra Aquatic Centre

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Chief Minister. The Adelaide Aquatic Centre was delivered for \$135 million and includes a 50-metre pool, a 25-metre pool, an indoor warm-water rehabilitation pool, an indoor learn-to-swim pool, an outdoor lagoon pool, diving amenities, an indoor leisure space with splash zones and water slides, an outdoor splash pool, a sauna, a steam room, a cafe and a gym. The Stromlo Leisure Centre was designed and constructed for \$36 million and includes a 50-metre pool, a 20-metre program pool, a splash park and more. Chief Minister, how can it possibly be the case that you have budgeted \$138 million for the new Canberra Aquatic Centre but cannot guarantee that it will deliver, at the bare minimum, like-for-like replacement of what we already have at the Civic pool, including an outdoor pool and a 10-metre diving platform?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Emerson for the question. I visited the Adelaide site during its construction and our officials have engaged with those developing that project. It is a

similar project budget but in a different location and with a different set of site parameters than are pertinent here in Canberra. I note that I believe that project started at \$80 million and has escalated in cost considerably. There has been a very significant increase in construction costs across all infrastructure projects in Australia post COVID, so the reference to Stromlo is relevant but you must factor in the escalation of costs associated with construction.

The government's objective within the available project budget is to deliver as much as possible, but trade-offs will be necessary. The representations to government have included, perhaps at the grandest end, a component that might be considered a sports facility that could host a Commonwealth Games or Olympics swimming versus, at a community level, the desire for a range of facilities, including features that Mr Emerson listed. We are going through the early stages of development. We also have to meet the requirements of the National Capital Plan, in relation to what can be built on the site. Also, the Aquatic Strategy that Minister Berry is developing will look at the provision of other elements that could not be delivered at Commonwealth Park within the project's budget, associated with other facilities across the territory.

We will endeavour, within available resources and available sites, to deliver as much as we possibly can, but there are some constraints associated with the development of each of those projects, such as timeframes, budget considerations, what is allowed under planning rules, and other issues that might emerge, including Big Splash. All of that is being taken into account.

MR EMERSON: Chief Minister, will you commit to delivering a new deep-water dive pool to ensure the survival of aquatic sports like water polo, underwater rugby, underwater hockey and, of course, competitive diving before the Civic pool is demolished?

MR BARR: To be clear on the Civic pool, it will remain open until the new facility in Commonwealth Park is compete. It will likely be open until the end of this decade. It is unlikely, given progress to date, that the Civic pool would close before the end of the decade. If it did, it would be because the other project was compete and open.

In relation to diving facilities, as we indicated in the statement that the Deputy Chief Minister and I made, we recognise the need, together with the needs of other sports that utilise those facilities. Currently, they are outdoor and seasonal only. We have had requests for them to be indoor and to Olympic standard, which would bring the cost to something like \$60 million to \$80 million for a standalone facility or a component within a project. I am being asked for like-for-like, and then other sections of the community and stakeholders ask for an indoor Olympic standard. They are different asks. We will endeavour to deliver as much as we possibly can across all the different sites and meet as many of the community requests as possible, but there do need to be trade-offs, and that is what we are working through at the moment.

Mr Emerson: Mr Speaker, I have a point of order. I seek your assessment of the responsiveness of the Chief Minister's answer to the question about whether the government will commit to a new dive pool before the current pool is demolished. We got a lot of other great information, but I do not think that question was answered.

MR SPEAKER: I think he was pretty comprehensive in his answer, to be frank, Mr Emerson. Sorry to disappoint you.

MS CARRICK: Chief Minister, if you cannot afford competition-level diving facilities in the new Canberra Aquatic Centre now, how can you guarantee you will be able to afford them somewhere else later?

MR BARR: Ms Carrick, the expectation is that the site conditions at other locations would enable a deeper dig, if you like. A major driver of cost is the depth you need to dig in order to get a five-metre-deep pool. What you are digging into—rock versus softer earth—drives cost, as well as the size of the body of water. They are factors that drive the cost. So too does indoor versus outdoor facilities. These are all factors that are being considered and have to be weighed up against the other requests that have come through the community consultation in relation to the Commonwealth Park site, which is why we have left open the option to deliver the dive facilities at another location.

There is also a question in relation to the National Triangle, around vistas, views and the like that the National Capital Authority must take into account, as well as permissible uses at that particular site. Clearly, the NCA approached the ACT government to offer Commonwealth Park for a pool. They want more usage of Commonwealth Park and they believed, in their master planning process, that a pool would deliver that. We agreed with that, and that is why we are proceeding down this path. It is how we were able to attract a 50 per cent contribution from the Commonwealth towards the project.

Hospitals—capacity and staffing

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, my office was contacted by a number of Canberrans over the Christmas period with concerns about staffing levels at both the North Canberra Hospital and Canberra Hospital. Minister, how many times was a Code Yellow declared over the Christmas-New Year period?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take the detail of that question on notice. There were quite regular Code Yellows called in relation to staffing shortages, particularly in the intensive care and emergency departments but also sometimes in relation to the neonatal intensive care unit over the summer period and still at the moment. Some time ago, Canberra Health Services started using the Code Yellow to specifically give effect to some of the clauses in the enterprise agreement about emergency staffing arrangements so that it really supports the additional pay for staff who come in when there are staffing pressures.

It is not unusual to have a bit of staffing pressure over summer, as I indicated in my ministerial statement this morning. However, Canberra Health Services will be bringing on more than 500 additional graduate staff in 2026, with nurses, midwives, allied health professionals and medical professions. We are certainly very much focused on ensuring that we have sustainable staffing. In addition to that, we have brought on 137 full-time equivalent nurses and midwives to meet our commitments to ratios as well.

The feedback that I have had from so many people recently about their experience at both Canberra Hospital and North Canberra Hospital has been about not just the

professionalism and the excellent clinical care but also the really positive attitude of our staff, which I think is an indication that people are feeling good about the services that they are delivering.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, for those Code Yellows that you are taking on notice, could you please provide the Assembly with a table listing the cause, duration and the impact that each Code Yellow had during December and January?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am happy to do that. I understood that Ms Castley's original question was only in relation to Code Yellows related to staffing. So I will do that in relation to those Code Yellows that related to staffing matters over the summer period. I will take that on notice.

MR PARTON: Minister, can you provide a guarantee that patient safety and outcomes have not been adversely impacted due to staffing shortages, which you have conceded are ongoing?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think I need to clarify for the Leader of the Opposition—who I understand is a very new shadow minister for health—that this does not necessarily mean that, overall, we have had staffing shortages. There are a range of mechanisms, including the Code Yellow, that are used to bring additional staff in. Code Yellows are stood up and then they are stood down when the pressures are eased, because additional staff come in. As part of the Code Yellow process, there is an indication of there being no adverse patient outcomes. Certainly there has not been any indication of any adverse patient outcomes as a result of calling these Code Yellows over the last little while.

Public housing—maintenance

MS BARRY: My question is to the Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs. My office continues to receive complaints from public housing residents about delays and inefficiencies in the management of public housing maintenance. We understand that your current strategy for insourcing maintenance will be considerably more expensive than the current outsourcing model. Minister, will you guarantee that your more expensive insourcing strategy will not result in fewer maintenance jobs being completed?

MS BERRY: I think there is a little bit of hypothetical in that question on what might happen in the future. What I can say is that through insourcing we can be assured that there is a very connected relationship with the people who will be responsible for the maintenance and upgrades of public housing properties in the ACT through the pilot work that we have been doing across some of our multi-unit properties. We have had very positive feedback from both our employees who have been doing the cleaning and upgrade work in our multi-unit properties, and the tenants, about the improved situation that they find themselves in because of the work and the relationships that are being built through that process. It will take a long time. It is a very big contract, but I am confident that there will be many improvements across a range of different areas through the direct employment of housing ACT maintenance services.

Mr Cocks: Point of order, under 118AA. The minister, while not seeking to rule that

last question out of order based on any potential hypothetical, has not actually answered the question in regard to the potential of fewer maintenance jobs being completed.

MR SPEAKER: I think she got pretty close, but there were certainly elements about whether there was going to be an increase in costs which I do not think the minister did go to. Or you might clarify Minister?

Mr Parton: The point of order is regarding relevance obviously on 118AA. The question was very specifically: will the strategy result in fewer maintenance jobs being completed? Our view is that the question was not answered.

MR SPEAKER: Minister, I will leave it with you. I will uphold the point of order and ask you to have a look at that under 118AA and get back to the Assembly if you have something further to add.

MS BARRY: Minister, have you considered doing an efficiency review of the maintenance program?

MS BERRY: I think we are kind of past that work. We have been reviewing the contractors and we have been working towards this insourcing approach to understand what we might be able to do to improve. As I said, we have had very positive feedback on the pilot that we have been conducting in multi-unit properties and that pilot will continue to roll out with domestic and family violence upgrades, as well as disability upgrades, in public housing properties. This is work that we are seeing great improvements in when it is being insourced by the ACT government. Yes, there could be increases in cost by doing that work. However, my focus is ensuring that public housing tenants get the best possible outcomes through this process. They are clearly not getting that at the moment and I want to see an improvement in that space.

MR COCKS: Minister, is your insourcing program, given your comments just now, now putting Labors ideology above proper fiscal management?

MS BERRY: No. It is a strong value of the Labor government that we work through an insourcing process, where we can, for jobs that do not need to be required to be contracted out. That is something that the ACT government has been doing for some time and we will continue to do that work. I see the Housing ACT insourcing project as a really important part of that work and I am committed to—

Opposition members interjecting—

MR SPEAKER: Members. Members, she is answering the question. You might not like the answer, but she is giving a relevant answer. I recommend you listen to it.

MS BERRY: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I appreciate your ruling on those interjections and I am happy to answer questions about the insourcing work that the ACT government is doing, particularly in the Housing ACT project. The pilots are going really well and I look forward to seeing more positive outcomes.

Swimming pools—deep water pools

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, on 3 January this year, in relation to the new Civic pool project, an ACT government spokesperson said, “Decisions have not been made ... including whether diving facilities will be part of the project.” Then, just 10 days later, on 13 January, you said, “There’s no dive pool at the Civic facility, that is true.” Minister, was the statement on 3 January from a spokesperson true?

MR BARR: I will take those questions. Yes, the process at the moment is that the Infrastructure Canberra directorate is working through the detail of the consultation process and the requests for facility or amenity, and assessing that against the indicative cost. That process has not concluded, but early advice was that the cost of a five-metre dig would consume a disproportionate amount of the project.

That information has progressively been provided to government as further work has been done, but final decisions in relation to the scope of the Commonwealth Park project, and indeed other works, have not been finalised. But indications are—as I indicated in my response to Mr Emerson’s question—that to dig that deep in the rock in that location would consume a disproportionate amount of the available project budget. But we will make final decisions in relation to the location and type of aquatic facility and pools—depth, width, indoor, outdoor and location—as we progress through the finalisation of the early contractor involvement and then, ultimately, the approach to market in relation to Commonwealth Park.

Then, of course, there is the broader aquatic strategy that the minister has announced. I think it is reasonable to assume that, for matters or facilities that cannot be delivered in Commonwealth Park, every effort will be made to deliver them elsewhere in the Territory.

MR RATTENBURY: Chief Minister, what happened in those 10 days that saw the two different quotes being given? Was there a cabinet meeting to discuss it?

MR BARR: There was not a cabinet meeting between those dates, but information obviously continues to be relayed to ministers. A cabinet meeting was held in the last week of January to confirm the release of the aquatic strategy that Minister Berry, in her correspondence with stakeholder groups, indicated would be coming. She indicated that before Christmas, and at the first cabinet meeting in the New Year that announcement was made.

You also wrote to me, Mr Rattenbury, on Christmas Eve—I think the correspondence arrived just before close of business—indicating a desire to have a discussion in relation to the Phillip pool and to look at alternative options. As I had foreshadowed in November 2024, an alternative option I foreshadowed then, has been pursued.

MISS NUTTALL: Chief Minister, how long will Canberrans who rely on diving facilities and deep-water pools be without access to such facilities, based on your current planning?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Nuttall for the question. As I indicated in my response to Ms Carrick and Mr Emerson, the current facility in Civic will continue for many years to come—at this stage, I suspect, through the rest of the decade. Should that change, we

will, of course, advise the community with plenty of notice—noting, of course, that it is seasonal; it is not available all year around. In relation to new facilities, once we have settled on a preferred location for replacement facilities, we will advise that, and it will be the government's endeavour to ensure that there is a seamless transition from one season to another, noting that if the facility is outdoor, then that could occur over the course of a calendar year. For example, Civic pool might close at the end of the summer season of a particular calendar year, and then a new facility would open at the beginning of the next summer to ensure that continuity of use.

Housing—National Housing Accord

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is also to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, can you provide an update to the Assembly on the government's progress implementing commitments made under the National Housing Accord?

MR BARR: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the question. There is no doubt that the increase in the supply of social and affordable housing is a key focus for the National Housing Accord. It sets a clear direction, lifting supply through coordinated action, with an agreed national target of 1.2 million new, well-located homes over five years, from mid-2024 onwards, backed by commonwealth incentives and enabling programs.

Our direct accord commitments for affordable homes—the ACT's allocation—is 175 dwellings, with an agreed rollout profile of 35 homes per year from 2024-25 to 2028-29. Across the broader program, since July 2024, the ACT leads all Australian jurisdictions in dwelling completions against the target, with 3,129 new homes delivered in this period.

The ABS data to December 2025 shows an uptick in ACT building approvals, with 4,353 dwellings approved in the territory over the 12 months to December 2025 forming part of the 5,157 dwellings approved since the commencement of the accord.

Quarterly approval and commencement data is volatile, given our relatively small numbers, but it is a positive signal from the market, and we will continue, obviously, to work hard in partnership with industry, community housing providers and the commonwealth to achieve our targets under that national commitment.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Chief Minister, how is the ACT government working with the commonwealth government and industry to increase housing supply in the territory?

MR BARR: We are using a number of different avenues, and particularly in public housing, we are seeing the Housing Australia Future Fund provide additional funding. There are 85 new homes being funded under the HAFF round, being a joint investment process, with \$66 million from the commonwealth and \$75 million from the territory government to ensure that these homes under that round of the program are available by 30 June 2029.

We continue to engage with community housing providers to ensure the continued funding for projects through the Housing Australia Future Fund rounds, and round 3 is now open. We continue to submit and be part of that process, and to date we have

secured well above our population share of that national program.

We will continue working closely with the commonwealth and industry on a range of practical and sensible reforms to streamline building and development approval processes, and we will support the workforce and future workers in this area by seeing more tradies trained in the territory through investments in free TAFE and \$10,000 apprenticeship incentives.

MS TOUGH: Chief Minister, what can Canberrans expect to see throughout 2026 as part of the government's housing agenda?

MR BARR: I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary question. The government is working on planning reforms to deliver more diverse housing, including medium and high-density homes in well-located areas. I think the Assembly is well-aware of the process there.

We hope these missing middle reforms will remove planning barriers to make it easier to build more medium-density homes in existing suburbs. We have announced targeted and technical amendments to the lease variation charge framework and valuation methodology to support more housing supply. The government will also continue to implement tax reforms to reduce the cost of entry into the housing market.

We will also continue our program of infill and greenfield land releases, enabling construction of tens of thousands of additional homes that will include a mix of market, community, public and affordable housing. In addition to these releases, based on current construction and planning activity, it is anticipated that around 9½ thousand new dwellings, on top of the government programs, will be delivered through private sector projects that are in the planning pipeline or under construction over the next five years.

Public schools—hours of operation

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood. Minister, the opposition has been made aware of a number of schools across the ACT that are not delivering a full-time schedule, with many of them ceasing face-to-face teaching on one or more days of the week. Minister, why are schools no longer providing full-time contact hours?

MS BERRY: I thought Ms Lee was referring to this year, and I was curious as to which school she meant where there had been some change happen this year. I thought, “Gee, that happened fast.” Yes, there are a couple of schools that have worked with their community and changed some of their rostered school hours to allow for different, flexible types of learning, and to change the way the schools are operating. I understand that those schools have worked with their school communities and engaged with them. They were piloting that particular process; then they went back to the community to check whether that was working for them. I understand that the community had positively received the pilot. I think there are only a couple of them in the ACT public school system that are running that process. I understand that that has been welcomed and agreed to by the community.

MS LEE: Minister, how many and which schools participated in this pilot?

MS BERRY: It was not a pilot designed for a bunch of schools. Particular schools were running pilots that were suitable for their own particular situation. I will have to take the question on notice, but I understand that it is a very small number.

MR PARTON: Minister, are you able to detail the exact level of engagement and consultation that has been done with parents before these decisions were taken?

MS BERRY: I will take that question on notice. If there is information that I can provide to the Assembly, I will do that.

Mr Cocks: A point of order.

MR SPEAKER: Mr Cocks?

Mr Cocks: Strangely enough, it is on 118AA! The original question—I was hoping that the minister would get to it through the supplementaries, or I would have jumped up sooner—was about the reason that schools are no longer providing full-time contact hours. The minister has spoken extensively about the process of speaking to the school community and the idea that maybe the school community supports these cutbacks in hours. I do not believe that the minister has actually answered the question: why?

MR SPEAKER: I think she was pretty responsive to the question, Mr Cocks. I do not uphold the point of order.

Public schools—hours of operation

MRS MORRIS: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood. Minister, in 2025 a number of Tuggeranong government high schools were forced to operate on a reduced timetable of 4½ days per week and students were regularly sent home early. We have had parents and other members of the school community tell us that this reduction was driven by ongoing teacher shortages. Minister, how does the government justify its failure to effectively manage teacher workforce shortages, resulting in the disruption of students' learning time? And what responsibility do you accept for the impact this has had on the educational outcomes for students in Tuggeranong?

MS BERRY: I can confirm that two schools were operating under this flexible learning period. Initially, there were situations where there were not enough casual staff to cover all the classes. The classes might have been split, combined or moved to supervised online learning. Flexible learning periods are designed to develop independent learning skills and time to practice and consolidate skills and knowledge, to enhance student confidence and application. The two schools operating under this flexible arrangement regularly review these arrangements with a student-centred focus and with the consistency of student learning as the main priority. Parents can opt for their children to sign out of the school and complete these programs in alternative settings if they prefer—that is, they can go home or go to a library somewhere else—

Opposition members interjecting—

MS BERRY: Well, you want the answers and I am giving them to you—but they must have permission from the parents. All students are expected to remain at school and engage in these flexible learning periods. It would be rare, I think, that students would not be part of the flexible learning periods. The increase in unplanned staff leave across ACT public schools is attributed to a range of reasons I have talked about at length in this place, including that teachers do not go to work when they are sick, which is appropriate. Sometimes there will be flu-like symptoms or an increase in family care responsibilities. Because of the increase in those circumstances, we have not been able to replace teachers immediately, but, as I said, the programs for those flexible learning outcomes in those public schools were working quite well, and I understand the schools were engaging very closely with their community. I have taken on notice that information being provided.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, given that teacher shortages have been well known for quite some time, why did your government fail to put effective measures in place to prevent these schools from being forced into a reduced timetable?

MS BERRY: An incident occurred in 2019-20 called COVID. Many people here would have experienced that. It has a long tail. It has created a different culture with all of our work situations, including within our schools. Teachers and school staff do not go to work sick, and that is appropriate. They should not be going to work when they are sick. There was a time when people were encouraged to soldier on and get to work regardless of having a runny nose. That is no longer the case. We are seeing that COVID still exists and is rampant in our community. Flus also exist in our community and are quite severe when you get a case of the flu. It has led to situations where people have needed to take an increased amount of leave.

Mr Cocks: It's taken a fair time to respond to that new reality, though.

MS BERRY: Well, you cannot magic up teachers. Teachers are qualified professionals and it takes some time for them to get their qualifications. The Education Directorate and the ACT government, as well as the national government, have been working on a range of strategies. In fact, more than ever before, under the Albanese government, we have had an increase in teacher enrolments—more than ever before. We are starting to see a shift, with more teachers being engaged in education, and we are hoping to see a change from that.

MS LEE: Minister, which is making ACT schools fail to deliver a full-time schedule: flexible learning arrangements, COVID or teacher shortages?

MS BERRY: All three. It is not as easy as the opposition would like—that you could magic up a group of teaching professionals to work in our public school system. There is COVID's tail. It exists in our community. It is unlikely to go away any time soon. And there is the flu. There is a requirement that staff do not come to work when they are sick, which is entirely appropriate. Then they have to introduce flexible school arrangements. That is what has happened. Those two schools have been engaging very closely with their school communities about that process.

Public schools—access to generative AI

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, recent reporting has revealed that ACT students are unable to access generative AI tools on their school-issued laptops, a stark contrast to students in New South Wales, who already have access to this emerging technology. Minister, given the rapid and accelerating role of AI in education in the future workforce, why has your government fallen behind and failed our students in equipping them with the necessary tools and digital infrastructure that are required for the future?

MS BERRY: This is rich coming from Ms Lee. When we were introducing free Chromebooks, she was very negative about the provision of free Chromebooks for public school students, and now she is wanting to make sure that they—

Mr Cocks: On a point of order: I believe that the minister has moved into debating the question.

MR SPEAKER: I think the minister has a long time to go over that and we will see what she comes up with.

Mr Cocks: But it is still debating.

MR SPEAKER: She is getting close; I will grant you that. But, if you want to ask a political question, you are going to get a political answer.

Mr Parton: Did you write this or was it ChatGPT?

MR SPEAKER: Just answer the question, Minister.

MS BERRY: I can reassure Mr Parton that I have never used ChatGPT. So make your judgements on my—

Opposition members interjecting—

MS BERRY: Wow—there is no need to be nasty! Our schools are actually working very closely around the introduction of AI—not being afraid of it but grasping it for all its opportunities with teaching application in our schools and also learning from our students. I do have some information—I just cannot put my finger on it today—which I will bring to the Assembly, because it is important that Ms Lee is informed about these matters.

MS LEE: Before I go to my supplementary, Mr Speaker, can I confirm, Minister, that you are taking some part of that question on notice?

MS BERRY: Yes.

MS LEE: Thank you. Minister, when will ACT students be able to access this key technology on their school-issued laptops?

MS BERRY: It turns out that I do have some information on that. The Education Directorate, as I said, is committed to making sure that we use AI in our schools both

for teachers to be able to use as well as students. Teachers across the ACT are already engaging students in discussions around generative AI and incorporating these tools into teacher-led learning activities, as I said in my first answer. The directorate is continuing to focus on building staff capability first in dedicated professional learning.

Feedback is being sought on the different preferred platforms for trials in the ACT. However, we are ensuring at this stage that participation in the use of AI is limited to 13 years and older. The trial will incorporate lessons learnt from national AI student trials. It will be conducted on platforms that meet appropriate safeguards. A broad suite of professional learning to staff was released in term 4 2025 and there are more planned from term 1 2026. Professional learning is designed to support those new to AI and those working at the forefront of AI in the classrooms.

As I said, our teachers are professionals and their professional development is important to them as well. Ensuring that our teachers are fully prepared for introducing AI into our classrooms is the first priority, and that is the work that the Education Directorate and the ACT government are doing.

MR CAIN: Minister, who made the decision to restrict access to AI technologies and on what basis was that decision made?

MS BERRY: I might have to take some of that question on notice with regard to restrictions on access with regard to Chromebooks. However, our teachers have been attending professional development—in fact, I attended one of their professional development opportunities in October last year with Google Gemini and NotebookLM—and they have been working towards introducing that into our schools to ensure that AI is used appropriately and safely.

Mr Cocks: Point of order—

MS BERRY: I took the question on notice at the start.

MR SPEAKER: A point of order, Mr Cocks?

Mr Cocks: Yes, on relevance. The minister is not responding to the question around the decision. She is now discussing other issues.

MR SPEAKER: She said that she is going to come back with further information about when that decision was made, and she is expanding on the answer. She has been relevant in saying that she is going to come back, and she is providing further information. So there is no point of order.

Public schools—phonics results

MS LEE: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood. Minister, year 1 phonics screening checks are designed to give parents, teachers, schools and the broader community clear information about whether children are learning to read effectively. Minister, why is your government refusing to release the results of the year 1 phonics test?

MS BERRY: One of the recommendations of the expert panel was that this information is a diagnostic tool and that the year 1 phonics test, or any test of that nature, might be used to create league tables. The expert panel also recommended that the ACT government legislate to ensure that they were not able to be used for league tables and the ACT government will be doing that work.

In the meantime, we will be releasing some parts of the year 1 phonics test when it is available. The first part of that test was piloting to make sure the professional development that we were providing to teachers was actually working on the ground in the implementation of delivering the year 1 phonics. But there is no point in any use for anyone, other than teachers, to release year 1 phonics tests for six year-old children publicly so that there can be league tables created across the ACT. I have committed to release year 1 phonics once we have gone through the completed period of implementing the program. Some of that information will be released, but in a way that is useful for the community. The tool is for teachers as a diagnostic tool.

MS LEE: When will that program come to an end and when can Canberra expect to see those results?

MS BERRY: I will take that on notice.

MR PARTON: Minister, if the government believes its literacy reforms are working, will you commit to releasing all of the results of the year 1 phonics test?

MS BERRY: No. On expert advice.

Swimming pools—access during heatwaves

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Minister for Sports and Recreation. Minister, during the recent heatwaves, Yass Valley Council opened up their pools for free to give the community a break from the heat.

Mr Parton: Good on them.

MISS NUTTALL: Good on them, indeed. A few local councils also did this in New South Wales and Victoria. Honestly, it sounds like a great idea. I would love to see it in places like the Lakeside Leisure Centre and the Active Leisure Centre in Erindale. Have you considered opening up government-owned pools in the ACT for free during heatwaves? If not, why not?

MS BERRY: Yes, it is something that the ACT government could consider, but they do not make decisions from questions in the Assembly—in this place. But I also note that every five minutes in this place, over the last couple of days, despite the interrogation of the ACT government's budget, the Greens are asking us to spend more money. Every five minutes there is a call to spend more money. There has to be a process for how that money is spent. It is called the budget, and we release it each year.

In circumstances where there are heat waves, yes, in the future is something that the ACT government might consider but it did not on this occasion. Heatwaves are very rare activities, and I know that we had a shortage of at least one pool in the ACT, which

meant that there was, perhaps, more activity at other pools than there normally would have been. It is certainly something that could be considered but it was not on this occasion.

I acknowledge and congratulate the Yass Valley Council for doing it. They have one pool; we have a number of pools, so it would end up being a significant financial commitment should be ACT government consider that.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, have you noticed whether people in the ACT use public pools more during the heatwaves if that is the kind of data you gather?

MS BERRY: We do collect data, and I have released it publicly in a reply to a question on notice. I did not include it in pool usage; I put it in pool income—from Belgravia Leisure—in an answer to Ms Carrick. Yes, there would be that information available from Belgravia. I think if anybody had visited pools on any of the days that were quite warm—particularly on those 40-degree days—they might have seen an increase in some pools, but not all pools. I did visit Woden pool on one of those heatwave days and it was not busy at all. There would be some pools that might have had increased usage. Dickson pool was quite popular during the heatwaves, but I would not say that that was the case for Woden.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, will our pools' role in heat relief, or as a heat refuge, be considered as part of the ACT's new aquatic facilities strategy?

MS BERRY: The government does not announce policy during question time.

Mr Braddock: Point of order. I was just asking if it would be considered; I was not asking for an announcement of an initiative.

MR SPEAKER: The question was basically asking whether it will be rolled out of part of the strategy. She said that that will not be announced as part of government policy. I think that is reasonable.

Woden interchange

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Minister, the new Woden interchange has been under construction for around three years. In an answer to a question on notice on 21 November last year, you said that the new Woden interchange will be complete by the end of March 2026. In your ministerial statement this morning you said that the new Woden interchange is expected to be completed in the first half of this year.

Minister, what month will the new Woden interchange open to buses, bringing to an end route diversions that have been delaying buses for eight months now?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Carrick for her question. Those two statements that I made are consistent, and I made that latter statement in my ministerial statement earlier this morning. The latest advice is that the expected completion is in April for the Woden interchange, with operations then commencing thereafter commissioning. It is not too far away. It has taken a little bit longer than expected due to substantial utility works

that were required—far more than what was anticipated when the project began—but once it is completed, it will be able to be incorporated into Transport Canberra’s network without too many issues and without any substantial changes to the timetable or network,

I will keep Ms Carrick abreast of the details of the exact opening time. Indeed, we will be making the community aware through quite detailed communications when operations are due to commence so that they can make adjustments, moving from the temporary interchange into the permanent facilities, which are futureproofed for light rail and in the interim will provide safer access to our bus services

MS CARRICK: Minister, will the Easty Street bus layover still be required once the new Woden interchange opens, given the availability of the Phillip oval layover and the large new bus depot on Athllon Drive?

MR STEEL: Yes, it will, but the extent of the use will be far more limited now that both the depot has opened and the interchange will be opening. There will not be as many buses that we will need to layover there, because there will be opportunities in other locations around Woden, but those facilities are still required permanently to support buses on the network, and of course that was factored into the design of the facilities that have been put onto Easty Street. We are looking forward to seeing the interchange open so that we can get the best use out of that asset and the expanded capacity in that interchange compared to the old interchange, which was more than 50 years old, unsafe, lacked solar access and had a range of other disadvantages.

MR EMERSON: Minister, are there plans to open the new road through the CIT West Plaza between Bradley and Bowes Streets once the new Woden interchange opens, given community concerns about cars moving through the new public space?

MR STEEL: Yes, we consulted on that very early in the design of the development of the Woden CIT project, so that has been contemplated at the point that the project is complete on the Woden interchange. Some further minor infrastructure improvements are required on the Bowes-Bradley connection, directly adjacent to Grand Central Towers, where there was a bus stop, so some further works will be required there just before it opens to provide a new north-south connection that did not exist previously.

In the town centre, of course, this will provide better access for those with mobility issues who are wanting to get dropped off closer to access into the CIT or the Westfield shopping centre, but there are also opportunities to potentially utilise that road and have it closed off for events in the future as well. That is something the government is willing to discuss with stakeholders who may be interested in using the western plaza, including the roadway, which is very much a slow zone and has been designed as such to make sure that safety is in mind, but it does still provide access to the businesses in that area, as well as providing access to passengers with a disability.

Land—breaches in lease conditions

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. Access Canberra have publicly stated that they are undertaking regulatory action against seven lessees for failing to meet the requirements of their Crown leases. The government has

already publicly identified Richardson shops and Big Splash as two of those sites. What are the other five sites and what action has been taken on those sites?

MR SPEAKER: Mr Steel, will you take that one?

MR STEEL: I will take that question on notice. Obviously, Access Canberra acts on the delegated authority from the independent Territory Planning Authority. I will have to seek advice from the independent Territory Planning Authority and Access Canberra as to exactly whether I am able to release the block and section numbers of the sites that they are looking at in relation to ongoing investigations and compliance action. There are a range of different sites with different zoning. Yes, those two are known about: Big Splash at Macquarie; and Richardson shops is one. But there are five other sites, and I will come back to the Assembly with what information I can on those.

MS CLAY: Minister, regarding the regulatory action for Big Splash, what specific steps were taken and when between the controlled activity order of 9 September 2025 and the notice of consideration to terminate the lease issued last Friday?

MR STEEL: There is a process that is established under the Planning Act 2023. The process generally starts with an investigation by Access Canberra. They may issue a show cause notice, after which they may issue a controlled activity order. There is then a range of other options set out under the Planning Act that Access Canberra may look at, and they are currently in that later stage.

Following both a show cause notice process and a controlled activity order process, they have now issued a notice of intent to terminate a lease. They have given 15 days to the lessee to respond. We are still in that period at the moment. They will no doubt consider the response from the lessee at an appropriate time.

I would certainly refer Ms Clay to the Planning Act, because that is what Access Canberra are following. It is important that they follow the law, and that they give the proper natural justice opportunity to the lessee, and procedural fairness. If they do not do that, the decisions that Access Canberra may make in relation to that particular lease may be challenged, and that may not have an outcome that Ms Clay or indeed her community may desire. They have to follow the procedure under the act, and that is indeed what they are doing.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, as part of taking it on notice, could you please check whether the Gungahlin cinema site is also the subject of regulatory action and, if not, why not?

MR STEEL: I will take it on notice as to whether it is subject to the investigation. I will have to seek advice from Access Canberra about how much information I can provide in relation to that particular site in Gungahlin.

Public schools—Strathnairn School

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood. Minister, I understand that the newest ACT public school opened this week. Could you

please tell the Assembly about the school?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Tough for the question. Named after its significant location on Ngunnawal Country, Strathnairn School is the ACT's newest and 93rd public school. It opened on Monday this week. It was exciting to be part of the school's opening on Monday morning with the principal, Nicole Nicholson, and her team as they welcomed 100 new students from preschool to year 2. In future years, Strathnairn School will have capacity for up to 780 students in preschool to year 6. Information about 2027 enrolments at the school will be available when enrolments open in May this year.

Students and staff currently have access to brand-new, state-of-the-art spaces for preschool, junior school learning, outdoor play, a library and administration. The additional indoor and outdoor learning spaces, canteen and school hall are expected to be ready during the second half of 2026.

MS TOUGH: Minister, could you please tell the Assembly about the design of the school?

MS BERRY: I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary. Strathnairn School is located in the suburb of Strathnairn. The suburb is bound the Murrumbidgee River and Ginninderra Creek, making it a region of vital cultural significance. The school has been designed with consideration of the nearby reserves, as well as being environmentally sustainable as part of the Ginninderry development. Comprehensive planning has ensured the school is conveniently located, well-designed, inclusive, sustainable, safe and able to meet the needs of the enrolments for that area. Consistent with the ACT government's commitment to take action on climate change, the design includes sustainable materials and a solar-power generation system, and it has a five-star Green Star rating.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, will there be an early childhood centre and an outside-of-school-hours service on the school grounds?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for that supplementary. Yes, there will be an early childhood education and care centre and out-of-school-hours care on the school grounds, and the YMCA will be operating both of them. The early childhood centre will be licenced for up to 130 children per day. Children from birth to five years of age will be attending in the coming months. In the next couple of weeks, the YMCA will begin providing before- and after-school care. Families can make bookings through the YMCA Canberra website or through contacting the school directly. Outside-of-school-hours care will be from 7 am to 9 am and 3 pm to 6 pm, and vacation care will also be available during school holidays.

Sport and recreation—sports fields

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, an article in the *Canberra Times* at the end of last year confirmed that certain parts of Canberra, particularly Gungahlin and Molonglo, do not have their fair share of sporting fields relative to their population size. Minister, how does the government identify future gaps and shortages in playing fields across Canberra?

MS BERRY: I did not catch the first part of that question—because I was pressing buttons by accident—but I will give it a crack anyway. The ACT government is working towards making sure that we have suitable and enough playing facilities across the ACT. In my ministerial statement this morning, I talked about the number of new sports fields and sports facilities across the ACT as part of the ACT government's election commitments, including the Stromlo playing fields, the Throsby playing fields, the Taylor playing fields and upgrades or expansions to Basketball ACT's stadium in Belconnen.

I am constantly working with all sports groups to understand where there are better ways that we can make sure that there is good use of our existing sports facilities equally across the city but also understanding ways that that could be expanded by including training or matchplay lighting at those facilities. We have also piloted partially turning on sports fields that had previously been turned off as a result of the millennial drought in the 2000s. We have successfully partially turned on junior training Melba-Copeland sports fields. The Canberra High School sports field has also been partially turned on, and we are investigating other dryland ovals that could be assisting in that space as well as increasing lighting opportunities across the ACT.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, does the government have a target ratio for sporting fields to population?

MS BERRY: I think there is going to be a lot of work coming out of a motion later on today, Mr Milligan, that might bring a whole lot of information together that I will be able to provide to the Assembly and the community going forward. The government's work involves engaging with the sports communities themselves and understanding their growth in participation across the various sites and clubs and then working with them to ensure that that growth can be managed on existing sites or where we might need to increase and improve other facilities.

MR COCKS: Minister, what is the government's current plan to fix the shortage of playing fields, noting for your benefit—given that you were distracted at the start of the question—that an article in the *Canberra Times* at the end of last year confirmed that certain parts of Canberra, particularly Gungahlin and Molonglo, do not have a fair share of sporting fields relative to population size and that Gungahlin and Molonglo will still be underserviced even after the completion of the Taylor, Throsby and Stromlo playing fields?

MS BERRY: I cannot recall that article. I think one of the journos wandered out to some of the fields and counted them all up. They are all available online; so he did not need to do that.

Mr Parton: Dedication.

MS BERRY: Not getting enough clicks on his stories. Again, I am working with the sports clubs and communities. In fact, I am holding a joint round table with the sort of top nine sports clubs around the ACT.

Mr Cocks: A round table always fixes it.

MS BERRY: Well, if I wasn't talking to them you would be upset. I am talking to them and listening to them about what their needs and priorities are in addition, to building the new fields at Stromlo, Taylor and Throsby and also looking at ways that we can include lighting that extends the period of time that sports can play on our sports fields.

Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. Minister, last week the *Canberra Times* reported on the resignation of the first Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People, Vanessa Turnbull-Roberts, less than halfway through her five year term. The *Canberra Times* goes on to state that your office was made aware of issues that senior members of the First Nations community had with the commissioner, specifically her "persistent absenteeism" and staff turnover in the office. Minister, how much has the establishment and operation of the commissioner's office cost ACT taxpayers to date?

MS ORR: The budget for the office is outlined in the budget papers. Mr Parton is welcome to go read those and have a look to get the answer to his question. It is printed. They are there. It has been put out in every budget paper as to the cost of the office. It has not been hidden.

MR PARTON: Minister, for that rather large figure, what practical and tangible outcomes—can you list the practical and tangible outcomes—that have been achieved by the commissioner and that office in those two years?

MS ORR: The commissioner and the commissioner's office is required to provide an annual statement of the work that they have been doing over a 12 month period. The former commissioner has provided those statements and they are publicly available and have been considered through things such as annual reports and processes.

MS BARRY: Minister, when were concerns about the commissioner raised with you and what action did you take?

MS ORR: Regarding concerns with the commissioner, certainly I received feedback for a number of decisions that are under my portfolio jurisdiction, including this particular one where concerns were raised with the community. Through those concerns coming through, the former commissioner was working with the community to address those concerns and looking at what could be done.

What I would like to point out though is that the former commissioner, Vanessa Turnbull-Roberts, resigned for personal reasons and I would like to acknowledge the work that she did do in the time that she was in the role and certainly the important role she has been in, having been the inaugural commissioner in this territory. It is a role that was called for by the community. It is something that is very much supported by the community and it is a role that I think we will continue to see go from strength to strength. I am not going to sit here and discuss the personal circumstances of any of the officials that report to me, including Ms Turnbull-Roberts. I wish her well in her next endeavours.

The Acting Commissioner, Barbara Causon has been appointed and will continue to act in the role. We are currently in the process of filling the role permanently. The office is fully staffed. It is doing a lot of work and I am certainly receiving positive feedback from the community about this role and how it is continuing to progress and develop.

Mr Cocks: Point of order. I am sorry to do it, but under 118AA, the question was very simply a when question. There was not a timeframe mentioned in the minister's response. It would be useful to get an actual answer to the question.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, I will uphold that one. The question was specific about when you received any concerns and what action you took. I did not hear a response to that in your answer Minister, so if you could respond to the 118AA that would be appreciated.

Mr Barr: Mr Speaker, I think we are 10 per cent more efficient than we were yesterday! We will take that as a productivity benefit for this place, and I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.

Supplementary answer to a question without notice

Development applications—approvals

MR STEEL: In question time yesterday, in response to Mr Milligan's question regarding the status of current development applications, I stated that, as at the latest statistics for September, the percentage of development applications—DAs—determined in statutory timeframes was 85 per cent. I said that that was pretty high. I said that the number of DAs active was 269, and the median days to make a decision was 45. I also said that that would be about the highest and best outcome in terms of percentage of DAs determined within statutory timeframes for the year.

I was actually referring to the month of December, which is the latest data that we have, as published on the ACT Planning website—not September. Specifically, it is the percentage of DAs decided within timeframe and DAs active at date tables, respectively. The percentage of DAs determined within the statutory timeframes for December 2025 was the highest outcome for the published period of July to December 2025.

Also, as of 3 February 2026, 283 development applications are active. Of these 283 active development applications, 21 development applications have exceeded the statutory due date, or approximately seven per cent. For Mr Cocks's benefit, in deduction, that equates to 93 per cent being within the statutory timeframe.

Waste—sharps disposal

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (3.14): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the ACT has a strong history of evidence-based public health policy, including harm-reduction approaches that prioritise community safety,

- prevention and dignity;
- (b) sharps waste, including needles, syringes and lancets, is generated by a wide range of Canberrans, including people living with diabetes, people undergoing medical treatments at home, people who use injectable medications and people who inject illicit drugs;
 - (c) safe and accessible disposal of sharps, regardless of the source, is essential to protecting public health and ensuring the safety of sanitation workers, park maintenance staff, community workers and members of the public;
 - (d) inadequate access to sharps disposal bins can contribute to unsafe disposal practices, including the discarding of sharps in household rubbish, public toilets, parks, car parks and other public spaces, which can cause serious concern in the community;
 - (e) demand for sharps disposal services is increasing as a result of population growth, an ageing community, higher rates of chronic illness managed at home and increased use of injectable medications; and
 - (f) increasing the availability of sharps disposal bins is a practical, preventative and cost-effective measure that reduces risks before harm occurs; and
- (2) calls on the Government to:
- (a) commit to working on increasing the number and accessibility of sharps disposal bins across the ACT;
 - (b) undertake a review of current sharps disposal locations to identify gaps, areas of unmet demand and opportunities for expansion;
 - (c) develop a plan to increase the provision of sharps disposal bins in public and community settings, with a focus on safety, accessibility and visibility;
 - (d) engage with relevant stakeholders, including health services, community organisations and worker representatives, to inform best practice placement and ongoing management;
 - (e) ensure that any expansion of sharps disposal infrastructure is accompanied by clear public information about safe disposal options available in the ACT; and
 - (f) report back to the Assembly on progress toward improving sharps disposal access as part of the ACT's broader public health and community safety objectives by the end of 2026.

This is a humble motion, and I am very proud of that. With it, I am not seeking to turn the great ship of state, overturn a policy or demand a new one. This motion is not inspired by world or national events or debates; instead, it responds both to my conversations with people who use or work with injectable medications and their suggestions. It is also informed by my own experience, living with type 1 diabetes these past 27 years, and who occasionally needs to use needles or other sharps in public places.

With this motion, I am seeking the Assembly's support to call on the government to look at an issue that it might otherwise miss, to do some work with stakeholders on assessing if and where there are gaps in sharps disposal accessibility in the ACT, and

then look to fill those gaps by making sharps disposal more accessible, more visible and safer.

In a feeble attempt to try to make this speech not entirely about me, I would like to remind my colleagues in the Assembly that people living with diabetes are not, by any means, the only members of our community who rely on sharps for legitimate medical purposes. The use of self-administered injectable medications is increasing significantly and rapidly.

The list includes people undergoing IVF treatment, people managing autoimmune conditions, people who have been prescribed with anticoagulant medication, growth hormones, fertility medication, and newer therapies such as GLP-1 medications, including Ozempic, Wegovy and similar drugs. There are also people who use injectable medications to manage chronic pain. There are hormone therapies. There is a range of other conditions that require regular injections.

Every self-administered injectable medication can, and sometimes must, be self-administered in public. For many Canberrans, using sharps in a public space is not a choice; it is simply a part of staying alive, staying healthy and following medical advice.

There is a possibility that conversation in this chamber around sharps will default to concerns about illicit drug use. I understand those concerns, and the concerns that have been raised with me, similarly, by members of the public. I have my own confronting memories of finding a used needle discarded upon a tree stump beside Lake Tuggeranong while my sons and I were participating in the Tuggeranong Community Council's legendary Clean Up Australia Day event. But I genuinely feel that that shallow frame misses, and perhaps stigmatises, a large and growing cohort of people who are doing exactly the right thing, exactly as prescribed and who simply want to dispose of medical waste safely and with dignity.

This is one of those motions that aims constructively to annoy the government into doing a bit of extra work that it might not otherwise do, because that work will make a real difference to people's everyday lives. I want to acknowledge at the outset that the ACT government is already doing important work in this space. Sharps disposal bins are provided in every ACT government-managed toilet in urban open spaces.

The Transport Canberra and City Services sharps team responds quickly and safely to reports of discarded sharps in public places. There are multiple bulk disposal options available across the ACT through recycling centres, health services and with community organisations. That work matters. It prevents injuries, it protects workers, and it keeps our public places and spaces safe. However, for many people who self-inject medication, there is still confusion about where sharps can be safely disposed of, particularly when they are away from home, unfamiliar with an area, or unable to access the current locations.

There is also an intuitive aversion to going into a public toilet to furtively, it feels, dispose of used sharps, or to put them in your bag or in your pocket. For people who do not use sharps, it is a bit like the natural aversion one would feel to putting a banana skin or a used chip packet back in one's pocket or bag. Once something becomes "rubbish", and therefore "dirty", even though it has barely changed, one much prefers

to dispose of it rather than carry it around. Used sharps in your bag or pocket provoke the same feelings of disgust, but much worse, and smeared with danger.

There is also something else at play here, and it is important to name it: stigma. There can be significant stigma attached to injecting in public, even though it is lawful and prescribed. People feel watched. People feel judged. People feel like they need to hide what they are doing, or not do it, even when it is essential to their health. When I say “people”, I mean me. I am a well-adjusted young man who is not generally, as far as I am aware, known for being overly averse to attention.

Additional sharps bins, clearer public information, and even simply talking about this issue in the Assembly today, all help to reduce that stigma and that feeling. Conversations like this help to normalise the reality that many Canberrans are using injectable medication and that they deserve safe, respectful options to manage that part of their health care.

Over the past year, I have had several conversations with Elise Apolloni, a Tuggeranong pharmacist and the owner of Capital Chemist Wanniasa. At the Wanniasa shops, there is a sharps disposal bin managed by Directions Health Services. It is about the size of one of the red or yellow bins that you find in public squares around Canberra. It sits somewhere between the small disposal units found in public toilets and the bulk disposal options at recycling centres or health facilities. It is a genuinely useful community-scale solution to a problem. But if you have not stumbled across that bin at the back of the shops, you probably would not know it is there or what it is for.

That is why this motion calls not just for the consideration of expanded disposal options, like placing more of these mid-sized bins in public spaces, but for clear public information to accompany any expansion. I would love to see something as simple as an online register of sharps disposal locations across the ACT—something that can be searched and is up to date, something that allows people to quickly find a safe option when they are not in familiar territory. That kind of information would be particularly valuable for people who travel across Canberra for work, caring responsibilities or medical appointments, and for people with limited access to transport.

Earlier this week, my office spoke to Elise. She said:

Our community is lucky to have sharps disposal options so close to home. We are very grateful to have a syringe disposal bin at our pharmacy after working with Directions ACT several years ago, and it helps many people in our community, for all different purposes, dispose of their syringe equipment in a safe manner.

That reflects almost exactly what I have heard consistently from pharmacists, health workers and community members. These bins work. People use them. They make us safer. And I want to be clear, Mr Assistant Speaker: I am not an expert in siting infrastructure. This motion does not pretend that I am. I will not suggest specific locations from the floor of this chamber, but I think it is reasonable to imagine opportunities in public spaces without bathroom facilities, in shopping precincts without nearby health centres, and in areas where sharps are already frequently reported. The sharps team at TCCS would know where these reports cluster. Community organisations would know where gaps exist. I look forward to hearing back

from the minister about the work of the directorate in considering these options.

I also want to note advice provided to me by Bronwyn Hendry, the CEO of Directions Health Services ACT, who also supports an expansion. She suggested that the government could consider disposal options at shopping centres without health centres, and in large housing complexes, particularly in areas where residents have limited access to transport. That strikes me as exactly the kind of practical, evidence-informed advice that this motion seeks to highlight.

MS CASTLEY (Yerrabi) (3.23): I will respond to Mr Werner-Gibblings's motion on behalf of the opposition, in my capacity as shadow minister for city services. The opposition does not have any particular concerns with this motion. We would like to see some credible evidence supporting the case that the current policy settings are inadequate, though, and some idea of the cost of implementing any change, but we are not opposed in principle. In fact, it is fair to say that we would welcome government action on discarded needles and syringes in public places.

I note that this issue was raised in the middle of last year by Mrs Morris. She asked the Minister for Health about the health risks associated with used syringes in public places, to which the minister responded, "Google it." This is yet another example of the minister being curtly dismissive of genuine public concern, only for it to be raised by the community, experts and stakeholders or, in this case, one of the minister's own colleagues.

Mr Assistant Speaker, you would think that a health minister—someone who should be committed to public health—would recognise the dangers of syringes in public places and that she would listen to reasonable concerns being raised by her own constituents in ensuring that there was adequate access to disposal services in public areas. You would think that it would not take a Labor MLA raising a concern for her to concede that the problem may be genuine. But you would be wrong.

The opposition will be supporting this motion today; but, as I say, it should not take an Assembly motion moved by a Labor MLA for this government to take action on this basic community service.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (3.25): I welcome the opportunity to support the motion put forward by Mr Werner-Gibblings and the amendments that will be circulated by Mr Emerson, if they have not been circulated already. This motion is about a practical and important issue—how we manage sharps waste in our community to reduce harm, protect public safety and prevent avoidable injury and disease.

Appropriate needle disposal and access to safety services are proven measures that reduce needle-stick injuries to members of the public, workers and emergency responders. They reduce the risk of blood-borne viruses, such as hepatitis C and HIV, and they reduce the number of discarded needles in public spaces, parks and streets. When governments invest in safe disposal and needle safety services, the benefits extend far beyond the people who inject drugs. They protect children playing in parks, cleaners, council workers, paramedics, police and the broader community. In other words, this is not a niche issue; it is a shared public good.

Importantly, the evidence shows that effective sharps disposal systems make a measurable difference in reducing harm. Research involving Australian hospitals has demonstrated that improved sharps disposal systems can reduce total sharps injuries by around one-third and reduce container-related sharps injuries by as much as 86 per cent. These are not marginal improvements. They represent dramatic reductions in preventable injuries. Other studies have found that safer sharps disposal systems can prevent thousands of accidental needle-stick injuries among workers, highlighting the central role of disposal infrastructure in protecting health and safety.

Australia's response to this evidence has been clear. In recent years, national sharps container standards have been strengthened to improve puncture resistance, prevent overfilling and reduce accidental exposure. These reforms were introduced precisely because safer disposal systems are recognised as one of the most effective ways to minimise needle-stick injuries and protect workers and the public. Workplace safety authorities, including WorkSafe ACT, have also warned that sharps that have been improperly disposed of create a high risk of injury and infection for waste workers and others. That is why safe disposal is not simply a matter of convenience; it is a fundamental workplace safety and public health obligation.

The logic is straightforward. When safe, accessible disposal options exist, fewer needles end up in public spaces, fewer workers are exposed to injury, and fewer people face the fear and trauma of accidental exposure to blood-borne viruses. When disposal options are inadequate or inaccessible, risk increases, not just for people who use needles but for the entire community.

That is why the motion before us is one that we are happy to support. It calls for a stronger, more systematic approach to sharps waste disposal and needle safety services across the territory. It recognises that harm reduction is not an abstract concept, but a set of practical measures that saves lives, prevents injuries and reduces long-term costs to the health system.

I understand that Mr Emerson will be moving amendments. I do not wish to pre-empt him but, as I have the floor, I will simply flag our support for his amendments, which raise issues in the Alexander Maconochie Centre. I will leave it to Mr Emerson to speak about those.

This motion asks us to recognise that sharps disposal is not a peripheral issue. It is a matter of public health, workplace safety and community wellbeing. It calls on us to act on evidence, not stigma; on prevention, not neglect. By supporting this motion, we affirm that safer sharps disposal is an effective tool that we have to reduce harm and protect the community, and that is why the Greens are pleased to support it today.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (3.29): I thank Mr Werner-Gibblings for bringing this motion to the chamber. After giving me such a finger-wagging lesson on fiscal responsibility and the budget process yesterday in the chamber, I did have a little smile when I read this one. In the first instance, Mr Werner-Gibblings calls upon the government to undertake a review of current sharps disposal locations to identify the gaps, the areas of unmet demand and the opportunities for expansion; but in the very next clause he concludes that the review would have a predetermined outcome, because Mr Werner-Gibblings already knows that there are

massive shortfalls, and his motion calls upon the government to roll out much more sharps disposal infrastructure, irrespective of the outcome of the review. I will refer the member to his speech of castigation of me yesterday.

As the new shadow minister for health, I have never had as many appointments with medical practitioners and associated staff as I have had in the past 2½ months. I have had many discussions with some really helpful people, and I will quote one of them here. I spoke to a specialist who operates presently in Canberra about this motion, and he gave me this feedback. This is his feedback, word for word:

Really? Is this all they've got? Why are we even wasting time debating this? Let them have their moment in the chamber, agree and move on. I cannot believe that we are having this debate when there are so many other larger problems. Can you ask Mr Werner-Gibbings, or even the Minister for Health, how do we handle the current crisis in acute medicine? How do we specifically handle the crisis in cardiology, which is impacting extremely vulnerable Canberrans every day? Does Mr Werner-Gibbings agree that there is a monumental problem, and what is he and the minister doing about it? Acute medicine cannot wait, and this motion is almost a distraction. Having said that, you should support it.

I got a slightly different view from a pharmacist. This came to me from someone wearing a white coat, and I understand that it refers to the concept of sharps disposal in the context of pharmacies. Again, I quote directly:

The motion reflects accurately what many community pharmacists would say, that the usage of sharps in health care is on the rise and having extra readily accessible access points for the disposal of sharps would be worthwhile for safety and the environment. While the ACT pharmacies would strongly support more local access points, not all pharmacies would have the capacity to be a disposal site themselves.

I have had additional feedback from a pharmacist based in Queanbeyan, and I think this is relevant. The chemist told me that the Queanbeyan-Palerang council have paid for a sharps disposal access point at the pharmacy for the past six months. They have made a decision to cease the service as of the end of this month, due to the cost and the location of other nearby access points. They believe that the nearby access points meet demand. This pharmacist said, "We generally collect two to three hundred litres of waste every two to three weeks," which sounds like a lot.

Such a service would struggle for the required space at quite a number of pharmacy locations in Canberra, particularly given the level of foot traffic at some of those pharmacies. I am aware—and Mr Werner-Gibbings has alluded to it—that Capital Chemist at Wanniassa some time ago felt the need to advocate locally, along with Directions ACT and others, for greater sharps disposal services in their Wanniassa precinct. As a result, a sharps disposal access point was created at the local Wanniassa shops. It has nothing to do with the outcome of this motion, but I believe that, for whatever reason, it is unavailable for use at the moment.

"The public disposal facility seems like the best solution for possible locations across the ACT, where most ACT pharmacies are smaller in size and have a community need." That is the feedback that came from another one.

We will not be opposing this motion from Mr Werner-Gibbings—wearing a double-breasted suit, if you do not mind, which I am loving.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (3.33): I rise to speak in support of Mr Werner-Gibbings's motion to increase the accessibility of sharps disposal bins across the ACT. I will not be opposing it. I will be supporting it—that is how far I will go on this one, Mr Werner-Gibbings—and also, in the spirit, as he put it, of annoying the government into doing the bit of extra work it might not otherwise do, I am moving amendments that seek to ensure that all Canberrans benefit from the evidence-based policies propounded by this motion.

I seek leave to move the following amendments together.

Leave granted.

MR EMERSON: I move:

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

“(g) the *Healthy Prison Review of the Alexander Maconochie Centre 2025* found that 35 percent of detainees strongly agreed or agreed it is easy to access needles. The review acknowledged the high risk of blood-borne virus infections due to shared needles, stated that the right to humane treatment when deprived of liberty encompasses a right to equivalent health care in prison to that provided in the community, and recommended the introduction of a needle and syringe program; and”.

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

“(f) ensure detainees at the Alexander Maconochie Centre have access to sharps disposal services commensurate to those available for the broader ACT community; and”.

The ACT Inspector of Custodial Services' 2025 *Healthy prison review of the AMC* acknowledged that the right to humane treatment when deprived of liberty, which is protected in section 19 of our Human Rights Act, encompasses a right to equivalent health care in prison to that provided in the community. Thirty-five per cent of detainees surveyed as part of the review strongly agreed or agreed it is easy to access needles in the AMC, although this of course includes dirty needles. I have heard stories of a single syringe being used by multiple detainees for 12 months at a time and nicotine patches being melted down and injected with such a needle.

The *Healthy prison review* recommended that a needle and syringe program should be introduced to respond to blood-borne virus and infection risks in the AMC. It is a recommendation that I support, and I appreciate the Greens' support, as I believe Mr Rattenbury was signalling. The review further suggests that, without such a program, the ACT government is failing to uphold detained people's right to receive health care equivalent to that available in the community, where people can access clean needles. Support for such a program is broad and has long been called for in our community.

Hepatitis ACT, seeing on the ground the health and also financial consequences of

needle sharing in Canberra's prison, has long advocated for the introduction of a needle and syringe program in the AMC. These programs, as we know, offer an evidence-based approach to reduce the spread of blood-borne viruses and infections in the broader community. The same holds, of course, in prison settings. The introduction of such a program in our prison would be in line with global best practice.

I acknowledge that it is, of course, tricky and complex, as is any step that we take to treat drug use as a health issue and not a criminal one, but that should not keep it from happening. Recent modelling found that \$2.60 would be saved for every dollar spent introducing and expanding needle and syringe programs in Australian prisons. In 2011, former CEO of the Public Health Association of Australia, who was also the former President of the World Federation of Public Health Associations and former ACT health minister, Dr Michael Moore AM, set out options for the implementation of such a program at Canberra's prison. His report responded directly to many of the concerns that continue to be raised as reasons for not rolling out a needle and syringe program there, including mechanisms to ensure the safety of corrections officers, such as one-for-one exchange programs using vending-style machines.

While this amendment does not commit the government to introducing a needle and syringe program in the ACT, I hope that the commitment to ensuring equitable access to sharps disposal services represents the start of a policy shift towards evidence-based safe injecting services for all Canberrans, including detainees, and to evidence-based disease and infection reduction in the AMC.

Again, I thank Mr Werner-Gibbins for bringing this motion before us today which, with the support of the Assembly, will improve the accessibility of sharps disposal bins for the many Canberrans who rely on these important facilities. I hope he will forgive me for confining my remarks to the substance of my amendments, but I thought he explained the grounds for the motion very clearly, and I support it fully. I also appreciate him sharing his personal experiences to inform the development of this motion and would appreciate members' support—Mr Werner-Gibbins included—for my amendment to ensure all Canberrans benefit from it equally.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (3.38): I rise to support the motion on the basis that evidence-based public health policy that embraces harm reduction approaches is best practice, in terms of keeping the community safe and also in order to ensure that people who need to dispose of sharps can be afforded safety, respect and confidentiality. Sharps disposal is used by many people in my electorate who require a safe way to dispose of clinical and non-clinical waste, including those with diabetes or women undergoing IVF.

The safe disposal of sharps in fit-for-purpose bins in community facilities is important also for the safety of workers who may come into contact with them, such as health, cleaning, recycling, waste management, and parks and recreation staff. I also support Mr Emerson's amendment to provide detainees at the Alexander Maconochie Centre with access to sharps disposal services commensurate with those available for the broader ACT community. For those reasons, this motion seems common sense and I support it.

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

Minister for Women, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence, Minister for Corrections and Minister for Gaming Reform) (3.39): I was not planning on talking today to Mr Werner-Gibblings's motion. I am very supportive of the advocacy work that he has done in this area, particularly in reducing stigma and improving the dignity afforded to those who need to use syringes for multitude reasons in the community. I support his motion and improving the public health response in the ACT. However, as Mr Emerson himself noted, there is not a motion in this place that does not have Mr Emerson's touch on it, so here we are with the amendment.

I welcome the opportunity to speak on a slightly diverted subject. I apologise to Mr Werner-Gibblings because this goes down the rabbit hole of the drug use conversation. I welcome the opportunity to talk about sharps disposal processes within the AMC. Sharps disposal bins are already available in health areas and at officer stations within the AMC, and detainees can provide sharps to correctional officers to dispose of them as required.

Mr Emerson's speech diverted further down the rabbit hole to needle and syringe programs, so I would like to take the opportunity to speak about some of the really important and good work that is underway within the AMC, particularly addressing drug use and blood-borne virus transmission among detainees. We know that the AMC is an incredibly complex environment and that nothing is as simple as it is in the community. We have an ongoing coronial matter as we speak that speaks very strongly to the dangers of drug use within the AMC and how ACT Corrective Services address this quite significant issue that we face.

There are a few aspects that I would like to talk about—initiatives and work that is underway, including measures to intercept and detect contraband in the facility; data collection through drug testing and wastewater testing; harm minimisation measures; and the implementation of the Drug and Blood-borne Virus Strategy. There are challenges in keeping correctional centres completely free from contraband, often including illicit drugs. These are significant and experienced nationally, in all facilities.

ACT Corrective Services have a range of tools and processes to prevent contraband from entering the AMC and are continually improving these measures. These include internal and external barriers, including use of X-ray machines, K9 units, body scanners, and dynamic and static security within the prison. There is a comprehensive searching program within the ACT; regular drug testing of detainees, both random and targeted; wastewater testing, which I will speak about next; staff searches; and signage outlining the seriousness and consequences of bringing or attempting to bring contraband into the correctional facility. When contraband is discovered, it is confiscated and stored securely. Items required for police evidence purposes are handed to ACT Policing. Otherwise, weapons or drugs are disposed of or safely destroyed.

A significant wastewater testing program was introduced at the AMC in May last year to detect traces of drugs and other illicit substances within the facility. This is really important information that the AMC has started to collect to be able to provide a baseline and an understanding of fluctuations in drugs that are entering the facility. The testing is undertaken on all toilet facilities within the AMC. This could include detainees, staff or visitors at the centre. Wastewater testing complements existing drug and alcohol testing strategies. The results are used alongside urine analysis to build a

clearer picture of drug use trends within the AMC. Over time, ongoing wastewater monitoring will help ACT Corrective Services identify trends and respond appropriately.

All detainees, when they enter the AMC, are provided with an initial health assessment, followed by a comprehensive health assessment between days 2 and 5 of detainees entering custody. As part of this process, screening for blood-borne viruses is offered. Detainees who return a positive result are referred to the Justice Health Services' Complex Care Team for follow-up support, including education, clinical assessment and initiation of treatment where appropriate. Detainees may also request blood-borne virus screening at any time during their custody.

A range of harm minimisation initiatives are in place across the custodial environment. These include opioid maintenance therapy, where clinically indicated and requested. Treatment for HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C is available in custody, and vaccination for hepatitis A and B is provided, in accordance with the National Immunisation Program. In 2025 the AMC established a hepatitis C testing program within the AMC in partnership with Hepatitis ACT and Community Corrections, ensuring detainees and clients of Community Corrections can access appropriate treatment. Detainees also have access to bleach sachets to minimise harm caused by sharps and minimise virus spread. This has had a significant impact on the harm caused by sharps circulating in the AMC.

ACT Corrective Services also deliver a range of evidence-based addiction treatment programs to support detainees in addressing substance dependence and reducing reoffending, including Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous; the Solaris Therapeutic Community; EQUIPS programs, including one dedicated to addressing addiction; and the SMART Recovery Inside Out program, an alcohol and drug use program.

In 2025, last year, the AMC Drug and Blood-borne Virus Strategy was launched and reflects the ongoing measures that I have just detailed. The strategy aims to provide an integrated, harm minimisation approach to substance use and blood-borne viruses to identify risks to the safety and security of detainees and staff at the correctional centre and improve health outcomes for detainees. Corrections are currently developing a detailed action plan that will operationalise the strategy and ensure a structured, accountable approach to implementation, noting that many of the key actions in the plan are already in place. The action plan is focused on strengthening prevention, enhancing detection, and supporting better health outcomes for detainees.

The Drug and Blood-borne Virus Strategy also notes that needle and syringe programs and tattooing and piercing programs are outside the scope of the strategy due to complex and extensive policy and funding considerations.

ACT Corrective Services and Canberra Health Services understand that the literature demonstrates the significant harm minimisation effects of needle and syringe programs in community settings and their positive impact on reducing blood-borne virus transmission. However, noting that establishing a needle and syringe program at the AMC would be the first for any Australian custodial setting, significant work would be undertaken before this could be realistically implemented. Such planning would require

extensive research, staff and community consultation, and exploring resourcing issues and budgetary considerations.

I acknowledge the Inspector of Custodial Services' *Healthy prison review* of 2025, which she released at the end of last year. The government is currently considering how to respond to the 33 recommendations in that report, including one that relates to the implementation of a needle and syringe program.

As flagged in the strategy, the government will continue to work through the issues associated with a needle and syringe program in the AMC. Any further consideration would require comprehensive consultation with staff, unions and detainees, as well as detailed operational and security risk assessments, the development of clear frameworks that guarantee staff safety, and assurance that any model aligns with ACT Corrective Services' core responsibility to maintain safety and security within the facility.

I will leave it at that. I strongly support Mr Werner-Gibblings's motion and the work that he is doing in this space.

MRS MORRIS (Brindabella) (3.48): I would like to thank the Minister for Corrections for her contribution with regard to Mr Emerson's amendments, and for the information that she has just provided on the management of illicit drugs in the AMC. I would like to make some brief remarks, and I will return to Mr Werner-Gibblings's motion.

Thank you very much for bringing this motion forward today. I want to acknowledge that the safe disposal of sharps is a challenge for many Canberrans who rely on injectable medications for their health, which Mr Werner-Gibblings has very vulnerably shared with us today. But there is another pressing aspect of this debate which should not be overlooked—that is, the community's right to be safe. Community safety is not just about crime statistics; it is often about how people feel, walking to their car, walking to school, taking their kids to public parks and playgrounds, or even where they are interstate visitors coming to our city and enjoying our city.

Illicit drug use and the reckless disposal of sharps can damage that sense of community safety, and it can hit a lot of our local businesses hard. I have heard some pretty troubling accounts from retailers and hotel managers about the impact of discarded needles in their vicinity, and the impact it has had on their workplace and their staff. I have heard descriptions of daily incidents, including discarded needles surrounding hotels and left for staff in those areas to dispose of. It is a threat to their right to a safe workplace. I refer to the harassment and intimidation that many staff and guests have been confronted with by users of those needles, and property damage, too.

This is not only an inconvenience and a risk to those workers and their right to be safe; it is also a reputational risk to the city, and it undermines the safety of all Canberrans to feel safe.

It also hits community and family spaces hard. Mums and dads should not have to worry about the safety of their children when they are walking to school or playing in playgrounds and parks. They should not have to worry that they will get stuck with discarded needles. Sadly, many of them do. The reason I know that is because they have

contacted my office and they have shared that with us—that their children have been playing in a playground and have come across discarded needles.

When I asked the minister about the risk to the public safety of young children coming across discarded needles like that, her response to me was, “Google it.” I thought that was a very dismissive response to the parents who, I thought, had very good and legitimate reasons for being concerned for their safety. Ms Castley is right; it should not take a Labor backbencher’s motion for the health minister or the ACT government to take public safety seriously.

Nonetheless, I am pleased to see that there has been somewhat of a softening of the government’s attitude towards discarded needles and the risk they pose to public safety.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (3.52): Very briefly, I want to clarify something. Both Ms Castley and Mrs Morris have referenced comments that I made, so I want to reiterate the comments I made in that question time for the record, to put a bit more context around them. What I actually said to the Speaker was:

My response to Mrs Morris would probably be by saying, “Google it.” You will get as good an answer from that, in terms of the health risks, as you would from me googling it and answering your question in relation to the health risks. If what Mrs Morris is concerned about is, in fact, a matter of littering and syringes—

and needles—

being in public places, the responsibility for that does not sit with the health minister.

I went on to say, in response to a subsequent question:

... of course, like any member of the community, I am concerned when I hear about syringes being discarded in public places. As a local member, I have had those conversations with people in my community as well.

In line with the ministerial responsibility for litter and the inappropriate dumping of needles and syringes, Ms Cheyne took the second supplementary question, because this is actually a matter for her portfolio, not for the health portfolio, in terms of the way that we manage disposal of sharps in the community and any incidents of people leaving needles and syringes inappropriately in public places. There are, as Ms Cheyne indicated in that question time, arrangements in place for people to call Access Canberra, and there is a very quick response to littering of sharps in public places.

Mrs Morris was very clearly drawing a connection between treating the changes that we made to the decriminalisation of the possession of small amounts of illicit drugs through the establishment of the simple drug offence notice and more littering of sharps in public places. There is no evidence of there being any connection between those two things. Mr Rattenbury talked a fair bit about harm reduction. That is the approach that we take.

I want to thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for bringing this evidence-based motion to the

Assembly. I am pleased that the Canberra Liberals will be supporting it. Again, I think they are drawing connections between things that are quite unlike, or should not have connections drawn between them. In doing so, they are really misrepresenting the approach that I took in question time, by taking that small bit of my response out of context. The broader context was an expression of concern about this public health risk; but, in the context of the response to that, it not being a responsibility of the health portfolio. With that, I will sit down, because I know that Ms Cheyne may have more to say.

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) (3.56): I did not expect that we would have so many contributions to what I thought was Mr Werner-Gibbings's quite straightforward motion today. I certainly welcome it, not least because it has given me some time to go back in time. What struck me, and what I was really quite proud to be supportive of, as the relevant minister in relation to this motion, was the breadth of it—the breadth of it in acknowledging that there are all sorts of reasons that people may need to be injecting themselves at any time of day, in any place.

I was reflecting that, not so long ago, a motion on sharps in this place probably would have been narrowly focused on illicit drug use. I thought, "Why don't I actually just check?" And I did not have to look very far. It was right there, as plain as day, in the Fourth Assembly. In fact, it was the very first sitting week of February, back in the year 2000—17 February. The government had brought forward an instrument for licensed venues regarding particular standards that they would need to employ, and one of them related to installing sharps disposal units.

Mr Rugendyke sought to disallow the instrument. I really need to stress, to anyone who ever reads this, that these are not my comments. This is him. I am quoting. He said:

I am not convinced that there is a problem in taverns and nightclubs. Understandably, the owners of these establishments are quite concerned—and with good reason. They do not want to encourage drug users on to their premises, nor should this Assembly be sending a message to drug users that it is okay to shoot up in toilets on licensed premises. This Assembly has already approved the establishment of one shooting gallery in the ACT, and I do not wish to see quasi-shooting galleries endorsed in other areas of our city.

He went on to say:

I can relate to the fears of tavern owners and nightclub owners that the presence of needle bins would create the perception that they condone drug use. I would not like to see this perception emerge, and I believe that this Assembly should be doing everything in its power to keep these premises clean of drugs, particularly clean of needles.

In opposing the motion—because, funnily enough, this instrument was brought by the then Carnell Liberal government—then Minister Humphries said:

There has been endless debate and discussion in this place about the hazard presented to the community by discarded needles and syringes. Those syringes are

a significant public health problem. A large number of such needles are collected daily in our community.

He went on to say:

In the public sense, there is no doubt that there is wide-scale use of needles and that they are a public health risk. A person in the vicinity, particularly a child who might be playing, runs a serious risk that, if they are stuck by one of those needles, blood-borne diseases on those needles could be transmitted to them. Literally, a death sentence could be transferred to a person in that circumstance by virtue of the fact that they have been exposed to that risk.

He did have some saving graces, in the narrative that was being put forward, and particularly with this, except for how it ends, which I think Mr Werner-Gibblings will find bemusing:

A significant number of needles are being used all the time in the community by people suffering from particular diseases—diabetes, in particular—for which needles need to be used. Sometimes they use quite a few during a day and they have a need for disposal as well.

He concluded:

But that is another issue.

That was 26 years ago, Mr Assistant Speaker. I reflect that there has been, perhaps in the commentary offered today, a touch of dog whistling; but I am really pleased, both with this motion and especially with the contributions today, that there has been nothing like the sort of dog whistling comments and, indeed, the stigma that was being promulgated in this place 26 years ago. I am glad that we are having a mature conversation in this place about what it means to be an injecting drug user and the many circumstances in which that may be a part of someone's life.

I want to acknowledge that our place management teams, when it comes to our public spaces, undertake very regular inspections and cleaning of our urban areas, and they do respond as quickly as possible when sharps or clinical waste are reported. Minister Stephen-Smith quoted my answer from last year, but it is worth iterating that there is a hotline. Call the 13 22 81 number if you discover a sharp. There are procedures in place for our dedicated teams, who do an outstanding job, to go in immediately, pick it up and dispose of it. It does help if you provide the location.

In looking back through the history of a sharps discussion in this place, I did note that, many years ago, someone called the hotline—a candidate, in fact—to report sharps, just to see whether someone would turn up. The person did turn up; then they said, “I just wanted to check that this service worked.” Please do not do that. That is not an invitation, but it does work. It did work then; it has been longstanding. I think that was from 1998. I have never named who that member was; but, please, do not do that. It does work; please use it if you are ever in that situation.

With improper disposal, I do understand the anxiety that it can create. There is still that fear of what a prick from a needle-stick injury might mean for you. But simply sighting

a sharp in a public place is no reason for alarm. We have trained professionals in our city. Just pick up the phone; they will be there, and they know what to do. Especially for anyone who is participating in Clean Up Australia Day soon, you will know that, if you spot a sharp, and particularly if you are at a site that some city services officers are at, refer it to them, because they are the experts in this space.

We do now have sharps disposal units—as much as there was such an argument and stigma 26 years ago—in our public toilets across the ACT. Of course, they are a normal sight in so many of our private venues. Every single public toilet does have one, and I believe that all of our venues across the Canberra Health network in the public area have sharps disposal units as well.

I do recognise that the demand for sharps disposal infrastructure is increasing. Indeed, there is a whole cohort of people who are engaging in sharps use who have never done so before, and I am one of them. I admitted that in my answer last year as well. I certainly have not lost weight through any particular, noble reason. I am on Wegovy; I have been on it for more than a year. I have an injection site right there, from this morning. That is what my weight loss is attributed to. There is no other thing to it. But it does mean that I have a sharps disposal unit at home, and it does mean that I have learned how to dispose of those needle tips. There is a whole cohort of people on these weight loss drugs who are getting used to what this means, what it looks like, what safety looks like in this space and who want to do the right thing.

Across all of the areas of government where we can usefully assist, there is absolutely no reason why we should not be undertaking an audit, doing a proper scan across our city and seeing how we can support any person for any reason who finds himself in the position of needing to use a needle for the purposes of injection, so that we can support the community in disposing of that waste. Ultimately, while it is a safety issue, it is also a public service issue, a city services issue, and one that is about supporting our community to dispose of waste thoughtfully. I commend it.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (4.06): Thank you, colleagues; that felt like a pretty decent discussion and, quite frankly, a gratifyingly in-depth and extensive discussion, especially considering this motion's modest nature, which I did note at the outset. It is not calling for a reinvention of the wheel; rather, to extend the metaphor, it is asking the government to examine if and how we can make it a little easier for some of the citizens to roll around our community.

I want to pick up on what Minister Cheyne mentioned during her contribution. When my sons and I found the syringe on the shores of Lake Tuggeranong, we called it in; we left it; and we were told exactly what to do and what would happen. We carried on our cleaning up efforts, and we came back half an hour later and the item had been removed. Also, 26 years ago, when I was only using needles, a hotel bathroom was exactly where I would go to inject insulin when I was painting the town red. It would have been tremendous to have options for disposal back then.

My motion is urging the government to listen to people who use and work around sharps disposal services, take into account how our community is changing and build sensibly on what already exists, if it identifies a serious need that that can be feasibly mitigated. Evidence shows that more people are using injectable medications and more people are

managing complex health needs outside of their home. What more people need, and I would suggest deserve, are systems that make it easier to do the right thing. Safe sharps disposal is a public health issue, it is a workplace safety issue and it is also a matter of dignity. When disposal options are visible, accessible and well communicated, we are reducing harm and we are reducing stigma.

Thank you to my Assembly colleagues who have contributed to this debate and particularly to Minister Cheyne and Minister Paterson and their staff for their engagement and thoughts on its development. Of course, and properly, a special thank you goes to Mr Emerson for his sincere and lovely words of support at the end of his speech and for his on-brand efforts to winkle in yet another amendment to a motion asking the government to do what it is already doing. Be that as it may, I commend the motion to the Assembly.

Amendments agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Sport and recreation—sports facilities

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (4.09): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) there is a significant shortage of sporting facilities in the ACT;
 - (b) this shortage is limiting growth options for clubs and grassroots sporting organisations;
 - (c) isolated investments from the Government into sporting facilities have failed to keep pace with growing demand;
 - (d) analysis from the *Canberra Times* has found that there is a geographical inequity in the spread of sporting facilities in the ACT, with Gungahlin and the Molonglo Valley generally missing out;
 - (e) local governments across Australia in areas such as Hobsons Bay, Orange, Victoria Park and Freemantle have previously commissioned sporting facility needs analyses to better inform sporting infrastructure investment; and
 - (f) comparable cities such as Newcastle, Wollongong and Geelong have provided certainty to their sporting communities by developing sporting facilities strategies;
- (2) further notes that in the public hearings on the Standing Committee on Economics, Industry and Recreation's inquiry into barriers and opportunities for participation in community sports in the ACT, several groups expressed concerns about the trajectory of sporting investments, including:
 - (a) committee members of the Yerrabi Football Club who stated that "in our experience, sportsgrounds are uneven and unlevel, and have poor drainage";
 - (b) the President of Friends of Manuka Pool who stated that "I am deeply concerned that too many pools are closing, with little planning for our

- community's future";
- (c) the President of the Royals Volleyball club who stated that "indoor space, or the lack of indoor facilities, is not a new thought that is being offered. This is decades old";
 - (d) the President of Badminton ACT who stated that "all my clubs are bursting at the seams, at capacity. I cannot take new members";
 - (e) the President of Basketball ACT who stated that "having a long-term facility strategy on how we build, develop and plan around our sporting infrastructure is really critical for indoor sports"; and
 - (f) the Executive Officer of the Community Sport Alliance who stated that "the whole purpose of having a facilities plan would be to give stakeholders some level of certainty about how we go about things"; and
- (3) calls on the Government to:
- (a) commission an independent audit of all sporting facilities in the Territory;
 - (b) include in the terms of reference of the audit:
 - (i) an assessment of whether existing facilities and assets are compliant with lease and planning requirements;
 - (ii) an assessment of gaps and potential future gaps in current and planned ACT sporting facilities; and
 - (iii) provide recommendations on upgrades to existing facilities that would close gaps identified within the audit; and
 - (c) table the report in the Assembly by 15 December 2026.

Canberra is an active city that deserves spaces to play and a plan to deliver them. According to the latest data by Ausplay, the ACT is the most active jurisdiction in Australia, with 77 per cent of adults participating in sport or recreation at least once a week. That means we have over 300,000 Canberrans going for a run, playing backyard cricket or participating in organised sport.

It is about having a healthy lifestyle, both physically and mentally, but it also promotes essential life lessons. It teaches us the importance of hard work and training, to try your best and to be your best. But it is also about teamwork and sportsmanship—that you do not win every game but you always shake hands after a match. It builds community and social cohesion. For some people in our community, sport will open up pathways to a career. Just look at Patty Mills and Caroline Buchanan, both born here in Canberra, who have gone on to compete on the international stage.

There is an opportunity here for the ACT government to keep excelling in the world of sport and recreation. Unfortunately, though, the government has not realised this opportunity. The sporting facilities shortage is truly at crisis levels. We have heard time and again that our sports clubs and groups are struggling to find places to play. The lack of basic facilities was a highlight in the Assembly's recent inquiry into the barriers and opportunities for participation in sport.

During this inquiry, the President of Basketball ACT said, "Having a long-term facilities strategy on how we build, develop and plan around our sporting infrastructure

is really critical for indoor sports.” The Community Sports Alliance said, “The whole purpose of having a facilities plan would be to give stakeholders some level of certainty about how we go about things.”

A core function of local government is to identify gaps in sporting infrastructure and facilities and work with the community to fix them. This function has been ignored by this ACT Labor government for many years. When was the last time the ACT government actually delivered sporting facilities in the community? I am talking about completed. When was the last tennis court actually built in the community—not at a school but in the community—for competition use? Or a basketball court or new playing fields?

As noted in my motion, we have seen other local governments across Australia commission audits of sporting facilities to understand where they need to invest. The town of Victoria Park in WA could see that their population was growing and, similar to Canberra, it was growing in pockets. Population growth was just one of the factors that they needed to consider when considering the town’s needs, going forward. So they commissioned an independent audit.

Hobsons Bay Council in Victoria have also seen an increase in participation in sport and rec. Player registrations were at capacity. Waiting lists were growing, and clubs had to tweet their schedules to make up for the lack of facilities. Similar to the rise of pickleball and badminton here in Canberra, their community, like ours, just want to participate in their chosen sport. So, to make sure that they had an evidence-based approach for future planning and development, they commissioned an independent audit. The City of Newcastle faced many challenges similar to Canberra. They needed to balance upgrades to aging facilities with the need for new facilities. So they commissioned an independent audit.

These local governments and many others chose to commission a needs analysis, because they knew that was the best way to inform their sporting facility investment. Why does this government think that it knows better? We have seen what happens when this government tries to reinvent the wheel. Just look at the failed MyWay+ project or its abandoned HR project and the digital health record system. The Auditor-General described that one as potentially the most significant failure of government he has ever seen.

It is time to get the basics right. It seems that the ACT government is more interested in announcing the big headlines about the big projects, but they always seem to be delayed in their completion. Greenway is still waiting for an ice rink and the Home of Football is no longer and will become a community sports facility. Then there is Casey. Casey was promised a sporting precinct way back in 2012.

ACT Labor is certainly good at developing a headline or an election promise, but it is failing to deliver on grassroots facilities for local communities. As reported in the *Canberra Times*: “The government says the problem with the long-term community sports infrastructure plan is future governments might say, ‘We’re not going to fund that’.” That is why we need an independent audit—to ensure that any future strategy reflects expert advice and best practice approaches, to ensure that investment is equitable across all of Canberra. We need an audit that is independent of government,

so that we can use the expertise of those in the industry and on the ground. We need an audit that is transparent so that the community know what to expect when they plan for their future.

We have seen the success of similar approaches in other local governments across Australia. It is worth noting that, just yesterday, the Minister for Sport and Recreation was in this chamber selling the benefits of an independent audit. The minister told us that the government is undertaking a condition audit of existing public schools. The minister said, “To ensure the strategy reflects expert advice and best practice approaches, the ACT government intends to engage a suitably qualified consultant to assist in its development.” So they understand that there is merit in an independent audit or review and that there are people out in the field with expertise that can contribute to any such audit.

I am glad that those opposite understand the need for external expertise in these matters. We on this side of the chamber are happy to work with the community to understand their needs. The Canberra Liberals know that the first step in resolving this facilities shortage is understanding the state of play so that we know where we are and we know what we need to do, going forward, to set a plan to help fill gaps that are identified through any audit.

That is why I am calling on the government to commission an independent audit of sporting facilities in the territory, and that is why I am calling for recommendations to address any gaps or future gaps that have been identified, and that is why I am calling for the findings to be tabled in the Assembly so that we can finally have some transparency and accountability from this government.

An independent audit will reveal the current state of play and provide that transparency about government decisions that have been made. An independent audit will provide the evidence and the building blocks for a long-term strategic plan. We need this evidence first, and we need transparency around that evidence. Then we can use that evidence to focus on the strategic plan, going forward—a plan for investment in sport and recreation that is based on evidence. This will give assurance to our clubs and community groups that we will develop a plan for the future and give them the reassurance that the government is going to invest in sport and recreation, and then they can invest in their participants.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.19): I rise to speak in support of both Mr Milligan’s motion—and I thank him for bringing this important matter to the Assembly—and Ms Carrick’s amendment—which we have all seen, and we will come to it later. I also thank her for her constructive work across the Assembly in putting it together.

We all know that community sports and the infrastructure that enables them are vital to community cohesion, wellbeing and health. They provide a place for social connection and community building—so much so that community sport was mentioned in hearings for the ongoing inquiry into men’s suicide as a key way of addressing the drivers of poor mental health among men. We know, of course, that its reach spans beyond that issue, as has often been canvassed in this Assembly.

In the context of the ever-growing strain on the territory’s health budget, as we also

consistently hear in this place, we need to explore all opportunities for savings. 2018 research from KPMG showed that participation in physical activity facilitated by community sport infrastructure provided a health saving of around half a billion dollars annually. Given this research is now a bit dated, we can, of course, expect this number to have grown significantly.

We all know that community sport has wide-reaching, cross-portfolio benefits—both for the government and, most importantly, for our community—which is why, like many residents, I find it worrying that multiple critical facilities in Kurrajong are in such poor condition. It is why community sport organisations continue to raise serious concerns with me and, of course, with other members regarding gaps in our sporting infrastructure.

Last year I visited Kingston Oval. It is one of the oldest facilities in Canberra, where so-called female-friendly toilets equate to a box having been installed over the top of a urinal. I also visited Southwell Park, where, due to serious maintenance problems, large sections of the fields had been left unusable, and an infant child of one of the Uni-North club's committed volunteers had to be changed on the floor of a storage shed, a shipping container, because there are no parents' rooms there. There was a pavilion planned for in 2009, as part of the Lyneham precinct master plan, but, 17 years later, it is yet to be delivered—or even designed or funded. Mr Milligan reflected on similar frustrations in other parts of the ACT.

As central Canberra densifies, there are also concerns about the need to balance that development with the provision of sufficient community facilities—a concern, of course, that Ms Carrick raises regularly regarding Woden. That is why I recently sponsored a petition about also addressing the loss of indoor sporting facilities on the north side, particularly in light of the impending closure of the Dickson squash courts, which means that the number of publicly accessible squash facilities is going backwards. This is despite a 2015 report on ACT indoor sports facilities commissioned by the government that highlighted how indoor facilities reported “a very high demand during weeknight peak hours”. This was more than 10 years ago.

While Canberra is one of the most active cities in the country, we must not take this as a given. We need to proactively create the conditions that enable high levels of community sport participation for current and future generations of Canberrans. I hope that this motion's calls lead to change in this area, and I very much applaud Mr Milligan for bringing this motion to the Assembly today.

I have some concerns about some of the specifics of the motion, and I have indicated those during the conversations along the way, in trying to reach an agreed final form of this motion. I want to take a moment to note them in my remarks. Members from across the chamber will note that I have not moved any amendments to address those concerns. My fingerprints will not be on the motion. What restraint!

Members may be aware that, during last year's hearings for the ongoing economics, industry and recreation committee inquiry into community sport—the membership of which is well represented in the chamber this afternoon—an ongoing audit of the ACT's planning and infrastructure for sport and recreation facilities was discussed, as was an Australian Sports Commission-led national sport and recreation facility process that is

underway, with a 10-year community sport infrastructure plan described as something government officials would “certainly like to be an outcome” of that work.

It seems to me that every non-government member believes that a 10-year community sport infrastructure plan is necessary. Government members might also be coming around to this idea. Personally, I would have loved to have seen today’s motion call for that plan, although I understand that a staged approach was preferred, so that is what we will be voting on with Ms Carrick’s amendment.

I am not sure that I fully understand the specific requirement for an independent report, although Mr Milligan made a strong case for it, and I appreciate him laying out the argument. I suppose I have a view that the government should or do have the capability within sport and rec to do this work themselves. I would have thought we have the public servants that are paid to do this kind of work, which really should be core government business, and they also have a lot of valuable, Canberra-specific knowledge and connections that I think would be key in the preparation of this report.

Further, my sense—and it is an interesting disagreement—is that we are more readily able to hold the government to account if they fail to deliver a quality product than if an independent consultant does, a consultant whose work the government might then not feel obliged to adopt or act on in any meaningful way. I referenced before the 2015 indoor sports facility audit, which seems not to have led to all that many more indoor sports facilities.

Nonetheless, it seems to me that what we all want is a clear, long-term community sport infrastructure pipeline that: makes forward planning possible for sporting organisations; leans into the growth potential of many sports that have been hamstrung by the current lack of facilities; addresses the deterioration in the condition of many current facilities; enables Canberrans to connect and stay active together through the sports they love; and, importantly, is something tangible on which we can hold the government to account in delivering.

If this motion ultimately moves us in the direction of achieving that, I am all for it. In reading through the final calls on the government communicated in Ms Carrick’s amendment, I believe that it will.

With all of that said, I am very glad to support the motion. Again, I thank members—Mr Milligan and Ms Carrick in particular—for their constructive work on the matter.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (4.26): I move:

Omit paragraph (3), substitute:

“(3) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) commission an independent sport report to ensure the community has access to the facilities required to stay active;
- (b) specify in the terms of reference that the report must:
 - (i) define the report’s objective to assess future demand and guide the ongoing supply, maintenance, and upgrade of sporting infrastructure, taking into account the current and future needs of

- the community;
 - (ii) conduct a needs assessment to analyse community demand and identify gaps in existing facilities;
 - (iii) engage with community members and sporting organisations to understand their needs and priorities;
 - (iv) review trends and demographic data to inform evidence-based decision-making;
 - (v) audit existing facilities to assess their condition, capacity, suitability and compliance with relevant lease and planning requirements;
 - (vi) identify gaps in the provision of sporting infrastructure and recommend strategies for short, medium and longer term upgrades and new facilities to meet the needs of current and future users; and
 - (vii) include clear criteria for selecting sites for new facilities; and
- (c) provide quarterly updates to the Assembly, with the final report to be tabled in the Assembly by 24 March 2027.”.

I rise to support Mr Milligan’s motion calling for an independent sport report to identify gaps in community sporting facilities, along with the proposed amendment that I circulated this morning. I understand that this will be a two-stage process, and that this report will gather the evidence needed for the government to then develop their own strategy. This is the underpinning evidence that can be drawn on to inform the government’s 10-year strategy.

This motion is important because community sport plays a vital role in building social connection and improving the mental and physical health of Canberrans, from our young people through to seniors, from people living with disability through to our gender-diverse communities and those from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Sadly, too many facilities across the ACT have already been lost. As I have said before, in Woden alone the community has seen the closure of our basketball stadium, pitch n’ putt, the bowling facilities—both bowling greens and bowling alleys—tennis courts, YMCA, and our gymnasium. Current ACT government policy supports relocating the ice rink and closing the existing Phillip pool to make way for apartment towers. These are losses that the community feels deeply.

I often think about the Weston Creek Woden Dodgers, who did play at the Woden basketball stadium. They have 693 registered players across 74 teams in Basketball ACT’s winter competitions. Since the demolition of the Woden basketball stadium and the Woden CIT courts—we did have basketball in the CIT that was previously there—the Dodgers have been left without a central home. Their teams now train across seven different venues in the south of Canberra, which makes it incredibly difficult to foster a strong sense of club identity and community.

These venues are below competition standard. Many school courts have unsafe flooring, noncompliant hoops and inadequate maintenance. Schools present ongoing challenges. They are unavailable during holidays and exams, cleaning and upkeep are inconsistent, and last-minute cancellations are common.

Managing 74 teams across seven venues is logistically overwhelming. Volunteers must juggle multiple contracts, keys, alarm codes, inconsistent conditions and unreliable access. This erodes volunteer capacity and diminishes the sense of belonging that community sport should provide. It is deeply upsetting that the club cannot run teams beyond the under 19 level, other than the elite team, because there simply are not enough suitable facilities. Too many young people who want to continue playing sport are forced to stop.

The Dodgers are not alone. Many sports are expressing the same concerns. The Royals Volleyball Club is travelling to Lyneham to access facilities. If we had our own, we might have more capacity in the north. There are no volleyball or badminton competitions available on the south side at all.

Even new infrastructure is falling short. The proposed playing fields at Stromlo Forest Park are too small. They are not district-level playing fields. District fields have not been identified in Molonglo, and I hope this report will finally address the sporting needs of the growing Molonglo community.

This issue extends beyond courts, pools and playing fields. It includes the essential infrastructure that enables safe, inclusive participation—adequate accessible toilet facilities, safe lighting for women playing evening sport, access to drinking water, and reliable, co-located public transport.

Supporting community sport requires an interconnected approach across multiple government portfolios. As our city grows, through higher-density developments and the creation of new suburbs, we must ensure people have access to a diverse range of sporting infrastructure that is close to where they live and easily accessible by public transport.

I welcome the ACT government's announcement of an aquatic strategy and support today's motion calling for a comprehensive sporting facilities report. To deliver the best outcomes for Canberra, I encourage the government to work closely with sporting groups, including niche and emerging sports, in order to anticipate future needs well in advance.

Finally, I hope that the development of this report includes identifying suitable public land and quarantining it, where needed, to meet future community sporting needs. Our community deserves long-term planning, equitable investment and facilities that allow all Canberrans to thrive through sport.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (4.31): I, too, rise to speak in support of this very topical motion moved by my colleague Mr Milligan, and I thank him for bringing this motion forward.

Good governments are defined by how well they plan for the future, and how great cities are designed depends on how well the government plans. It also helps the wellbeing and aspirations of their citizens. This motion calls for the government to undertake an independent audit of sporting infrastructure across the ACT to assess whether it is fit for purpose and to identify priorities for improvements.

This is a sensible approach. It is evidence based, and it would provide the foundations needed to inform future investment and development decisions. It is also entirely consistent with the motion that I brought forward to this Assembly last year, calling for similar audits of community facilities and the needs of multicultural communities.

Frankly, if this Assembly had any confidence in the competence of this Labor government, motions such as this would not even be necessary. A capable government would already have this information, and it would already be publicly available. What we see from this government is window-dressing and selective messaging, rather than serious planning

Canberrans know what the reality is. They see the deteriorating nature of our community facilities. They see the aging public pools falling into disrepair. They see uneven, poorly maintained playing fields and sporting ovals that were once well loved, now falling into disuse because basic maintenance is not being done.

They also know how hard communities have had to fight to protect the facilities that matter to them, whether it is pools, Big Splash or local soccer clubs. For example, many residents in Kippax remain deeply concerned that the expansion of the Kippax shopping centre, without proper consultation, will come at the cost of valuable sporting ovals. The truth is clear: all is not well with the sporting infrastructure in the ACT. Canberrans are calling on us to stop the rot, and to begin the work of repairing, restoring and protecting community infrastructure before it is lost altogether.

I visited a sporting club in the Ginninderra area. I wanted to use the bathroom, and the bathroom had no water. We had to go and get water from a different facility to be able to use a basic facility like a bathroom. That is a huge disgrace in a community or a world-class city like Canberra.

My daughter plays basketball. On several occasions we have been asked to go to the Tuggeranong basketball centre and, on arrival, it was flooded. Families have had to go there, spend time doing so on a weekend, only to drive their kids back because the facility was flooded. Again, that is a disgrace in a world-class city like Canberra.

That brings me to another very important issue—that is, when you look at the future, this challenge is only growing. As we know, an Australian Bureau of Statistics projection shows that the ACT population could reach between 739,000 and almost a million people by 2071. Any responsible government would be factoring this growth into the planning process now. The reality is that we must not only preserve our existing infrastructure but expand and improve on it, to meet the needs of our rapidly growing community.

We face a conundrum in this city. The conundrum is that we are concerned about the mental health and state of wellbeing of our young people. At the same time, we know that sport is one way in which mental health issues can be addressed. But there are not enough facilities for our young people to participate in the sports of their choice—to participate at a local level or, if they are seeking to be internationally renowned, there are very few facilities that meet world standards. That is a huge disadvantage to the people growing up in this city. Again, that is a disgrace in a world-class city like Canberra.

What Mr Milligan is calling for in this motion is simple: this government should start acting like it is serious about the future of our young people and of Canberrans in general who will call this city home. I strongly support this motion, as it will provide Canberrans with the baseline data that we need to make informed decisions and future investment and development to ensure that our sporting infrastructure is fit for purpose and available for future generations.

I thank Mr Milligan for this motion, and I commend it to the Assembly.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (4.37): For as long as I have been in the Greens, we have been calling for a transparent, coordinated and evidence-based approach to sports facilities here in the ACT. We are definitely not the only ones. Across the territory, it is impossible to count the number of people involved in organised sport in one way or another. When you consider that Canberrans play everything from soccer to ice hockey, to polocrosse, to tennis, to tenpin bowling, at every level, from preschoolers muddling their way through T-ball and learn-to-swim programs, to elite athletes at the AIS, and when you consider the number of parents, coaches, spectators and volunteers standing on the sidelines, it is pretty darn clear that sporting facilities matter a lot to people in our territory.

We have heard from many of the sports and rec organisations that represent those people, and they are beyond frustrated with the current approach. As it stands, to sports organisations, it really feels like there is no clarity on if and when a facility will be upgraded. There is no detailed forward plan and no explanation as to why certain facilities have received upgrades while others are left long overdue.

A review into the ACT Sports and Recreation Grants Program conducted by McLaughlin Sports Consultancy about three years ago concluded that there is a large amount of unmet need, as represented by the 55 unsuccessful grant applications made in 2021. Stakeholder feedback suggests that there is a strong perception that funding is sometimes allocated for political reasons rather than genuine need. One point I always come back to is when the focus group was asked, “How will you know when you have got a fair dinkum sports funding budget?” and they responded, “When the CAP budget is significantly larger and when politically-driven sport facility election funding commitments are significantly decreased.” I think we do need to reflect on that as members in this place.

The concerns of organisations across the sector, which are documented in the review, tell us of their experience of the current system. They describe a system that is reactive rather than planned, inconsistent rather than strategic, and one that leaves clubs feeling like they must constantly compete against each other for limited, unpredictable funding. When asked, community orgs were frustrated about things like the lack of attention and money given to disability access; the lack of long-term planning and funding commitment—many organisers do not know if their facilities will accommodate increasing participation in the future; and insufficient articulation of the government’s strategic priorities in the short term.

At the moment, organisations feel like they have to lobby for basic improvements to their facilities. This is a hard ask when they are run by volunteers. More than that, it is

wrong. We should not be asking mums and dads and community volunteers to spend their time crafting appeals to the government for funding just so their kids can play sport in proper facilities. That is time they would rather spend cheering on their kids, jumping on the sausage sizzle and handing out orange slices.

Do we want successful outcomes to depend on need or on which clubs have the savviest office holders? And I do mean that with full respect to savvy office holders, by the way. Keep doing your thing. But knowing how to write a good grant application should not need to be a course skill for a weekend soccer coach. The more time these people have to spend wearing lobbying hats, the less time they get to spend wearing their baseball caps and bike helmets. Simply put: we need to let sports groups be sports groups.

The government's current approach to sports facilities planning prevents this. At the risk of oversimplifying things, I think it boils down to a lack of clarity for sports orgs and, quite frankly, for all of us around who, what, when, where and why investments are made in certain facilities while others are neglected. Our system must be needs based and evidence based, and it must be transparent.

In 2021, the government responded to the Greens calls for a comprehensive facilities management plan, through a motion in this place, with a road map. While, sure, it did provide a basic list of planned upgrades helpfully broken down by electorate, it was two sides of an A4 piece of paper. It did not tell community sports orgs how government had decided these priorities, when they would happen and why they were not on the list. There was no methodology, no justification and it was not comprehensive. We are five years on now, it is 2026, and I think it is pretty fair to say that a pipeline does not cut it. We are still in the same position.

The position we now find ourselves in is this: the ACT's inventory of sporting facilities has been under-assessed and ignored for so long that now everyone is due for an upgrade at the same time and there does not appear to be a solution articulated by government. This is why we need an audit and why the ACT Greens made an audit step one of our election commitment back in 2024. An audit will make the task of allocating funding appropriately so much easier. Crucially, it will make the allocation of funding based on real data for the supply and demand of sports facilities.

If I had to design a perfect audit, I would want it to include a few core elements: both demand and supply. On the supply side, a good audit will give everyone a comprehensive overview of the current state of repair of facilities, the geographic spread and the ease of access by public transport; and, for multisport facilities and ovals, which sports they can be used for. Then, when we look at demand, we will know which sports use which shared facilities; at what level of play facilities are being used for—whether it is grassroots or whether it is elite; how frequently they are being used—are they being used from dawn until 10 pm; and how fast demand for a sport is growing and where.

Our common sense can quickly see how useful this would be when prioritising expenditure. For example, swish upgrades to a facility used by a few dozen people for six hours a week might be nice, but they would probably sit further down the to-do list than basic repairs to something that is used by a changing roster of enthusiasts every weeknight and all day on weekends. At times, we probably will need swanky new

facilities, especially when a sport is growing.

The really awesome thing I have seen and heard from sports organisations is that they are eminently reasonable. They are competitive in the field, sure, but they get it. If your mate's roof is about to cave in, you are usually pretty happy to wait a bit longer to get your line markings repainted. Elite athletes might need more polished facilities than juniors, but if we want those juniors to turn into elite players—not to mention just being happy kids—we cannot neglect them either. We need quality grassroots spaces, too. We also have a duty to ensure that facilities in the ACT are up to scratch on accessibility, so that every Canberran has the opportunity to enjoy the benefits of sport and rec.

I understand that the budget is tight. That is exactly why we are calling for an audit—so that the money spent on sports goes where it is needed most and where it can then do the most good for our communities. I could go on—and probably will a bit—but most of this is pretty obvious, and I am sure that most of us agree that seeing community sports get the facilities they need to function is so incredibly important.

Before I sit down, I really do want to thank everyone for their constructive engagements on the amendments we have before us today. In particular, we were really glad—and actually had a lot of fun working with Ms Carrick and Mr Milligan's team—to come up with amendments that would get the constructive outcome that Canberra sports and rec orgs expect us to deliver. We as the Greens were really eager to get demand embedded in this audit and were very pleased when Ms Carrick was able to fit our calls into the one set of amendments—for the smoother debate experience. We will, of course, be wholeheartedly supporting her amendment. We wholeheartedly support calls for a comprehensive audit. In fact, this was step one of our commitments back in 2024.

In this, as in everything else, the Greens strive for evidence-based policy, not policy that comes from vibes and vested interests. Of course, this means that the evidence actually needs to be gathered in the first place. Without a proper audit into sports facilities, we are effectively planning blind or at the risk of not planning at all. Ultimately, it is our hope that an audit forms the necessary foundations for an infrastructure plan that will direct funding sensibly—one that gives sports and rec organisations certainty, restores trust in the decision-making we do here and ensures investment is directed where it will deliver the greatest community benefit. Sporting clubs should not have to beg. Volunteers should not have to lobby. Communities should not be left guessing. I support this motion for giving the sector the peace of mind it deserves and giving this Assembly the evidence it needs to invest in sports properly.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood, Minister for Homes, Homelessness and New Suburbs and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (4.46): I thank Mr Milligan for bringing to the Assembly this motion about sporting facilities in the ACT and thank Ms Carrick, for her amendment and for her discussions with me as well

I really appreciate and acknowledge the interest across the Assembly from everybody about community sport issues. I am sure that many of us have, throughout our lives and our children's lives, accessed sport and recreation facilities across the ACT, even as spectators but often as participants in sport. So I do understand the deep connection that most Canberrans have to our sports facilities in the ACT and that there will always be

calls for more and better. I absolutely appreciate that.

I want to thank everybody again for their constructive engagement with myself and my office. I have appreciated the chance to raise the concerns that Labor has with the motion with each of you. It is not the audit itself that is the problem for the Labor government. As I have tried to explain to offices, the issue that the ACT Labor government takes with the motion is that it is not the role of the Assembly to direct the government to appropriate funds, which is what is required to commission an independent sport audit or sport report.

I accept that is still the case, and that we are not being called on; we are indeed being directed now by Ms Carrick in her amendment, and so—

Mr Milligan: It does not say directed.

Mr Cocks: I think it says “calls on”.

MS BERRY: It has changed, has it? I appreciate that; thank you. Sorry, I take all of that back. Thank you for that, Ms Carrick. I did not see that. I appreciate that change.

The government is working towards repairing a budget that is facing some challenging times. I am confident that the Treasurer will be able to do this. I am sure that the parliament takes the fiscal responsibility of the budget seriously, and we have seen that through some of the questions that have been asked of the Treasury this week. Every sitting week since this government was formed, and in these first couple of days of this week, the parliament calls on the government to appropriate funds—and that is the situation in this case as well. But I will come back to that in just a moment and talk to the motion itself.

The Labor government, of course, understands the importance of community sports infrastructure, which is why we continue to make investments in the development upgrades of facilities that increase participation and best ensure a positive sporting experience. I acknowledge the call for a long-term infrastructure plan. I expect that the government will, at some point along the way, be asked to develop a long-term plan. As members will know, I approach a long-term infrastructure plan in sporting infrastructure with caution. I am just noting that things do change. Yes, future governments might have to make different decisions that could mean that the expectations of sports communities would be impacted and people would be disappointed by that; however, I accept that that is what the community wants. So I am continuing my conversations with sports organisations, including Sports ACT, with whom I am having a further conversation coming up about sports infrastructure planning.

I also need to note that there are a number of other inquiries happening in the sports space. Firstly, the Assembly has a committee of inquiry into barriers and opportunities for participation in community sports, which is chaired by Mr Taimus Werner-Gibbings. The second is that the ACT Audit Office is also conducting a performance audit into planning for sport and recreation infrastructure. The ACT government is in the process of developing both an aquatic strategy and skate park user strategy. Both of these strategies will also look at existing infrastructure, community need and future

infrastructure needs.

As I referred to, next week I am co-hosting a community round table with Community Sports ACT, where we are talking to sports from across the ACT about their priorities, including for infrastructure; their thoughts on what a long-term plan would look like; and their aspirations and goals that are achievable and that the community could reasonably expect to be looking forward to. This is in addition to my quarterly meetings with community sports leaders, as well as meetings on every other day with a variety of sports in this space. As has been referred to, nationally, the Australian Sports Commission is developing a national sports infrastructure plan, which is in collaboration with states and territories as well.

So to suggest that nothing is happening or that there has been no plan or nobody understands what is going on is not true. There is quite a bit happening in gathering together data from across the country as well as here in the ACT, and I expect there will be significant overlap with what this motion and amendment are calling for. In many ways, this motion pre-empts some of the work that is happening in the parliamentary committee and the Audit Office. Potentially there could be some duplication, and it might perhaps undermine some of the existing effort that is occurring. So perhaps there might be a need to come back to the Assembly and somehow bring all of this together, because there is quite a lot of work happening all over the place. I think it would be better if it was all brought together under one focused approach rather than so many multiple recommendations et cetera around all of this, as well as the work that this motion is calling for today—just to sort of put that into the minds of people who I might be able to talk about that with throughout the rest of this year.

I also want to be clear with the Assembly about practical realities of timeframes. Again, I am very appreciative of the change to the timeframe in the amendment that Ms Carrick is putting forward. If I come back to the appropriation of funds that the government needs to do to engage an independent auditor to do this report, we need to go through the budget process, as you all know, and that will not happen until June. Then, if it is successful, there will need to be a procurement process to engage an independent auditor. That process can take one to two months at least. Then we would need to ensure there was a plan to ensure that all of the ACT sports sector was consulted and a plan going forward around that, and engagement of the community. Then, of course, all the work in Ms Carrick's amendment—which is quite a lot of chunky effort—has to be brought together to put into a report. All of that takes time.

While I agree, absolutely, that it is important work and we should take a reasonable amount of time to do that, I am appreciative of the March timeframe. I will do my very best to ensure that a report is completed by that timeframe. What I can absolutely commit to is reporting back to the Assembly on work progress that is happening in the meantime leading up to March. It is my absolute ambition to meet the timeframes in this motion. But, as I said, with all of the other work that is happening and the work that is being directed through this motion and Ms Carrick's amendment, there is a lot happening in this space. We will do our very best to deliver on the motion's expectations.

I would go back to our understanding of our sports communities and their priorities. As I have described, there are a range of different meetings and opportunities through the

ACT government and the team at sport and rec to engage around making sure that our sports facilities meet the needs of our community. Yes, we have some very old facilities that need upgrading, and there is funding going towards that. In fact, the funding has been doubled around grants programs and processes.

I disagree with Miss Nuttall's assessment of the grants program. Clubs appreciate the opportunity to jointly fund different ideas for their own sports facilities, and they are supported every step of the way to apply for grants if there are people for whom grants writing is not their specialty. If their grants do not succeed in the first instance, the sport and rec team work with them to ensure that they have success in a second application for grants rounds, going forward.

I think if we took that away and removed the opportunities for sports to work with governments or partnerships with other organisations, sports businesses or anyone else who wants to support sports communities across the ACT, there would be a huge uproar from the community about not being able to be part of that process. It is a very successful program. As I said, we have doubled the funding that goes towards those infrastructure upgrades at our sports facilities, and it is very appreciated—from all the feedback that I get from the community—that that process is there and available.

Last week I was also excited to deliver a new dragon boat facility at Grevillea Park, a new and completed facility, Mr Milligan—just one of the things that the ACT government has delivered. We have also included upgrades to all five district netball facilities, as well as the new pavilion at Phillip District Oval—completed infrastructure work. Right now, we are also upgrading Phillip District Enclosed Oval, the sports field. There is the new Gungahlin District Tennis Centre. We are expanding the Belconnen Basketball Stadium, which is obviously something that the basketball community has been calling for some time. And, coming up, there will be more district playing fields at Stromlo, Throsby and Taylor, and, of course, there is the Tuggeranong ice sports facility. Planning has started on a new sports facility at Casey. It was not a sports facility that was promised in 2012. I think it was a CRIP, Community Recreation Irrigation Park, back in the day. But, talking with the sports community and others, a new indoors facility is the need out there. So that is the commitment for a multi-sport facility in Gungahlin.

In addition to all of these big projects, every year the government replaces and renews aging infrastructure, such as pavilions, irrigation systems, toilets and lighting to maintain safety and functionality of durability. Sometimes sports communities do not see some of this work, because it is invisible work but necessary to ensure that our sports fields and other facilities operate smoothly.

Last term I also released the Sport and Rec Facilities Roadmap of Infrastructure Projects, delivered from 2020 to 2024. We have a robust understanding of the individual needs of each sport through the 2023 survey of all recognised ACT peak sport and recreation bodies—although I would say, talking with sports groups now, even after a couple of years of that survey being conducted, sport aspirations and goals for their own sports have changed. So we will go back and revisit that through our regular conversations with the sports clubs.

Through that process, the government received 267 proposals. They are all published

online on the Proposal Register, which informs the ACT government's consideration of priorities in the short to medium term. The government has been working on an updated roadmap, similar to the previous years' ones, which will have a forward plan to 2028, and which I look forward to releasing in the coming weeks. All of this work is directly informed by community consultation, sector advocacy and identified need.

Before I finish, I would like to thank all of the fierce advocates and leaders in the sports community in the ACT. I love that we have a sports culture in Canberra that is ambitious, competitive and has high expectations—and I try to meet those high expectations as much as I possibly can. That culture drives the high participation levels that we see in our communities, and I think we should all be proud of that.

In this place, I know that we might all go about it in different ways, but I appreciate that there is a shared intent to support our sports community—so I will take that for what it is—all the way from grassroots community sport to the highest elite levels.

I am absolutely committed to ensuring that our sports have all of the facilities that they need. I am always keen to work with them and meet with them to meet their needs and aspirations in the short, medium and long term. I look forward to reporting back to the Assembly on the work that will be carried out through the amendment to Mr Milligan's motion. But I would just express again that there is quite a bit happening in the sports space and we might need to work on a way to bring this together so that it is more consumable for the community sports organisations and for ourselves, I would suggest. I look forward to working with everybody on all of that process, going forward.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (5.01): Thank you Mr Milligan for bringing this motion, and Ms Carrick for your amendments. I rise to contribute to this important discussion about sporting facilities here in the ACT, using this opportunity to highlight the importance of sport to the Canberra community, particularly Tuggeranong.

We are lucky down south to have a thriving sporting community and opportunities for all—young and old; those who excel in the sporting field; those who enjoy it; and others like me who are at times a bit too uncoordinated so stay on the sidelines and cheer others on. I grew up on the sidelines of many soccer fields and sometimes cricket pitches, dragged along to support my brother, who was, and still is, a keen footballer. He was president of the local soccer club for a while and is still mates with many of the boys he played soccer with growing up, even though they are now all pushing their 30s. I have seen how sport brings people together, not just teammates but families, friends and entire suburbs, rallying together and encouraging a shared sense of pride and belonging. And as a parent, I am looking forward to being more involved in these communities into the future.

A member of my staff who grew up in Tuggeranong and was a proud member of the Brindabella Blues Football Club for over a decade agrees with this sentiment. Upon seeing this motion, he reflected on the chilly mornings at Calwell Playing Fields, which I am personally not looking that forward to, the energy from supporters and the friendly rivalry with Tuggeranong United, which always added an extra layer of excitement. Each game felt significant and full of community spirit, even just for kids playing soccer on the weekend.

There is truly nothing quite like sport to unite a community. It has a unique ability to bring people together, to foster connections and strengthen bonds. You only have to turn on the TV or look online and see sport being played all over the country, from grassroots kids participation, all the way through to elite sport—cricket, tennis, soccer, NRL, AFL—and see the role of elite sport in encouraging grassroots participation, particularly a few years ago with the Matildas and the rise now in soccer, not just for boys but girls as well. That role of elite sport encouraging kids into sport is so wonderful to watch, even for someone who is as uncoordinated as me, who just likes to stay on the sidelines.

So with that in mind, I was excited when it was announced in last year's budget that \$15 million was being invested over four years in upgrading suburban infrastructure in Tuggeranong, including improvements to some of our sporting facilities that allow participatory sports to flourish within our community. It was announced the Lakeside Leisure Centre in Greenway will be upgraded to expand community use, supporting school groups, families and sporting clubs. Lakeside Leisure Centre has undergone refurbishment to improve accessibility features, enhance privacy and upgrade lighting and baby-changing facilities. These upgrades are designed to be flexible and inclusive while meeting current accessibility and health standards. We have committed to upgrades at Active Leisure Centre this term, despite what some might think.

Additionally, other facilities across Tuggeranong are being upgraded to enhance community and player participation. This includes upgrades at Gordon Oval. Right now, construction is underway for the new LED sportsground floodlighting for the rectangular field. Our plan for Tuggeranong further commits to a new portable grandstand at Gordon Oval so that friends and family can comfortably cheer on our teams, making every game more accessible and enjoyable for the whole community.

Our plan for Tuggeranong committed to upgraded cricket nets at Gowrie Oval and we are delivering this. Planning and design are already underway on this work. I want to acknowledge the role of my colleague Mr Werner-Gibbins and his advocacy on this particular project in 2024 and what it means for a lot of his family and friends in the cricket world around Gowrie and Fadden.

But we know, Mr Speaker, that once kids hit their teens, fewer girls remain in sport and very few ever pick up sport again. I myself dropped out of swimming at age 12, tried to pick it up again at 15 and subsequently dropped out again. I do not want to speak negatively of the council-owned facilities that I grew up swimming at, but they leave a lot to be desired compared to the facilities here in Canberra, which although they get negative attention, trust me, are quite good compared to what I grew up with.

Just yesterday, I attended a panel at Parliament House hosted by Endometriosis Australia that included elite athletes talking about women's sport and how we keep girls and women in sport, particularly when their health might be getting in the way, as well as what supports and education can be provided in sport. I think that is a space we can explore further in the future.

But one thing we can do, and that the government is doing, is ensuring there are female-friendly changerooms at our sporting facilities to ensure a comfortable and inclusive space. Women here in the ACT are the most physically active in the country,

and we support this through making sure the infrastructure supports women. It is not just for players. Our infrastructure upgrades ensure female-friendly changeroom facilities for umpires and other officials are there as well to encourage women to stay engaged as officials. I think that is something that the inquiry has been looking at as well or is hoping to look into.

In Tuggeranong, we have committed to female-friendly changerooms at Calwell, Wanniasa and Chisholm, with the federal government, in conjunction with Tuggeranong Valley Cricket Club and Cricket ACT, taking the lead on the female-friendly changerooms at Chisholm. This encourages the further participation of women and girls in cricket, a growing sport for women. It is wonderful that we can encourage that here in Tuggeranong.

Looking through some of our other regional plans, sporting facilities are a key feature in them as well, reflecting the different needs of each different district depending on what is happening in that district.

Going back to the substance of the motion, while out and about in Brindabella, I regularly meet with people who need more space for their sport or improvements to their existing sporting facilities. From basketball to pickleball, there are so many sports expanding and growing across our community, which is something that should be welcomed and celebrated but supported to happen. Working with local sports to know what they need is really important. It is really important to know where those gaps are and where we can do more. I appreciate the work Minister Berry is doing to engage with so many different sports across the ACT because there are so many different diverse sports that need different facilities doing different things. I acknowledge the work of others identifying some of the gaps in sporting infrastructure as well. It sounds like the minister does a lot of work engaging with many different sports, and I appreciate we have a minister for sport who is so interested in sport herself and out and about participating.

So thank you, Mr Milligan, for bringing the motion and thank you, Ms Carrick, for the amendments, as well. I just want to echo what Minister Berry has said about what is going on in this space. We have the Assembly committee, we have the Auditor-General, there is other processes as well and there is a risk of duplicating work. The timeframe is also something that needs to be looked at. But I think it is important that going forward we see what sports facilities are here, where it can be improved in the future and recognise everyone can engage in sport if they want to, and sports can grow.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (5.09): I am going to start today by apologising to my office because they have prepared a whole lot of really good speaking notes and I am not going to use them. It has been a fairly wide-ranging conversation today. There are some really important things that I want to touch on. Chief among them is the idea of evidence-based policy. In the Canberra Liberals, we are pretty strongly committed to the idea.

I have to call out Mr Milligan because he has spent many years advocating for exactly what we are debating today. He brought a proposal for this sort of audit to the election in 2020, on the back of consultation across sporting organisations at that time. Mr Milligan has been nothing if not consistent and diligent and has absolutely

continued to beat the drum on this. The plan that he brought in 2020 was exactly the sort of 10-year plan that others are talking about needing today. If the ACT had adopted the approach that Mr Milligan brought forward way back then—a strategic approach that is based on evidence and incorporates this sort of groundwork and data—we would not be in the place that we are in now. We would not be in a situation where, as Miss Nuttall was pointing out, we have organisations that feel that grant processes are being decided on the back of political decisions, rather than on the back of what people genuinely need in our community.

There are genuine needs in our community, and those needs are different in different parts of the ACT. In my electorate, if you go to Woden, the big concern is that many people feel that they have been missing out for too long. We have been watching our sporting facilities decay and disappear. Ms Carrick has touched on that already. There are places like the basketball stadium, and facilities like the one we have been talking about on and on: the Phillip pool. Here in the Canberra Liberals—and I will give the Greens credit; they brought forward similar proposals—we have been speaking for a long time about the need to address those gaps, but it has to be part of a strategic approach, and that is what this does. It lays the groundwork for a genuine, connected and strategic approach, going into the future.

I know that Mr Milligan's hard work has continued into the past 24 hours. I have to commend him for the open approach that he has brought to this. It speaks miles about the sort of approach he and all of us try to bring to this place, in that it was genuine, collegiate and collaborative work. I have to thank Ms Carrick for her open approach as well, and indeed for her willingness to move this amendment rather than having to work through the technical challenges of Mr Milligan trying to amend his own motion. That sort of collaboration is how we are going to start to overcome some of the problems of the inertia of the approach we have seen for far too long.

I was speaking about the geographic differences in need. When you look at a different area like the Molonglo Valley and the trajectory we have seen in that area, it is a different story. We are not seeing established facilities that are necessarily going backwards; we are seeing promised facilities undelivered. They are either undelivered or they are moving locations or changing scope. The community does not know what it is going to get or when it is going to get it. This sort of audit approach, a genuine evidence-based approach, sets the groundwork so that the community knows what to expect and when.

I think it is important to touch on one of Mr Emerson's comments, too. Mr Emerson seemed unsure why this should be an independent approach. Why not get the government to do it internally? That is a fair question. The government should be able to do this work itself, but it has not. We have heard concerns—I know the minister does not think these are genuine concerns, but we hear them—about political decision-making. This needs to be independent. It is right for this part of the process to be independent—to get the data and use an established approach now so that the strategic development can happen based on that evidence. Everyone in this place will be able to work from the same starting point. Everyone in the community will be able to see the same starting point, and that is highly valuable.

It is important, too, to note that we need this starting point before some of the changes

come. People in the inner south are concerned about the impact that the tram is going to have on sporting facilities. Are we going to lose playing fields around Deakin? If we are, where do we find land to replace them? It is really important that we take a strategic, evidence-based approach going forward, and that is exactly what we are doing today, and we are doing it in a collegiate and collaborative way.

The minister needs to understand that there are a couple of things that she is getting wrong. The minister wanted to point out the Auditor-General's work. I think it is important to understand that what the Auditor-General does is not the type of audit that this is talking about. The Auditor-General looks at the processes of government and the Auditor-General, he or she at the time, considers how things are done—not where each specific piece of infrastructure is but the approach the government is taking to things. This does not overlap with that sort of work. This is a very different type of work.

The minister also pointed out that there are all sorts of other strategies under development. This work will give the minister the information she needs to make sure all of those strategies are working together in a cohesive way so that everything comes together strategically—not one strategy for this area and another plan for that area. The ad hoc development of sporting infrastructure is the problem. You cannot just make it up as you go, because, when you do, you end up with people not knowing why they missed out on a grant, and then it apparently sounds like the minister has the directorate helping the organisations to maybe get a grant the next year. Everyone will know where they stand.

This is a really good example of consistent work over a long period of time by the Canberra Liberals. Now that we are in a different situation in this chamber, we can start to progress really important evidence-based policy. That is the way things should work and that is what Mr Milligan has delivered today.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (5.17): I want to start by thanking a lot of people here who have contributed to this motion. Ms Berry, the minister, contributed, as did Ms Tough and Miss Nuttall. I thank Ms Carrick for the hard work that she has done in working with my office and also with the government to come to an arrangement where we are all happy with the “calls-ons” and what we are trying to achieve with this motion. It seems that it will get unanimous support. How good is that for the community! I also thank Mr Cocks. Mr Cocks raised a couple of really good points and was very complimentary too. I have to say it was the best speech I have heard in this chamber! I think that even Ms Berry was impressed with it. Mr Steel came down to hear it. That is how great it was. Mr Cocks mentioned that this audit provides the starting point for anyone, because it will be honest, it will be transparent and it will give anyone the foundation that they need to develop a strategy, going forward. It will certainly help this government develop a strategy for sport and rec in the community, but will also help us to do the same.

Obviously, I understand that we are in a budgetary crisis at the moment, and sport and rec costs a lot of money. Having this audit, though, will set the priorities for this government. Whether it is a five-, 10-, 15- or 20-year plan, it comes with the budgetary process—right? How much can you invest in sport and rec? We realise that you have to be realistic in terms of how much money you can put into those areas.

Ms Berry mentioned that there are a couple of other inquiries happening. We have the standing committee inquiry that is happening and also the Auditor-General one. I took that into consideration when drafting this motion to ensure that this was complementary to those two inquiries. I would encourage Ms Berry, the minister, to come to us—my office is open—and say, “Hey, do you want to work on this audit? Do you want to work on these terms of reference together to ensure that we are getting a good outcome?” By all means, come in and let’s work together on it, because I think it is going to benefit the community and the sporting community across the ACT.

Ms Berry: Back at you, Mr Milligan. My office is open as well.

MR MILLIGAN: Excellent. Do you have snacks? I will come for sure. I would like to note a couple of changes to the “calls-ons”, from both Miss Nuttall and Ms Carrick. They strengthened the “calls-ons” and added the additional support needed to achieve what we want to achieve, and that is assess future demand; do an analysis on community demand; engage with the community, stakeholders and participants—which I think is really good; review trends and demographic data—I think is very important; also review the condition, capacity and suitability of all our facilities is really important; and include clear criteria for selecting sites for new facilities. I think all those additions to the “calls-ons” have really strengthened it. I thank them both. I am sure the minister’s office also contributed to what came out in the final “calls-ons”.

At the end of the day, I think it is good for Canberrans. I think it is good for the Canberra community. It will improve access, it will improve investment and it will improve our infrastructure. It will also give confidence to our sporting community, particularly our clubs and associations, that there is a plan for the future, that there is a plan for investment, and it will help them plan their competitions and events, going forward. On the other hand, it would also help them to gather support, donors and sponsors for their club or association, because they would be able to go back to them and say, “Hey, the ACT government goes give a * about sport and rec here in the territory and they are investing in sport and rec.” I think they will also find it easier to help gain support for their club or association.

I will finish now. Once again, I thank everyone for the contributions that they have made today. It is a really great outcome. Like I said, let’s work on the terms of reference together and get a good outcome.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Building and Construction Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (No 2)

Debate resumed from 23 October 2025, on motion by **Mr Steel**:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

MRS MORRIS (Brindabella) (5.23): The Canberra Liberals will be supporting the Building and Construction Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 (No 2). This bill contains

a range of minor and technical amendments across the building and construction regulatory framework. Many of the changes seem to be sensible housekeeping: updating drafting and terminology, modernising references across the statute book, correcting typographical errors, improving definitions and notes, and removing redundant provisions that no longer reflect current drafting practice. The bill also includes new practical measures to support safety and compliance, including clearer as-built documentation requirements and pool safety reforms.

While this is a straightforward bill for the Assembly to consider, I do not underestimate the work required to produce it. Bills like this represent careful effort by officials and the Parliamentary Counsel's Office. With those changes made, we are satisfied that the bill improves clarity and administration, hopefully without creating unintended consequences. The Canberra Liberals will support the bill and I thank the minister for bringing it forward.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.25): The Greens are really pleased to support this bill, with some minor amendments that have been agreed with the minister. As Mrs Morris noted, the bill includes minor and technical amendments to enhance the administration, efficiency and enforcement of the existing building regulatory system. It makes amendments to a broad range of legislation that manages the construction industry, such as the Building Act, the Gas Safety Act and the Professional Engineers Act.

The legislation also opposes a number of amendments to the Property Developers Act 2024. In part, the Property Developers Act is seeking to improve the transparency and accountability measures of the building and construction industry. One of the things that this bill does is address the inherent power and knowledge imbalance that there is between a home buyer and a property developer. It ensures that a developer provides more information about their past activities so that intended purchasers can understand what developments the developer has been involved in and what kind of developer they are. We were a little concerned that some of the provisions would wind back this transparency.

The property developers legislation was a fairly significant body of work. It was very consumer focused. We were a little concerned. I had a really good briefing with the directorate on this. I thank the minister for arranging that. We heard about some operational issues that they had identified with two clauses: clause 57 and clause 58. We had a really good workshop about how the directorate might be able to meet those clauses operationally without winding down consumer protection. I think that today we actually have a really great outcome.

We are very pleased that government is looking at ways to improve the delivery of dwellings and make sure that they are doing that without undermining any of the consumer protections that we have embedded in the property developer system that we have. It is important in a housing crisis that we are looking at every feasible way to get people into homes quicker, but we need to make sure, when we are doing that, the homes are built with quality; there is excellent consumer protection; people have the best knowledge they can have to make sure they know what they are buying; and we make sure that Canberra's system of construction is meeting the standards that Canberrans expect. With those amendments—those clauses not being passed—we are very pleased to support this bill proceeding.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (5.27), in reply: This bill makes minor and technical amendments to various pieces of legislation within our building and construction regulatory framework, including the Building Act, the Construction Occupations (Licensing) Act, and the Gas Safety Act, as well as the Professional Engineers Act and the Property Developers Act. The main goal of these amendments is to ensure our building and construction system is fit for purpose and proactively addresses quality and safety by clarifying and modernising existing legislation related to building, construction and engineering professions to ensure our laws remain current, consistent and aligned.

Key improvements include better clarity around licensing requirements, obligations and regulatory processes; ensuring plans provided to the Construction Occupations Registrar for certification accurately reflect works as built; and strengthening the legal framework by linking related acts.

Clause 2(4) has been amended since the bill was presented on 23 October 2025. As section 25 of the Property Developers Act 2024 commenced following the introduction of the bill, the drafting no longer aligns with the intended timing. When originally drafted, it was intended that clauses 3 and 56 to 59 would commence in concert with the commencement of section 25 of the Property Developers Act. The amendment substitute that will be debated in the detail stage substitutes clause 2(4) to provide that clauses 3 and 56 to 59 commence on the day after notification of this amendment act. This is a minor technical change to ensure timely commencement and consistency with legislative intent.

To further support the opening of the Property Developer Licensing Scheme for applications from 1 October 2025, with mandatory licensing required from 1 October 2026, the bill introduces provisions relating to the publication of director identification numbers in the public register, to align with commonwealth practice and amendments to strengthen the regulator's ability to consider community housing providers' performance.

I thank members for their engagement ahead of this debate to ensure that the Property Developer Licensing Scheme supports effective public oversight, and their support for clauses 57 and 58 of this bill not being progressed today. The effect of these clauses was to remove requirements for the registrar to publish on the public register the details of relevant regulatory action taken against a licensed property developer or details of their past and residential development activities. These clauses sought to minimise the duplication and operational complexities of publishing this information, noting that it is already considered through the licensee obtaining a ratings report, as required under the act. In the case of regulatory action under relevant legislation, it may be published elsewhere.

However, I acknowledge these clauses as presented may not achieve the best outcomes in terms of the perception of public visibility. That was not the intention. Further work is required to ensure that we achieve the appropriate balance between operational efficiency and the objectives of the act as we see the continued transition to the new scheme.

In summary, these amendments support the broader housing and construction productivity agenda by reducing regulatory burden, eliminating duplication and fostering clearer processes. Ultimately, they will bolster regulatory oversight and promote better building practices and will deliver a robust, streamlined building and construction system to the benefit of all Canberrans. I commend the bill to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Detail stage

Clause 1 agreed to.

Clause 2.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (5.32): Pursuant to standing order 182A(c), I seek leave to move an amendment to this clause, which is in response to comments by the scrutiny committee, and that has not been circulated in accordance with standing order 178A.

Leave granted.

MR STEEL: I move amendment No 1 circulated in my name [*see schedule 1 at page 238*] and table a supplementary explanatory statement to the amendment.

Amendment agreed to.

Clause 2, as amended, agreed to.

Clauses 3 to 56, by leave, taken together and agreed to.

Clause 57.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (5.33): I will be opposing this clause, as will the government, as per the reasons stated in my closing speech in the in-principle stage.

Clause 57 negatived.

Clause 58.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (5.33): Same reasons.

Clause 58 negatived.

Remainder of bill, by leave, taken as a whole and agreed to.

Bill, as amended, agreed to.

Statements by members

Cockington Green Gardens

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (5.34): Late last year, just prior to Christmas, I had the great pleasure of being part of the official launch of a brand-new locomotive at Cockington Green Gardens. I joined a dedicated group of train enthusiasts to launch Douglas William, a beautiful replica of the classic John Fowler Bunyip design steam locomotives.

Douglas William is named after Doug Sarah, who, with his wife Brenda Sarah, founded Cockington Green Gardens in 1972—before I was born, Mr Speaker, which is a long time ago. Mark Sarah and the team at Cockington Green commissioned the new train in 2023, and it made its official debut in early December.

It was a great day. There were some very enthusiastic patrons who enjoyed their inaugural rides. A shout-out to Massi, the train driver, who took us all on a few circuits of the track. Douglas William joins Mighty Mike to double the Cockington Green miniature fleet. The project is a wonderful boost to the visitor experience at one of Canberra's most famous and awarded tourist attractions. The ACT government was very pleased to support the initiative through our Tourism Product Development Fund.

Transport—Fantastic Bus Trips of Canberra

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (5.36): I would like to recognise the aptly named Fantastic Bus Trips of Canberra, an initiative put in place by the Public Transport Association of Canberra, PTCBR. PTCBR introduced Fantastic Bus Trips to help demystify public transport and encourage passengers to try out, and build confidence in, travelling by bus in a friendly setting. It is a great example of what local Canberrans are doing to support access and connectivity within our community.

PTCBR member Victoria Wells leads these curated trips, built around the Transport Canberra bus network, whilst talking all things public transport along the way—how to buy a ticket, how to use the new MyWay+ payment options and app, and tips on how to plan a great travel route. Information on these trips is published through PTCBR's channels in advance, with details on where to meet, the travel routes and stops along the way, which will often feature a chance to have coffee or lunch. Their December Fantastic Bus Trip, for example, included a chance to get in some Christmas shopping at Gold Creek. The trips go to a variety of destinations across the ACT, like Gold Creek, Mawson, Lanyon Marketplace and Gungahlin, taking people along roads they may never otherwise have travelled.

I would like to thank PTCBR and Ms Wells for volunteering to introduce people to the pluses of buses and helping them feel undeterred about choosing public transport as a

sustainable option for them to travel around the city.

Iran—human rights

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.37): I rise to speak about a very serious matter, in support of the people of Iran, a nation with a rich and ancient culture, a proud history, and a legacy of remarkable warriors and thinkers who have helped, in a significant way, with the shaping of the modern world. From the grandeur of Persepolis to the wisdom of poets like Hafez and Rumi, Iran has contributed immensely to art, science, philosophy and the enduring spirit of humanity.

Despite this extraordinary heritage, the people of Iran today face oppression and injustice. They are calling for the most basic rights, which we here take for granted—freedom of speech, freedom of conscience and the ability to choose their leaders through free and fair elections under democratic law. These rights are appreciated; they are universal. We have them here and we should not take them for granted.

I want to express my support for the women, the youth and the men who are raising their voices at great risk, as we are seeing reported—risk to their lives, risk to family members, risk to friends—who are calling for free and open government, free and democratic elections and the freedom to be themselves. For me, supporting the people of Iran is not a matter of politics; it is a matter of principle.

Environment—Ginninderra Falls

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.39): I want to speak briefly to the Ginninderra Falls petition. The government response was lodged this morning. We had 722 people who signed up to that petition, so there are a lot of people who are really keen to see public access to the Ginninderra Falls again, to put the management of the Ginninderra Falls back into First Nations hands and make sure that there is proper cultural management of the sites out there, and to make sure that we have really good ecological protection.

The government response is useful. We have seen that government did not put in a bid to the recent sales process, but the government has given us some information publicly that Riverview Ginninderry has put in a bid. I might have a chat to them about how that is going. We do not have any clear paths here, and I understand that this cross-border work is very difficult. I know that a lot of people have asked me—and I am certain that even more people have asked the government members here—about the impacts of Yass Valley Council’s recent conversations about border shifts. I know that this work is really tricky. We are keen to continue to work with government and any commercial players in this field to make sure that we get a really great outcome for Ginninderra Falls.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

Motion (by **Ms Cheyne**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

Multicultural affairs—Hazara community

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.41): Late last year, it was my pleasure to meet with members of Canberra's Hazara community. For anyone who does not know, the Hazara people are one of the largest ethnic groups in Afghanistan, and there are sizable Hazara communities in Pakistan and Iran as well. Marginalised and often persecuted in their countries of origin, Hazara people have resettled in Australia and are committed to making a positive contribution to their new home, while also advocating on behalf of those who remain in Afghanistan.

When I met Bashir last year, he spoke about his extensive advocacy to the federal government regarding the ongoing human rights abuses faced by women and minority groups in Afghanistan. That advocacy helped to culminate in the Senate passing a motion recognising the gender apartheid and persecution of minority groups in Afghanistan. I thank Bashir for his commitment and continued effort in this cause.

I have also heard about several concerns that the Hazara community here in Canberra have, and I hope we can address them in a meaningful way. For the Hazara community, as well as for other small multicultural groups in the ACT, renting a place to hold events can be prohibitive in terms of cost. Indoor spaces at EPIC, for example, cost several thousand dollars a day. Their community activities are largely self-funded at the moment, and they have had low success in applying for grant funding, despite being an incorporated organisation that is part of a larger national federation. They have applied unsuccessfully for six grants, and I am yet to understand why.

Unfortunately, I am hearing very similar concerns from many multicultural community organisations. It is becoming increasingly clear that there is simply not enough funding available in this space. It is unacceptable that multicultural organisations are being forced to compete against one another for limited resources. Each plays a vital role in its community, providing essential services and connection, and funding arrangements should reflect the importance of that work.

As the Greens spokesperson for multicultural affairs, I do not like to see different groups being pitted against each other when we already face an environment in which certain bad actors seek to promote hate or widen the distance between people from different backgrounds.

I will continue to meet with representatives of our city's diverse communities in the belief that listening to and helping each group will help all of us to live better together.

Planning and development—Hawker Tennis Centre site

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.43): I want to go over the history of a very sorry sight in the Belconnen area—that is, the site of the former Hawker Tennis Centre. I want to step through a little bit of the history, some of the current concerns and, frankly, some of the current inaction of this ACT government.

As members would be aware, the site was opened in 1977 and, from the 90s to the

2000s, there were 12 outdoor tennis courts; 300 to 400 students per week were at the site learning tennis and enjoying outdoor activities. Unfortunately, from around 15 years or so ago, the operations of tennis ceased. The site was, unfortunately, left unused and it progressively deteriorated. It was picked up by private developers in 2015. Their proposal for a residential development was rejected by the then government. A subsequent DA for a childcare centre was approved, but that expired. Since then, we have seen this site degenerate into a very ugly eyesore in the region of Belconnen, in Hawker.

I want to step through some of the responses from government over the past couple of years and, of course, very recently. I note that back in April 2024, when the DA for the childcare centre was open—it could have happened, but it did not—there was an answer from the then planning minister, Minister Steel—the current planning minister—on 8 May 2024, to a question from the Canberra Liberals’ Mrs Kikkert. If the DA does not get actuated—this was for a childcare centre in 2024—and I quote:

Should the inspectors identify that the status of the block is a Controlled Activity under Item 2 of ... the Planning Act 2023 the lessee would be advised that they are required to take measures to clean, secure and maintain the block to an acceptable standard.

Should the lessee fail to comply with this request a show cause notice may be issued and a subsequent Controlled Activity Order may be issued. Failure to comply with a Controlled Activity Order is an offence pursuant to Section 361 of the Act and may result in a penalty being imposed.

That is what the then planning minister, the current planning minister, said on 8 May 2024. Guess what, Mr Speaker? There was no response to the lessee when it failed to develop the land for an approved childcare centre, and that DA expired. For the information of members, that was question on notice No 41 from the previous term.

In September this year I received a response from the planning minister—the same individual, Mr Steel. I want to note a couple of things from that response which go to the history of the matter. The DA had expired; they were well aware of that a year earlier, yet the site continued to degrade. I will get to some of the detail on that in a moment. My question on notice was No 9.

In question on notice No 14 from Ms Clay, an update was sought. The minister—again, Minister Steel—advised that “the site was inspected in early December last year, and there was no evidence that the block constituted an unclean leasehold”. I will dwell on that phrase: it did not constitute “an unclean leasehold”. The member was assured that “the lessee is in the process of bringing the block back into compliance and is seeking a new operator to take over the proposal and explore viable options for development”. That was on 19 January.

I want to applaud Neighbourhood Watch Weetangera-Hawker for pointing out the obvious neglect and dangers of that site.

Planning and development—Richardson shops

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (5.48): I wish to use this opportunity to provide an update

on progress at the Richardson shops site. During the last sitting week of 2025, Minister Steel provided an update to the Assembly on the status of Richardson shops. We learned that the lessee of the shops was in discussion with multiple areas within the ACT government about future uses of the site, and there are issues with releasing the unleased land adjacent to the shops due to the lack of road access.

Since then, there has been movement, which has been quite visible to the residents of Richardson who pass the derelict shops daily. On 21 January I began receiving correspondence from residents inquiring about temporary fencing that had been set up around the shops and adjoining car park. The next day I went down to the shops to see for myself and confirm the rumours were true. There is a large fence. It does make it harder to get to the playground now.

That afternoon I wrote to the lessee and Minister Steel seeking clarification on who had the fencing installed and its intended purpose. In a letter I received from Minister Steel last week, I was advised that the temporary fencing was installed on behalf of the lessee around the shops on 21 January due to ongoing vandalism and to allow future works to occur. In an interesting development, the minister informed me that the lessee is intending to finalise two tenancy agreements over the coming months and says that the fencing is also expected to facilitate this. We learned last week that Access Canberra are undertaking regulatory action, issuing a show cause notice to the lessee and receiving a response, which it is considering. I look forward to hearing the outcome of this in due course as processes take place.

The revitalisation of Richardson shops is an issue of great importance to me and many members of the Tuggeranong community. The petition I led in 2024, signed by hundreds of residents of Richardson and surrounding suburbs, is a testament to local demand for a vibrant community hub: a cafe or a restaurant to gather and socialise with neighbours, a supermarket for everyday needs without travelling to Calwell or Chisholm, a space that supports small business, and somewhere parents can go when their kids are at the adjoining playground. When I lived in Calwell, it was a really great place to just duck in on the way home from work, rather than trying to navigate big shopping centres.

Last week's update gives us hope that real progress is happening towards the vision for Richardson shops that we have long hoped for. I am personally cautiously optimistic that things are happening.

I want to thank Minister Steel and his office for their ongoing work with me towards the revitalisation of Richardson shops. I acknowledge Miss Nuttall for her advocacy, as well, and my colleague Mr Werner-Gibbins for his continued support for me as I am out there in Richardson.

I welcome the news that the lessee is in discussions with potential tenants and with government, and I will maintain my optimism for the future of Richardson shops and that things will start to happen in the coming months. But I will still maintain the rage that things have sat derelict for so long and that it has been so long without shops in Richardson.

Richardson Community Centre and Richardson Child Care and Education

Centre

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS (Brindabella) (5.52): Many Tuggeranong residents have been thinking seriously about Richardson this summer. An outstanding piece of anecdotal data supporting this hypothesis is the fact that my recent post about what is happening with Richardson shops, as has just been described by my colleague Ms Tough, has been viewed 65,000 times. This number has smashed past the previous low-record bar I had set by a post I threw together in two minutes about putt-putt golf on South Point's roof.

Richardson residents are really invested in the future of Richardson shops. Many are also concerned about Communities at Work's organisational decision to close the Richardson Child Care and Education Centre on 27 February 2026. This closure is because Communities at Work, as I understand they informed Minister Berry in December, cannot maintain the level of subsidisation the centre requires, despite the ACT government's previous provision of a peppercorn lease.

I have received a lot of correspondence about the centre's closure, of which the following is perhaps the loveliest example:

I am a deeply concerned parent whose children attended the Richardson Child Care and Education Centre. This centre has been a cornerstone in supporting families in our community and gave my children an outstanding foundation for their education journey. The educators were nothing short of phenomenal, nurturing, professional, and truly invested in each child's development. Their care helped shape my children's early learning and gave our family peace of mind, knowing that they were in such capable hands.

The proposed closure of this centre will not only remove an essential support for families with young children but also disrupt community connections that have been built over many years. Early childhood education has lifelong impacts on children's wellbeing, social skills and school readiness. And losing this trusted centre would be a significant blow to parents and children alike.

I respectfully urge you to advocate for keeping Richardson Child Care and Education Centre open for the families who depend on it, engaging with Communities at Work and families to explore alternatives to closure, ensuring stability and continuity in early childhood education in our community.

Mr Speaker, I have taken my constituent's advice, and I am working closely on this with my colleague Ms Tough. I started by passing on Richardson parents' positive support for the centre to Minister Berry.

We understand that all children and families will be offered enrolments at other Communities at Work services, while educators working at the centre are being supported to transfer to other Communities at Work services.

The centre has a close relationship with the nearby Richardson Primary School and offers before and after-school care for the Richardson Primary School Preschool and Koori Preschool. The Education Directorate will work with Richardson Primary School to offer information and support. One of these supporting options is another not-for-profit provider, the YWCA, which provides a 33 place before and after-school care

service for preschool to year 6 at Richardson Primary School.

I was and remain extremely impressed and affected by the support Richardson parents are expressing for the centre.

Economy—interest rates

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (5.55): Federal Labor's failure to get a grip on housing supply and food prices, and failure to address inequities in the tax system, has led the Reserve Bank to make the decision to increase interest rates. This runs counter to decisions being made across the world, where many major economies have already cut further and faster, and are projected to continue doing so over the course of 2026.

For people on variable mortgages, or those trying to get a fixed rate mortgage, this means significant additional cost. Someone living in a medium value home—which in Canberra is now worth north of around \$1 million—with \$200,000 in equity and an \$800,000 mortgage, will now be \$2,000 a year worse off. Renters taking out new leases may also find themselves facing higher costs as a result of this, further boosting the inflation that this rate rise is meant to counter.

In December, year on year inflation in Australia of 3.8 per cent was higher than all G20 countries, bar Russia and Brazil. Why was this? They may tell you this is all about global supply chain pressures, but so much of this inflation is homegrown and founded in inaction by the federal Labor Government.

Firstly to housing, we know supply has not kept up with demand, with the cost of rent and construction a major contributor to inflation, and negative gearing and capital gains tax discounts turbo charging it. Those benefiting from negative gearing and then going out and spending the proceeds of stage 3 tax cuts are further fuelling inflation—a double whammy with a ricochet effect on inflation.

And let's not forget the information we revealed by ACTCOSS recently that \$12.3 billion is the amount the federal government gave property investors in tax breaks last year, more than they spent on social homes, homelessness services and rent support combined. Who suffers from all of this? It is young people and other working age people who are renting or looking to buy their first home, or who have bought and are now coping with a mortgage.

Contributing to higher mortgage costs are banks, which make a significant margin above the base rate. The very best rates in Australia sit at about five per cent for a two-year fixed rate mortgage, while they are 3.5 per cent in the UK. I give the UK as an example because its base rate is 3.75 per cent, very similar to Australia's new rate of 3.85 per cent, or 2.5 per cent in the eurozone, including in countries which are growing more stronger than Australia, like Spain or even Greece. While the reason for the higher rate in Australia may be complex, it is clear that the big four banks are making billions in profits while our consumers are paying much more than in other similar markets.

The ACT government is suffering from that same inflation, but some areas of expenditure are growing even faster. For the five-year period, from 2013-2018, the ACT government spent \$6.7 million on banking services. The current, just over four-

year, contract with Westpac is \$17 million, a 300 per cent annual increase. The Chief Minister has attributed that cost rise to increasingly complex and extensive banking services being required in the digital age; but, with the efficiencies being brought in this said “digital age”, I am not confident it justifies a threefold increase. Surely this must be ringing some alarm bells.

The federal Labor Government needs to take action to ensure that mortgage markets are competitive. It is a national shame and a crisis when Australian cities are significantly cited as having the least affordable housing markets globally.

We should also look at food and beverages. We all have to eat, and we all have to pay what the supermarkets say we have to pay. Do not tell me that Australia’s supermarket duopoly does not have a lot to do with this. How can we possibly have a competitive market for groceries without greater competition?

This is a moment that calls for choices. Households are being smashed by interest rate rises they did not cause. The federal government must make the hard structural reforms that ease inflation and repair budgets at the same time. This means action to more equitably tax those who are cashed up and spending, rather than leaning on mortgage holders who are already struggling to do their bit for the nation in the fight against inflation.

We need to hear the Chief Minister advocating loudly at national cabinet to fix our broken housing, rental and mortgage markets; picking up the cause of increasing competition and availability in the grocery market, both in the ACT and nationwide; and arguing for tax reform that is fairer across the generations.

The cost of policy failure must not continually be pushed onto younger and working age Australians and Canberrans. It is simply not fair. We are fighting inflation by targeting those who can least afford it.

Waste—waste to energy

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (6.00): Canberrans have a right to a healthy environment. Our community expects the ACT to be a world leader in waste management, including reducing waste and moving towards a circular economy.

The ACT Waste-to-Energy Policy 2020-2025 prohibits waste-to-energy projects—that is, the thermal treatment of waste, including incineration, gasification and pyrolysis. Waste-to-energy products create harmful by-products and pollutants, like heavy metals, toxic flue gas, bottom ash, furans and dioxins. They pose real risks to human health and to our natural environment.

The ACT has been working really hard to recover our resources so that we do not need to burn our waste. We have got a target to recover 90 per cent of our waste. We have not reached that target. For years I was frustrated because we plateaued at around 75 per cent resource recovery. Last year, disappointingly, we actually dropped, and we are now recovering only 75 per cent of the waste that we generate. We went backwards by a lot. That is not a great result, and means that we need to be working harder on our circular economy and recycling solutions. But pursuing waste-to-energy projects is not

the answer.

What we need are waste management strategies that reduce waste production and create life cycle solutions for the waste we generate. We need local recycling facilities that can process soft plastics and the packaging that people buy in the supermarkets.

We need our local government, and our state and federal governments, to be working with industry and requiring industry to design out waste and stop the problem at its source. A lot of us have been calling for mandatory product stewardship for decades now. The latest waste magazine that I got has now shifted, and the industry is calling for that mandatory regulation, too. It makes their lives easier if they are all playing by the same rules.

The ACT has done really well on energy generation, and we are powered by 100 per cent renewable electricity. We are phasing out our fossil fuel gas, and that phase-out is going well. It is moving quicker than we expected. So we simply do not need energy from waste. We certainly do not have a social licence for burning waste here in the ACT. As Jane Bremmer, Chair of Toxics Free Australia, said:

The ACT has been a leader and a beacon of light in safeguarding a sustainable zero waste policy for a true Circular Economy in Australia.

Burning our waste makes no sense when it is the most expensive and polluting way to make energy or manage what should be the smallest fraction of our waste stream—residual waste.

Here in the ACT we are doing well on energy. We have a lot of work to do on recycling in our circular economy, and we absolutely cannot afford to be taking backward steps.

I was delighted recently to hear that our legislative ban on waste-to-energy incinerators has been extended indefinitely; that is really great to hear from the ACT government. The ban was in a policy document that expired in 2025 and the code of practice refers to that 2025 document. The ACT government has confirmed that that is now a permanent and ongoing ban, and has made it clear that energy from waste, and waste incineration, has no part to play here in the ACT. It is really good to hear. It means we can focus on the next steps in implementing our circular economy, including tackling soft plastics, delivering city-wide FOGO faster and making sure that our recycling facilities are meeting expectations from our community.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.03 pm.

Schedule of amendments

Schedule 1

Building and Construction Legislation Amendment bill 2025 (No 2)

Amendment moved by the Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development

1

Clause 2 (4)

Page 2, line 14—

omit clause 2 (4), substitute

(4) Sections 3 and 56 to 59 commence on the day after this Act's notification day.

**Standing Order 118AA—answer to a question without notice
Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and
Young People**

Ms Orr (*in response to a supplementary question by Ms Barry on 4 February 2026*):

On 4 February 2026, the Speaker made a ruling under Standing Order 118AA regarding my answer to the following question from Ms Chiaka Barry MLA:

When were concerns about the commissioner raised with you, and what actions did you take?

Further to the answer I provided in Question Time, I confirm that concerns about the Commissioner were raised with me on 7 March 2025. I engaged with the Directorate immediately and took advice thereafter on appropriate steps to ensure the concerns were considered and addressed appropriately. This included engaging promptly and directly with both the community members who wrote the letter and the former Commissioner.

To maintain privacy and confidentiality of all involved, as is suitable for considerations of this nature, it would be inappropriate to provide further particulars or details on actions taken.