



DEBATES
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

DAILY HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

26 March 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 **Thursday, 16 April 2026**.

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Thursday, 26 March 2026

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

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

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

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

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

Petitions

The following petitions were lodged for presentation:

Firearms regulations—petition 2-26

By Mr Milligan, from 1,108 residents:

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

To the Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory We, the undersigned residents of the Australian Capital Territory, draw the attention of the Legislative Assembly to the following: That:

1. The regulation of firearms is a serious matter of public safety, requiring careful, evidence based and proportionate policymaking.
2. The ACT already operates under one of the most comprehensive firearms regulatory frameworks in Australia, including strict licensing, registration, storage, training and compliance requirements.
3. Several other jurisdictions have introduced rapid legislative changes that do not adequately consider the circumstances leading up to the recent terror attack, the unique environment of the ACT, or the need for proper consultation.
4. The ACT Government is currently undertaking a reform project for the ACT Firearms Registry and had commenced consultation on potential changes prior to the attack.
5. Responsible law making requires that any proposed reforms be informed by:
 - a. reliable evidence of actual issues or gaps;
 - b. operational experience from agencies responsible for administering the system;
 - c. expert advice from those directly affected; and
 - d. genuine consultation with impacted stakeholders.

6. Lawful firearms owners in the ACT include primary producers, pest controllers, sporting shooters, conservation workers, hunters, rural landholders, security organisations and government agencies, all of whom rely on firearms for legitimate and lawful purposes.
7. Effective public safety policy must focus on criminal misuse, trafficking and illegal possession of firearms, rather than imposing unnecessary regulatory burdens on licensed, compliant firearm owners.
8. Effective and fair regulation requires that licensed firearm owners are not subjected to measures that imply criminality or extremism, particularly when they have demonstrated ongoing compliance with stringent ACT requirements.

Therefore, we respect that the Assembly call on the ACT Government to:

1. Defer the introduction of any major firearms legislative reforms until the findings of the current Australian and Victorian Government investigations have been completed, released and properly assessed;
2. Commit to an evidence-based policy process, ensuring that any proposed changes are: a. justified by data; b. supported by expert analysis; and c. demonstrably linked to improved public safety outcomes;
3. Undertake genuine, fair and reasonable consultation with affected stakeholders, including: a. licensed firearm owners; b. firearms dealers and retailers; c. primary producers and land managers; d. pest control operators; e. sporting organisations; f. conservation bodies; g. government agencies and security organisations that hold licences; and h. rural landholders;
4. Ensure that any reform measures are proportionate, fair and targeted, with a clear focus on criminal misuse and illegal firearms rather than lawful, compliant ownership; and
5. Publish a Regulatory Impact Statement outlining the economic, social, operational and compliance impacts of any proposed reforms.

Pursuant to standing order 99A, the petition, having at least 500 signatories, was referred to the Standing Committee on Legal Affairs.

Belconnen—R2 and R3 buses—petition 83-25

By Ms Clay, from 1,685 residents:

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

The following residents of the ACT draw the attention of the Assembly that the ACT Government intends to cut R2 and R3 routes from West Belconnen, replacing these with local buses from February 2026. The proposed changes to the R2 and R3 will mean that these services terminate at the Belconnen interchange and disconnect the residents of West Belconnen from reliable and frequent public transport options.

Your petitioners, therefore, request the Assembly to call on the ACT Government to:

- Keep the R2 and R3 bus routes that vitally connect West Belconnen to the rest of Canberra.
- Explore all other options available to mitigate congestion, including the option of having the R4 travel along the parkway.
- Acknowledge the importance of a public transport network that is frequent and reliable, and that public transport is essential to minimising congestion on ACT roads.

Pursuant to standing order 99A, the petition, having at least 500 signatories, was referred to the Standing Committee on Transport and City Services.

The Clerk having announced that the terms of the petitions would be recorded in Hansard and referred to the appropriate ministers for response pursuant to standing order 100, the petitions were received.

Motion to take note of petitions

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

That the petitions so lodged be noted.

Firearms regulations—petition 2-26

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (10.02): I rise today to speak to the petition that I sponsored regarding firearms reform. I was contacted by members of the community who simply want the government to take the time to get it right, commit to evidence-based policy processes, undertake genuine consultation, and ensure that any reform is fair, targeted and effective.

Let me be clear at the outset: everyone in this chamber wants safer communities. We all want to prevent acts of violence and ensure that our constituents feel safe in their homes, their workplaces and in public areas. We must ask whether these proposed reforms will actually achieve their stated goals.

At the heart of my concern is a simple principle: law-abiding gun owners do not need to be punished for the actions of criminals. Firearm owners in the ACT are responsible, compliant and respectful of the law. They undergo background checks, they store their firearms correctly and they use their firearms for legitimate purposes, such as sports shooting and rural activities. These individuals are not the problem, yet this bill places additional burdens squarely on their shoulders.

I am hoping that we can all work together on solutions that address the root causes of violence without unfairly penalising those who are already abiding by the law and doing the right thing.

Belconnen—R2 and R3 buses—petition 83-25

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.03): Today I have been pleased to table Dani Hunterford's petition to keep the R2 and R3 bus routes for west Belconnen. This petition has 1,685 signatures online and more on paper. Over 1,700 people are calling

on the ACT government to restore these services.

This petition was started because in December last year, the government announced that in February they would cut our Belconnen rapid routes—the R2 and R3—from west Belconnen and north Belconnen. The government announced these cuts due to the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge works. The government had known these works were coming for several years. The government failed to acquire sufficient buses to accommodate the disruptions, other than by cutting Belconnen’s services.

Our frequent, reliable rapids are at the core of our public transport network. In Belco, we do not have light rail. We do not even know when we are getting it. From February, both of our rapids began terminating at the Belconnen interchange, cutting out Kippax, Fraser, Spence and many other suburbs. This region services one in 10 Canberrans.

At the time the government told the community that there would be effectively no change on the ground. The government said local network buses would be as frequent and reliable as the rapids they replaced, and the only difference was that people would have to change buses. That is not what our community experienced. The local buses were not as frequent. They did not run as early or as late. They did not run, like the rapids, outside peak hours or on weekends. They got too full and the government had to put on more local buses because more people were using our rapids than the government expected.

That last point relates to the poor quality of data due to the rollout of MyWay+, and we have had a lot of bus problems lately. Our only rapids in west and north Belco—the R2 and R3—are our core services. They are meant to be our fixed, reliable routes around which everyone can plan their days, their jobs, their studies, their appointments and their lives. A lot of people using these buses were particularly badly affected. Those who are mobility impaired find it harder to change buses. Those who are visually impaired learn their routes and timetables, and they find it hard to adjust. Older people, students, shiftworkers and many others found the February cuts to our rapid services really hard.

We are in a climate crisis, and the cost of fuel is rising. We need better public transport, not progressive decline. In February, one month ago, my colleague Andrew Braddock and I brought this matter to the Assembly. We noted Labor’s election commitments. I quote:

ACT Labor’s progressive and practical public transport plan will see more rapid services.

ACT Labor is committed to deliver additional rapid bus services ... a new rapid service to support growth in West Belconnen.

ACT Labor will increase services on the popular R2 rapid from Belconnen to the City to better meet demand.

We called on the government to restore the R2 in April, and the R2 and R3 in July. We worked with all parties and we negotiated. We reached agreement that the government would take “all steps possible, including network scheduling, bus fleet planning, bus leasing and bus acquisitions”. Those actions were intended to restore our Belconnen

rapids and make other improvements by the start of term 3 in July.

I have seen the statements tabled yesterday and I spoke then. I am pleased to see that the government is working on this problem. If it can be done purely by network improvements, that is fantastic; problem solved. But I am concerned that the government still does not seem to realise how badly we need those rapids back.

Is there a lack of funding for buses? If so, we need to see a solution to that in the budget. Is it genuinely impossible to source more buses in the meantime? If so, we need to see a solution, and evidence that that has been genuinely tried. We need our rapids. Kippax, in particular, as a group centre and major hub for our region, needs that service back.

Please come and talk to the community and to my office. We can negotiate, if we get a good update on this. West Belconnen, though, cannot simply continue to be ignored. We do not need more statements about ambitious agendas. We need more buses and we need delivery of the services that we were promised.

I seek leave to present an out-of-order petition relating to the R2 and R3 petition, with 61 signatures, some of which have suburbs only, not full addresses.

Leave granted.

MS CLAY: I present the following paper:

Petition which does not conform with the standing order—West Belconnen—R2 and R3 rapid bus routes—Reinstatement—Ms Clay (61 signatures).

MS CARRICK(Murrumbidgee) (10.08): I rise to support this petition because it highlights the importance of having seamless public transport. Forcing people to change services mid-journey adds unnecessary time and inconvenience, particularly when passengers are left standing or are unable to find a seat after transferring. If we want people to choose public transport, it must be convenient, reliable, frequent and with reasonable travel times, not just now but as our network grows into the future. Without convenient, reliable and frequent services, we will not attract people to our bus network.

Planning our network to maintain seamless journeys to the south is critical if we are serious about encouraging mode shift. People will only leave their cars behind when public transport offers a genuine alternative. This mode shift is essential to help people with the cost of living, reduce congestion on our roads and meaningfully cut transport emissions, which remain our single largest local source of emissions.

That is why I again support the call for government to restore the R2 and the R3 to their previous states. I also want to highlight the ongoing poor service on the R4 and R5 routes servicing Woden and Tuggeranong since the new timetable was introduced last month. My constituents keep telling me that overcrowding is driving delays, with full buses skipping stops on a daily basis, and people are unable to get to work on time.

While the transport minister has said some services will be restored in late July, that is too far away. Action is required now to restore capacity on the R4 and R5 to meet current demand and to allow room for people who want to switch to buses in response

to rising fuel costs.

MS BARRY (Ginninderra) (10.10): First of all, I want to thank the Belconnen Community Council for starting this petition, and the over 1,600 petitioners who have called for what we should offer as a basic service. I also want to thank Ms Clay for sponsoring this petition.

Mr Speaker, if you are a Canberran, particularly if you live in the Belconnen area and you are listening to the debate about public transport, you would be confused about the debate we are having on public transport. On one hand, we are saying that people should take public transport. On the other hand, the transport minister is saying that 50c bus fares will increase capacity on the buses. You would be confused. Which one is it? Are we taking public transport or are we not?

The changes—I know Ms Cheyne does not call it a cut—to the R2 and R3 bus service significantly impact people’s lives. For some people, the bus service provides their independence. That is what they rely on, in order to participate in our community and to engage with our community. Cutting that service, changing the service—whatever word we want to use—cuts away that independence.

Mr Speaker, if you are someone who lives in Strathnairn, for example, you have to rely on an ad hoc bus service that is not even really a bus service; it is a shuttle service. When you get to Kippax, you have to rely on a flow-on service to other parts of the Canberra community. You would be frustrated, and rightly so. You would be very frustrated that one service that you could at least rely on—the R2 and the R3 buses—has now been changed. That is a frustration at the moment for people who are living in Strathnairn. They have raised the concern separately with my office that it was the one service that at least was reliable, and now it is not.

It is good to see that the government is trying to address this issue, but it should not take 1,600 residents raising the issue for the government to do something about it. It should not take a petition and several calls in this place for the government to offer a basic service. If the government says that it is progressive, there is nothing progressive about cutting bus services to people who need them.

Once again, I commend Ms Clay for this petition, and I commend the residents who are speaking up for things that should be a basic service.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (10.13): I thank Ms Clay for sponsoring this petition. I think that what Ms Barry said is most pertinent. Mr Speaker, you do not have a petition unless someone is saying that something is not working. There is something not working in government. It is interesting that this government will promote public transport—as it should—and then cut a rapid service, or more than one rapid service. They are cutting services that are extremely convenient for the community, save time and money for our community, and fit in with their messaging about the importance of public transport.

It does seem that this government have a really bad habit of giving out great-sounding and important messages, and their actions contradict their own message. To me, it is not surprising that the “minister for failures” and “minister for icebergs” has again championed something—

Ms Berry: A point of order, Mr Speaker. If an opposition member wishes to refer to a minister in this government, they should refer to the minister by their appropriate title.

MR SPEAKER: Yes, that is correct, Ms Berry. There is a point of order. I ask that you withdraw and apologise, Mr Cain, and then continue.

MR CAIN: What would you like me to withdraw, Mr Speaker?

MR SPEAKER: Withdraw the comments and the title you gave the minister. I ask you to withdraw that.

MR CAIN: I withdraw calling the minister the “minister for failures” and the “minister for icebergs”. I withdraw, and I apologise.

We have these wonderful messages coming from the government that are really important messages, but their actions contradict their message. That is quite unsurprising, from what I have seen in my time in this Assembly.

The petitioners are asking for something really obvious. Can I say that they should not really have had to ask for it, because this petition should not have been needed. The minister promoting public transport should not then be at the helm of cutting an efficient and much-used service, as these routes are.

I commend the petition and thank those petitioners who got behind this. I would encourage the government to respond promptly. I do not think it is a complicated question that is being put to the government. They should respond promptly. We are hoping that their messaging starts to align with their actual actions.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

SDN Bluebell childcare centre—update 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) (10.16): I rise to update the Assembly on the ACT government’s response to a motion moved in this place on 24 September 2025 regarding SDN Bluebell and the not-for-profit early childhood education and care sector.

Every child deserves access to a high-quality early childhood education and the lifelong opportunities that stem from it. Education is one of the most powerful tools we have to shape futures, break cycles of disadvantage and empower individuals to reach their full potential. The benefits of a strong educational foundation extend far beyond academic achievement. High-quality early childhood education sets children up for lifelong learning, success and happiness.

The ACT has a long and proud history of leading the nation in delivering and supporting early childhood education. This goes back to the two small preschool units at the Griffith Mothercraft Centre and Duntroon Royal Military College in 1942. This led to

the establishment of the Canberra Nursery Kindergarten Society in 1943. Acton Nursery School opened in 1944 and was Canberra's first early childhood centre, followed by Reid Play Centre in 1945.

Since then, not-for-profit community organisations have been an integral part of the ACT's early childhood education and care landscape. The Canberra Preschool Society oversaw the significant growth of preschools as Canberra expanded, before responsibility was handed over to the ACT government in 2008.

When the federal government came together with states and territories in 2012 to deliver the Universal Access National Partnership, guaranteeing 15 hours of access to preschool every week, the ACT was already leading the way nationally with 12 hours of free preschool for every child in Canberra. We took the lead again in 2025, when we rolled out the first phase of the three-year-old preschool program, supporting up to 300 hours of access to high-quality early education for three-year-olds.

Not-for-profit providers like SDN Children's Services are the preferred services in the ACT. They ensure that they put children before profit. They invest in children and their workforce instead of shareholders, and this should be the priority for every early childhood education and care service and provider.

I am working with my colleagues across the ACT government, including in planning, to identify how we can further support not-for-profit early childhood education and care services and providers here in the ACT.

In response to the Assembly resolution, the government has undertaken a demand-supply analysis for early childhood education centres across the whole of the ACT, including Belconnen. The demand and supply analysis conducted by the Education Directorate lets us know the state of the sector here in Canberra, and I will table that analysis with my statement today. The analysis shows that we need more early learning places in Belconnen, Gungahlin, Molonglo and Tuggeranong, but have an oversupply in parts of north and south Canberra.

Early education in Australia is market-driven, and this means that the story of undersupply and oversupply is not just an ACT issue. Around Australia, we face a complex challenge to ensure that we have high-quality early education available to all children, no matter where they live. The analysis shows that we need to do more to support not-for-profit services in those areas, as we did with SDN Bluebell.

I congratulate SDN on securing their new premises in Gold Creek, where I know they will continue to support the learning and wellbeing of children in the community. But there is still work to do. ACT Labor made two key commitments during the election campaign: to explore measures to increase the number of not-for-profit early childhood education and care services in the ACT through future land release; and to ensure that all future early childhood education and care services in ACT government-owned buildings are leased to not-for-profit or community providers below the market rate.

Members will know that the ACT government builds early childhood education and care services adjacent to new ACT public school builds. These are operated by not-for-profit early childhood education and care providers. In fact, the Strathnairn School,

which opened this year, will also soon be opening its early childhood education and care service, operated by local not-for-profit provider YMCA Canberra.

In January, I also signed an agreement with the Australian government to access \$10 million for the building of a not-for-profit early education service as part of the Whitlam School. These partnerships between ACT public schools and the not-for-profit early childhood education and care sector show the ACT government's commitment to learning from birth.

The ACT government is providing, and will continue to provide, support to not-for-profit early childhood education and care services. The ACT government will continue to work on strengthening support for not-for-profit providers so that we can sustain a thriving and high-quality early childhood education and care sector here in Canberra. But we also know that a strong early childhood education and care sector is not just about actions taken here in the ACT. Around the country, rapid growth in the early childhood education and care sector is being driven by the property development market rather than real demand for child-centred early childhood education. This is a national issue that requires national reform.

I continue to work closely with my colleagues in the state, territory and federal governments to implement child safety measures. We are setting up a national register of educators. We are providing child safety training to everyone who works in early childhood education and care services. We are getting personal devices out of classrooms. These measures are important; but, as I said, I know that we have more to do.

The data is clear that not-for-profit providers provide higher quality, yet they have become a smaller part of the sector over the last decade. There are great for-profit providers out there, including here in the ACT, but it is time to make sure that the balance is right. This is not an easy problem to solve, and it is repeated in every other part of the country. We need to continue to work here in the ACT, and nationally, to grow and develop the not-for-profit sector now and into the future.

I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank all the teachers, educators and leaders in our early childhood education and care sector. It has been a tough time in the sector and, unsurprisingly, they continue to rise with professionalism and strength to the important challenge of improving quality and approaches to child safety.

I present the following papers:

SDN Bluebell Childcare Centre and not-for-profit early learning sector—
Support— Assembly resolution of 24 September 2025—Government response—

ACT Early Childhood Education and Care Demand & Supply Analysis, undated.

Ministerial statement, 26 March 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the ministerial statement.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (10.23): I would like to sincerely thank the minister

for her statement. I want to thank her team, the Education Directorate, and all those who contributed to the supply and demand report of the early childhood education and care centres in Canberra. This report came from the calls of a motion by Ms Clay and myself to save SDN Bluebell last year, which managed to save the wonderful not-for-profit centre from fully shutting its doors—in close collaboration with an excellent community campaign.

Last week, I was pleased to provide an update to the Assembly from the Bluebell team. The preparation for relocating students and families to Gold Greek is well underway. The wonderful Bluebell team are using soft toy puppies—the pups—to help with the transition. I still think that is the most adorable, wholesome thing ever. We have been really eager to see the findings of this supply and demand analysis. We are really pleased with its undertakings. We think it was a nice thorough report. While we will need a little more time to go through and analyse the report properly and understand the data, I would like to quote from the conclusion, to highlight the key findings and what we must all keep in mind as we work to reform our early childhood education and care centres sector:

The loss or relocation of any service in Belconnen, Gungahlin, Molonglo or Tuggeranong is a cause for concern, given existing undersupply in these regions. The loss or relocation of not-for-profit services in these regions is particularly concerning given the imbalanced provider mix, the sector's workforce fragility, and the need for community supports for children and families experiencing disadvantage.

The Greens have been fighting for this. We have been fighting for children to come first. That means children before profit. We have been fighting for our not-for-profit providers to get the support they need to survive and thrive in a skewed market; one which favours shiny new for-profit centres, over the longstanding community ones. I am glad to hear the minister agree with this and I hope that the supply and demand analysis is used to inform how we introduce the next reforms to improve early childhood education and care for kids, and for their families, communities and educators.

The Greens have been fighting for universal and free early childhood education and care for quite some time now, both federally and locally. It was one of our election commitments because every child deserves the right to free, high-quality early education, just as they do for primary and secondary schooling. We will continue to fight for it until we have got it. So, thank you to the minister and Education Directorate for this substantial report. Let's use its findings to make reforms that count for our youngest constituents, their families who love them and the people that educate and care for them every day. Thank you.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (10.26): It is comforting to see that so many voices in this place have contributed to a really good outcome for SDN Bluebell, for the staff and the parents. The petition I tabled on behalf of supporters of SDN Bluebell, tabled on 28 October last year, had over 600 signatures with two petitions and called for the government to add its voice to helping this site be relocated. So, it is really pleasing.

There have been many contributors to this, and I am very pleased that the opposition and the crossbench have contributed to pointing something out that really needed urgent

attention. It is so pleasing to see that happen. I want to give credit where it really is due, and that is to the parents, staff and operators of this not-for-profit childcare centre who said, “We do not want to stop operating in the ACT.”

I am very pleased to see the outcome that has happened, and, of course, we wish them well. Thank you, Mr Speaker.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.27): I welcome the government’s recognition that not-for-profit providers should be prioritised and that new early childhood centres co-located with ACT public schools should be operated by not-for-profit providers. That is the right direction, and it is a model I strongly support, because co-located community-based services help families to access early learning close to where they live and build stronger local school communities.

But the Molonglo figures in the government’s own analysis are deeply concerning. Molonglo has an average of just 0.3395 places per child, which the report says is close to the childcare desert threshold of 0.333. It has 224 for-profit places and zero not-for-profit places, meaning the region is currently 100 per cent for-profit. The same analysis finds that Molonglo is one of the regions showing clear undersupply against the ACT’s own 60 per cent participation benchmark. That imbalance is worrying.

In a fast-growing area like Molonglo, families should not be left with fewer choices, less community-based provision and a market made up entirely of for-profit providers. While I acknowledge that the Whitlam primary school will have a co-located childcare with it, if the government is serious about supporting not-for-profit early learning, Molonglo is exactly where that commitment now needs to be visible on the ground. Thank you.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.29): I wanted to briefly welcome today’s statement, with a focus on the significant piece of work that has gone into the supply and demand analysis here. This is critical work as the sector has been allowed to grow and develop largely unchecked, without a strong direction from government. With that in mind, I very warmly welcome the minister’s remarks in that respect, focusing on the provision of quality services where they are required.

It is interesting in this analysis to see the variability across the ACT and relative oversupply in parts of north and central south Canberra as compared with some of the more outer suburbs.

An issue that has also been raised with me, which is not touched on in this analysis—understandably so—is variability in oversupply and undersupply within centres. Of course, it is more expensive to look after babies where you have got a higher ratio requirement than it is to look after toddlers or preschool-aged children, for example. And so, this is an issue that has been raised within the sector, given that the subsidy is the same regardless of the age of the child. Of course, that is not a matter for the territory, but it is a matter that is worthy of consideration.

I wanted to briefly use the opportunity to thank members for their advocacy with respect to this specific centre, but more broadly to thank the minister for her engagement on this matter, including with me and my office. There was an exchange of letters.

I am very much looking forward to continuing to work together with Assembly colleagues on how we ensure that safe and high-quality early childhood education and care services are provided across every part of the territory; that the educators that are desperately working to ensure that is occurring are supported to do so; and that we are backing the providers that have the best interests of our children at heart. So, I am encouraged by the statement from the minister this morning and the support of that statement by multiple members of this Assembly. Let's continue working together to ensure our children are put first.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Digital Canberra—Payroll Capability and Human Resources Management—update

Ministerial statement

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (10.31): Today I am providing an update on the delivery of the Payroll Capability and Human Resource Management (PC-HRM) Program. This important initiative was funded through the 2023-24 budget, and I am pleased to confirm that we continue to progress as planned, with full completion expected by June 2027.

The PC-HRM Program is a whole-of-government initiative aimed at modernising payroll and human resource management. Its purpose is to improve end-user experience when interacting with HR systems and reduce long term operational risk across the ACT public service. The program leverages our existing technology investments and is structured around four key projects: the HRIMS closure; program initiation, establishment and governance; upgrade of Chris21 and HR21; and design and implementation of a whole-of-government time and attendance system.

The HRIMS closure project is complete. It successfully decommissioned ACT government infrastructure and vendor components associated with the former HRIMS program. It also renegotiated historical contract arrangements with vendors that resulted in a reduction in the annual licensing costs of \$3 million per annum.

The program initiation, establishment and governance project is also fully complete. This project established the strong foundations for successful delivery, actively learning lessons from HRIMS. Effective governance is operating with comprehensive planning and assurance frameworks and a highly skilled multidisciplinary team. The program is managed in line with the ACT government's ICT governance arrangements, including use of the territory's Best Practice Design and Delivery Guidance. This ensures that the planning, design, management and delivery of the program is well governed, assured and supported by active stakeholder engagement.

Considerable progress has also been made on the remaining two projects.

The Chris21 and HR21 upgrade project is scheduled for completion in June 2026. I am pleased to report that a major milestone was achieved earlier this year with the main upgrade of Chris21 and HR21, the core systems supporting payroll and HR functions

for around 33,000 staff across the ACT Public Service. Completed over the 2026 Australia Day long weekend, the upgrade modernised critical functions, and early indications point to tangible benefits. Improved system integration has delivered a reduction in vendor cost of approximately \$70,000 per annum, along with some time savings for staff. Recent user surveys show an improvement in system usability, with staff reporting that the system is easier to navigate, more intuitive, and provides a better experience when staff submit or approve leave or update their details.

Importantly, Mr Speaker, last year the program also successfully transitioned approximately 8,300 staff across several directorates—including city and environment, justice and community safety, education and Digital Canberra—from the Kronos Workforce Central system to Kronos UKG Pro for time and attendance management. This transition was critical to maintaining business continuity ahead of the vendor's scheduled end-of-life for Kronos Workforce Central in December 2025.

To make the transition as smooth as possible, extensive readiness work was undertaken including the development of updated procedures, 22 training guides and the delivery of 195 training sessions, online and in person. Following go-live, a six-week hyper care period ensured responsive ongoing support, helping staff adjust quickly and confidently to the new system.

Benefits from the transition are already being realised across the ACT public service. For example, the ACT Ambulance Service has realised operational efficiencies, with new reporting capabilities saving up to 13 hours per pay period and generating annual cost savings of more than \$24,600 through more efficient roster management and overtime reconciliation. These savings reflect improved systems and processes that enhance accuracy and reduce administrative effort.

Beyond the quantifiable gains, staff across business units report a markedly improved user experience. Feedback highlights better workforce visibility, enhanced mobile and desktop functionality, streamlined scheduling and leave management, and richer reporting insights. Overall, users describe the upgraded system as easier, more intuitive and far more efficient than the previous version.

The program is now progressing the next stages of this work, including further system enhancements and retiring 10 legacy system components that will no longer be required. Collectively, these updates improve the territory's risk and security posture, support business continuity, reduce manual processing, enhance reporting and analytics capability, and ensure continued compliance with legislative requirements.

The next release of the Chris21 and HR21 upgrade, scheduled for June 2026, is expected to deliver additional annual savings of up to \$300,000 through reduced manual effort and licensing costs.

Work is also progressing well on transitioning to a whole-of-government time and attendance system to replace multiple legacy systems and time-consuming manual processes across directorates. During the design phase, the program undertook a comprehensive review of existing time and attendance processes across all ACT government directorates and co-designed a future whole-of-government solution.

Through more than 50 hours of workshops and consultation sessions with directorates, payroll and HR systems staff, the consultants documented the current state and designed a future state aligned to the government's operational and user needs. Given the scale and complexity of the changes required, a staged rollout has been agreed to ensure workforce readiness, change absorption, and adequate technical support.

In conclusion, Mr Speaker, the PC-HRM Program continues to demonstrate good progress.

Strong governance, demonstrable delivery of key outcomes and independent assurance provides confidence that the ACT government is well positioned to realise the strategic and operational benefits of this major initiative.

I present the following paper:

Payroll capability and Human Resource Management (PC-HRM) Program—
Project delivery update March 2026—Ministerial statement, 26 March 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Regional plans—inner north and inner south 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) (10.38): I rise to provide an update to the Assembly on projects and commitments within my ministerial responsibilities that are being delivered by the ACT government in the inner north and inner south. As you have heard this week, ACT Labor took practical regional plans to the election including for the inner north and inner south, to deliver strategic investments in our suburban infrastructure. It was based on the thousands of conversations had across the region by the Chief Minister, Minister Stephen-Smith, and our Labor candidates.

The inner north and inner south are, of course, well-connected districts; indeed, among the earliest built of Canberra. Acknowledging that the needs of a growing region are ever-changing, our efforts reflect what we have heard in the inner north and inner south, and as they do across the territory. It is why we are progressing a range of improvements across our active travel network in these areas.

Construction of the first stage of the Garden City Cycleway, providing a safer and improved cycling network through the inner north, is almost complete. Construction of the final section along Cooyong Street from Torrens Street to the Lonsdale Street traffic lights will commence soon, and it is planned to be finished by mid-year. Design of stage 2 will commence shortly, with both stages jointly funded with the federal government.

The next stage of the Kingston cycleway, connecting Bowen Park through to the

Kingston foreshore with Cunningham Street near the railway station, is progressing. I am pleased to say that construction on this section will commence in the coming months. We are investing in new and improved footpaths in the inner north and inner south. This will be additional to work already underway to upgrade and improve footpaths in Braddon, O'Connor, Reid and the city. We have delivered improved paths around Telopea Park from Darling Street to Gosse Street, with improved lighting along the new and existing path to support safer use of the space.

We are also installing raised pedestrian crossings on Challis Street in Dickson, raised crossings around Telopea Park and New South Wales Crescent in Kingston, and a raised crossing on the West Basin cycle path alongside Alexandrina Drive in Yarralumla. A raised crossing will also be installed on Bauhinia Drive in O'Connor to improve pedestrian safety and strengthen this important cycle route. These raised crossings will create a safer environment for pedestrians and cyclists at key points across the network.

In other areas of the inner north, we have undertaken upgrades to the road network to improve movement throughout the area. Upgrades to Beltana Road in Pialligo have been delivered which will support local businesses and improve conditions for residents and visitors.

It is also important to note that, as we invest in our road network across the city, the positive impacts of this work will flow through the networks of the inner north and inner south due to their centrality. As the government improves how people can move around the region, we are also upgrading the various places that people travel to for enjoyment or throughout daily life.

We have delivered a new destination playground for Canberra's inner north on Windeyer Street in Watson, located in the green space adjacent to Canberra Technology Park. This destination playground has been designed to provide recreation opportunities for people of all ages and abilities, creating a space where families can spend time together, be active, and connect with their community. This playground includes a junior play area, an accessible play route connecting a network of inclusive play equipment, a grassed amphitheatre, two multi-use courts, fitness equipment, picnic shelters, barbecues, drinking fountains and accessible seating. The site also includes an accessible toilet and change facilities, bike parking, a bike repair station, new paths, additional tree plantings and parking.

In our nature reserves, the Parks and Conservation Service have made updates to the Black Mountain summit track and are planning upgrades to deliver improved lookouts.

But Mr Speaker, it is, of course, not only humans that need spaces to play and walk, and that is why we are investigating a potential temporary dog park in the inner south, serving the Kingston foreshore precinct and wider communities. This work has commenced and I look forward to updating the Assembly on this in due course.

Alongside our playgrounds and open spaces, we are also delivering public amenity upgrades at local shopping centres across central Canberra. New toilet facilities at Downer shops and Red Hill are currently in the design phase. The new location at Downer will consider access, passive surveillance for the safety of users, and access to utility services such as water. The new toilet facility will include a unisex accessible

toilet with baby change table. It will also allow people to stay longer at the shops and enjoy more time outdoors in their local neighbourhood.

I thank Minister Stephen-Smith for her very welcome—quite intense—engagement on this issue. I know that the community is looking forward to this facility and I look forward to working with Minister Stephen-Smith to deliver it.

The new toilet facility in Red Hill is planned for their local shops. The design will be guided by the local character of the existing area. Additional landscaping including planting and pathways will also be installed around the facility to help it connect and integrate with the surrounding landscape.

Mr Speaker, in the 25-26 budget we furthered our commitment to improving shops across Canberra. This includes public space upgrades at the Griffith shops, with a focus on the area at the front of the shops. Design for that is currently underway. The improvements will focus on increasing safety, access and amenity. These may include footpath improvements, new street furniture, landscaping, lighting and bin shrouds.

Upgrades to the Narrabundah shops on Iluka Street were part of the Suburban Infrastructure Program to improve access and the overall look and feel, encouraging the community to shop local and spend more time in their suburbs. These important upgrades were completed in mid-2025. They have some wonderful artwork there too.

At the end of the day, these projects are about people; how we move around our city, how our children play, how we spend time in our local centres, and how we stay connected to our communities. These investments are helping make Canberra's suburbs safer, more accessible and more vibrant places to live. Together, these projects show the ACT government's continued investment in Canberra's roads, active travel network, local shops and community spaces. I heard members say that this is business as usual. Well, if it is business as usual, we should be proud that we continue to make sure it is business as usual. We are building safer roads, better paths, and more welcoming public places so that our suburbs remain connected, accessible and great places to live.

I thank the community for their advocacy, engagement and interest as this work is delivered, and I look forward to seeing Canberrans enjoy the benefits of these important improvements for many years to come.

Mr Speaker, ACT Labor's regional plans—all of them and, today, for the inner north and inner south—are practical and targeted. They represent strategic investments in our suburban infrastructure. They are transparent; they allow people to follow along on what we are delivering. I think it is pretty clear we have already delivered a lot, and there is much to be ticked off very soon. I look forward to working with our members for Kurrajong and Murrumbidgee to deliver these upgrades for the community.

I present the following paper:

Update on Inner North/South Regional Plan—Ministerial statement, 26 March 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (10.45): I welcome the update this morning from the minister. There are a few items that I would like to touch on that are relevant and about which I am frequently contacted by people in my electorate. I, for one, am very pleased to see the continuation of construction of the Garden City Cycleway. Completion of stage 1 in the coming months will be very warmly welcomed by many people across the Inner North, myself included. It is a regular part of my commute, and I am excited to see that final leg into the city made more complete and therefore a bit safer.

Equally, the design of stage 2 will be welcomed as well to increase the reach of this cycleway. This kind of route—where along the way we have prioritised pedestrian crossings, which I understand required some kind of advocacy through the design phase of stage 1—is what we should have more and more across the ACT. It makes that route incredibly efficient if you are able to access it. Alongside that, I welcome the commitment to further improvements, upgrades and repairs across the footpath network which feeds onto these cycleways.

I very much look forward to the extension of the Kingston cycleway as well. What is currently in place has been described to me by multiple residents as the best thing the government has ever done, so we very much welcome more of these lanes. Having replaced that lane with a safe footpath does not seem to have had a negative impact on congestion in that area. That has also been very good for the pedestrians who use the other path. They feel safer not having cyclists speeding past them. This is fantastic stuff and I would love to see more of it. I very much welcome the commitments in today's statement to further upgrades and extensions of these routes shortly.

Telopea Park was also mentioned in the statement. This has been raised with me by multiple constituents: the path and, very importantly, the lighting. That has been welcomed. People in the area are very happy to have seen this change made. I also welcome the commitment today to a raised crossing on Challis Street in Dickson. This has been the most dangerous street for cyclists over the last decade and the site of the most crashes in the ACT, so a raised crossing is a good idea. We would love to get more detail on that: when that crossing will be installed and, specifically, where it is going to be.

We heard about the Inner North playground this morning as well. It is one of the favourites of my children and a regular meeting point for families in the Inner North. I have had concerns raised about the lack of shade. Trees have been planted, but they will take some time to grow. That is an issue there, and also at Maliyan Park, which we spoke about in the chamber yesterday. I would very much welcome—and I think many residents would—shade sails or some kind of measure to ensure that these playgrounds remain accessible throughout the hotter months. In summer, I was choosing to go either very early in the morning or later in the afternoon, when it was not 30 or 35 degrees, because it is just not possible for children. You can slip, slop and slap, but you might still get heatstroke if there is not sufficient shade. That is something I would very much welcome.

Finally—and there are many other things that we could speak to in this update—I welcome the Downer toilet facilities. I appreciate and acknowledge the advocacy of residents for that upgrade over an extended period of time. It will be very much warmly welcomed by the community, including the operators of Gang Gang, which has drawn more and more people to that part of our city. They are usually happy for people to use their bathrooms, but it is good to also have one publicly available that can be used outside of hours by people who are there with dogs at the park, and for casual support. It is such a hub in the Inner North, so having a quality toilet facility there, as has been described in the statement this morning, will be very much welcomed by residents.

I have done a lot of welcoming. I will have to find something to criticise later in the day to cleanse myself of all the positivity! But I am pleased with this update and thank the minister for providing it this morning.

Ms Lee: Shame!

MR EMERSON: Yes. Perhaps Ms Lee can provide some contrary remarks in her response!

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (10.50): It would be remiss of me if I did not live up to Mr Emerson's expectations, so here we go! I thank the minister for providing the update on the Inner North and Inner South regional plans. It highlights what the update does not include, as opposed to what it does. There is some talk. Mr Emerson has already congratulated the minister about the public toilets in Downer but left out the fact that this was after long-term advocacy—years and years, in fact—to get any movement. There is the Watson playground. I was in Watson this week. Mr Emerson asked a question about the surface and what is happening in that space. Unfortunately, the minister was away from question time and Mr Steel took that question on notice on her behalf. I am not sure where we got to with tabling of that piece of rubber or microplastic, but we were certainly given a taste of what that material might be and how it would cause some anxiety for parents.

There is another issue that comes up all the time when it comes to the Watson playground. I was there at the opening with Ava, and she had a great time. The issue is the lack of shade. One thing that I have consistently been receiving feedback on from parents is the lack of shade. They want to use it and are very happy to use it, but they are concerned about sun safety. Another issue that comes about the Watson playground is the lack of toilet facilities. Before anyone else jumps up and says, "There is one," yes, there is. What I hear is that there are not many, especially for the footprint that playground was designed for. That is the feedback that I get about the playground, which, of course, is very new. It was opened in the second half of 2024, and we know that it cost ACT taxpayers multimillion dollars. These basic things that seem to be missing are of concern to my constituents.

What is also not contained in the statement is the Dickson taskforce. It came with great fanfare. A lot of the Kurrajong members raised concern about what was happening in Dickson. There were multitude concerns in relation to safety, including accessibility, as well as business viability and vibrance. People are doing it tough. Vulnerable Canberrans find themselves there. We raised significant concern about it. It led to the Dickson taskforce being established.

But what we have heard—I met with the Dickson Residents Group earlier this month—is that there has not been much improvement. In fact, I have a direct quote from the Dickson Residents Group. They said: “Disappointingly, we are not convinced that enough has happened to address the issues which led to the creation of the taskforce in the first place. The work of the taskforce has helped to clarify some issues and potential solutions but has not been effective in implementing or in providing a clear strategy which will be effective for Dickson and could provide a model for other shopping areas.” This is a taskforce that the government announced with great fanfare in response to the concerns that had been raised for quite some time by Dickson residents and traders, but unfortunately it seems that, once again, the glossy announcement does not live up to the reality, in terms of implementation.

Staying with the Inner North, I note that there has not been much in relation to some of the concerns that we hear about traffic at busy times, especially during school drop-off times around the Inner North.

Crossing the lake over to the south side is Narrabundah. There was some talk in the minister’s statement about some upgrades, but the feedback that I have received from local residents is that, firstly, it is too little too late; and, secondly, some of the other concerns that they have certainly raised were not addressed. Lighting has been raised as an issue, as well as parking, and it is not just at the shops either. I sponsored a petition on behalf of residents and local sporting groups who raised significant concern that lighting at the local ovals was inadequate—so inadequate that sporting clubs which are paying full freight to use these facilities cannot actually get games or training going. It has become a safety risk for players, spectators and parents who take their kids there.

Regarding Griffith, some concerns have been raised with me about consultation, the process and the scope of the Inner South health facility, including access issues. I am sure that will be discussed in more detail in future debates as well.

Both the minister and Mr Emerson spoke about Telopea Park. It would be remiss of me if I did not mention that one of the issues that is raised with me consistently is flooding. Whenever we have torrential rain, I am always sent a video or a photo of the major flooding that happens in Telopea Park. It causes a lot of angst for locals who use it significantly. It becomes a safety hazard.

I do not know if Mr Cocks is going to raise this, but, if he will excuse me, I am going to cross the border. This is slightly in Forrest, but it does affect Kurrajong residents—certainly on a personal level as well, because I drive past this intersection during school drop-offs. Where Tasmania Circle, Arthur Circle and Monaro Crescent intersect is confusing at the best of times. I am told about a significant number of near misses, and I have personally experienced it, because, as I said, I drive through that intersection at least a few times a week. It is a significant concern. There was an accident this week or last week—very recently. It must be looked at in some detail.

Finally, I want to talk about Oaks Estate, because it was not mentioned. Oaks Estate residents have spoken up for many years. The strong advocacy of the local residents group is second to none. They consider themselves very much part of the Inner South and they are a very key contributor to the Inner South Canberra Community Council.

In May 2025, the Assembly passed a motion that was brought forward jointly, by Mr Emerson, Mr Rattenbury and me, to incorporate a five-year strategic plan for Oaks Estate. There are multitude issues in relation to what needs to be done in Oaks Estate. There are aspects such as maintenance and accessibility. Once again, we see all the great fanfare from this government, but, when it comes to actual implementation and delivery, it falls short. I am contacted by Oaks Estate residents and residents' organisations on a consistent basis. Even as recently as last month, they were still raising concerns that, despite the promises, despite the listening reports and despite the consultations, more needs to be done to address the issues that Oaks Estate residents have raised for many years.

Without doubt, I would say that the Inner North and Inner South are the best areas of Canberra to live, to send children to school and to work, and we want to keep it that way. But it is clear that, after 20-plus years of this ACT Labor government, things are sliding. It is all good for the minister to talk about some of the improvements that the government claims they have made, but, once again, it is about what is not in the ministerial statement.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (10.59): I welcome the new toilet at the Red Hill shops—not that it has been built, but I look forward to the finalisation of the design and the start of construction, when that happens. I also welcome the raised crossings on New South Wales Crescent and on the cycle path at Alexandrina Drive, and look forward to funding for the construction of the other crossings that have been identified for upgrades along this scenic lakeside route.

I would also like to note progress of the Garden City and Kingston Cycleways, which are both important arterial routes for our city-wide active travel network, but what is missing is anything about the major cycleway through the Inner South, on Adelaide Avenue and Commonwealth Avenue. That is still under consideration on the government's cycle path map and has been under consideration for decades, so we are wondering when that will be designed.

I would like to also mention the flooding that we have and the blue-green algae in the lake that is coming through Yarralumla from Red Hill. The Yarralumla Wetlands are needed to reduce the nutrients flowing into the lake, causing the blue-green algae.

The minister mentioned the government's investment in the road network. Traffic congestion is an increasing problem in parts of the Inner South, particularly Yarralumla, which is experiencing rapid growth from a number of major developments, including the Brickworks. I would like to see the government commit to building the Mint Interchange to alleviate traffic pressure on Dudley Street in Yarralumla and Kent Street in Deakin by allowing vehicles to move seamlessly between Yarra Glen and the Cotter Road.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (11.01): It is a pleasure to rise to speak briefly to the statement that Minister Cheyne made today. There are so many places I could start, but I want to start by talking about the raised crossings that Ms Cheyne listed. That really does reflect the feedback that we have received from constituents about where they are concerned about safe crossings of roads. An inquiry

report into Fix My Street was tabled, and that is one avenue with which people can talk about the improvements they would like to see. But, of course, Labor members were out and about consulting with the community. Well, we are out and about all the time consulting with the community. Particularly during 2024, we were listening to that feedback and reflect that in our regional plans for the Inner North and the Inner South.

Raised crossings in these key areas respond to feedback from constituents and promote opportunities for active travel, as, of course, does the Garden City Cycleway. This is a major project that has really transformed the ability for people on the eastern side of Northbourne Avenue to ride safely to work, shops, playgrounds and between friends' houses. I am looking forward to the future stages of that project and seeing it complete. Watching people ride along the Garden City Cycleway takes me back to my own childhood and teen years, riding my bike around the Inner North, to school, to friends' places, to the shops and generally for entertainment.

This complements the footpath work that Ms Cheyne has detailed as well and, of course, the Kingston Cycleway, which Mr Emerson spoke of so fondly. I must say, I am more likely to be driving down Bowen Drive than walking or riding on that particular section of cycle path or footpath, but I have certainly noticed the reduction in congestion and the increased safety and comfort for pedestrians when I drive along that road, particularly when it is very busy in the morning or after work and a lot of people are exercising in that area. I am not sure it is the best thing we have ever done, but I am pleased to hear that that is the feedback that Mr Emerson has received.

As a child and a teenager, I also spent a lot of time at the Dickson shops and Dickson Pool. Having popped into the much improved Dickson Woolies on Monday evening—it is amazing what a bit of competition will do—it was clear how much work is going on in Dickson. While I acknowledge that constituents will continue to have concerns about opportunities to do more, it is disappointing that Ms Lee did not recognise the work that is going on to improve Dickson shops. That work is happening at other shops across the city, across the Inner North and the Inner South. I am very excited as well about the public toilet at the Downer shops, as Ms Cheyne indicated. I advocated very strongly for it to be a Labor election commitment. I am also very pleased about the public toilets to be put in at the Red Hill shops, which is no longer in my electorate but certainly a place I have spent a lot of time. I still spend time there, but I spent a lot of time talking to constituents there when it was part of Kurrajong.

As Ms Cheyne has said, local shops more broadly are getting a facelift, and there will particularly be a lot of work going on at Griffith shops, with shop upgrades, a new playground closer to the shops to enable the construction of a new health centre, and a new wetland behind the shops. Again, Ms Lee pointed to some criticism that she has heard around consultation in relation to the health centre but has not welcomed a health centre in her electorate in the Inner South, where there is no community health centre currently. The feedback I have received from constituents in Griffith and the local area in the Inner South, particularly in Griffith and Narrabundah, has been very positive about the health centre.

I note that no-one other than Ms Cheyne spent much time focusing on Pialligo. The changes to Beltana Road in Pialligo—which were significantly completed during the last term of government but continue—have really transformed Pialligo. I am not there

every day as I used to be, with the horses no longer living in Pialligo, but, having watched the roadworks and pedestrian works taking place and seeing the transformation of Pialligo, it really has been a great project. I hope that it will indeed support the local businesses and improve traffic conditions for residents and visitors.

I want to touch on a couple of other places that people visit in the Inner North and Inner South, particularly around the work that is happening in Braddon and Garema Place. I have already talked about the Dickson shops. It is about making some of these very highly trafficked areas more pedestrian friendly and better places to hang out and spend time. I also want to acknowledge the work that is going on at Gorman House. The Gorman Arts Centre is approaching its centenary, I believe. Ms Cheyne will probably know the answer. It is close. It is getting a facelift and will be an even more incredible venue for our arts community into the future.

I am really pleased to see what is happening across the Inner North and Inner South. I also want to recognise that there is often criticism in relation to housing. Some critics will say that we have been moving people in public housing out of the Inner North and Inner South, but what we have in fact been doing is refreshing and renewing a range of housing in the Inner North and Inner South. I particularly want to recognise Common Ground in Dickson, although it is not something that we have delivered in this term; it is now well-embedded. It is a really great example of a partnership with the community delivering something that is making a difference in people's lives. It is something that the community expressed a lot of concern about through the development process, and it is now well-embedded in the community and a really incredible and important resource for people who have been in insecure housing for some time and are able to find a home.

There is a lot more we could talk about in terms of sporting facilities, playgrounds and parks, but other people have said a lot about those things, so I will leave it there. I thank Ms Cheyne very much for bringing her statement to the Assembly, and thank my Kurrajong colleagues for their positive remarks, in Mr Emerson's case, and for reminding us that there is always more work to do, in Ms Lee's case.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

ACT Ambulance Service—staffing—update Ministerial statement

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) (11.09): I rise today to respond to the Assembly resolution of 2 December 2025 in relation to ACT Ambulance Service roster improvement. I would like to begin by extending my sincere thanks and appreciation to our paramedics, ACTAS staff and those who support them for their work, resilience and commitment to keeping our Canberra community safe.

As our city continues to grow, the demand for ambulance services is increasing. Our ACTAS staff continue to do an excellent job in delivering clinical and compassionate care to Canberrans in need. The report on government services shows that the ACT has one of the fastest ambulance response times in Australia for life-threatening incidents.

It also highlights that ACT Ambulance Service call-takers answer 93.6 per cent of emergency 000 calls within 10 seconds, ensuring people receive help as quickly as possible.

Although these statistics give me reassurance, I recognise that more needs to be done to support our ACTAS staff in responding to non-life-threatening emergencies.

In response to part (a) of the resolution to take immediate operational action to stabilise roster coverage and prevent below-minimum crewing, we have acted immediately following the ACT Ambulance Service roster review, which identified the pressures that ACTAS staff have faced since the implementation of the new roster.

The government is acutely aware that the recruitment of more paramedics is an essential step towards creating a healthy and modernised ambulance service within the ACT. We are taking steps to deliver on this.

Recruitment already completed and planned for the year includes the following. Fourteen new graduate paramedics joined the service on 16 February; and eight paramedics from a lateral recruitment commenced training on 2 March. Eight call-takers are expected to commence on 20 April; a further 10 graduate paramedics are expected to commence on 20 July; and additional lateral paramedics are expected to commence on 3 August and during November.

Two weeks ago, I had the great opportunity to meet our new graduate and lateral paramedics. It was inspiring to see their enthusiasm for joining the ACT Ambulance Service, and their commitment to serving our community. As I shared with them—and as I reaffirm today—we are committed to building a service that not only meets the needs of our community but is also a great place to work. While we look to recruit more paramedics to our service, as part of its daily functions ACTAS will continue to take operational action to stabilise roster coverage and minimise below-minimum crewing. This includes maximising staff available to the roster, offering overtime, requesting staff move from day shift to night shift, or requesting shift extensions for staff on the prior shift.

Recruiting paramedics is a priority for government, but so is educating our community on when to call 000. I would like to note that in the 24-25 financial year ACTAS received over 67,000 calls. This is the most calls the service has ever received in a year, with many of these being for non-life-threatening emergencies.

We all have a role to play in ensuring that paramedics are available to respond to the sickest people in our communities. Calling an ambulance when you do not need one could delay help for someone whose life depends on it. That is why the government will do work to remind our community to save paramedics for life-threatening situations. As with any emergency, we are best prepared when the community also takes steps and we work together to support one another.

Part (b) of the Assembly resolution called on the government to table a comprehensive workforce management and implementation plan that sets out clear milestones for achieving roster stability; minimum crewing coverage across all shifts; and the timeline of when the government plans to have all stations staffed 24/7.

I would like to present to the Assembly the ACTAS workforce management and implementation plan. This plan has been prepared in consultation with the ACTAS senior leadership team, ACTAS staff including paramedics and call-takers, and other key stakeholders.

Implementation of the substantial roster reform has been complex and requires ongoing strategic support, management, administration, communication, and training. Nationally, our ACTAS roster is unique within the ambulance sector. The ACTAS roster review report has provided a solid baseline to inform the structure and contents of the workforce management and implementation plan.

Part (c) of the Assembly resolution requires public reporting every quarter on ACTAS data. This reporting will commence with the first quarter of 2026. The reports will be available on the ESA website within a month of the end of each quarter. So, the report for the January to March quarter will be on the ESA website by the end of April. The public report will contain the information required as part of the Assembly resolution. ACTAS will also provide additional information on activity and performance that will assist to add context to a demanding and dynamic operational environment.

While I understand the interest in the minimum crewing metric, overtime hours worked, and station closures—as required by the Assembly resolution—these are not used as key performance indicators for ambulance services in any jurisdiction. Ambulance services are judged by the number of calls for assistance, their response times to life-threatening situations and, of course, feedback from patients. Including this type of information will highlight the excellent work that ACTAS is undertaking, despite the volume of their work and other challenges.

I want to reassure the community that station closure data does not mean ambulances are unable to respond to those areas. ACTAS ambulances are mobile and are dispatched from wherever they are on the road, ensuring help can still reach you when it is needed. Stations are a starting point, a space for breaks and an end point of a shift.

Station closure data should not alarm the community; rather, it helps illustrate the capability and flexibility of our ambulance service.

Part (d) of the Assembly resolution seeks a progress of implementation and recommendations in the ACTAS roster review report. The final report makes 13 recommendations. The ACTAS roster review report, along with its recommendations, will be considered by government as part of the 26-27 ACT budget process.

Being a paramedic has never been an easy job. We all have a role to play in supporting our paramedics. Supporting paramedics also requires back-of-house activities. I want to thank all those in the ESA who help to recruit, train, roster, dispatch, procure, service vehicles, and provide mental health and wellbeing support. These are only some examples of the enabling services our frontline members receive and deserve for the service they are providing to keep our community safe. It is those in the back of house that keep our people on the frontline safe, and able to perform their roles as effectively and efficiently as possible.

In closing, I want to thank our ambulance paramedics and ACTAS staff for their inspiring and outstanding efforts in looking after the community. I want to thank the TWU for their work and ongoing advocacy on behalf of ACTAS staff. I am committed to continuing to work with you to achieve great outcomes for our community and our staff. I also want to assure them that we continue to support them, and we remain focused on their health and wellbeing as they continue to deliver on community expectations, under increasing pressures. Thank you.

I present the following paper:

ACT Ambulance Service Workforce Strategy 2026-2029—Version 1, dated 1 March 2026.

ACT Ambulance Service Roster—Improvement—Assembly resolution of 2 December 2025—Government response—Ministerial statement, 26 March 2026.

I move:

That the Assembly take note of the paper.

MRS MORRIS (Brindabella) (11.18): I would like to make some comments in response to the minister's statement. I thank the minister for her statement and for presenting the report today. I begin by echoing the gratitude expressed to our paramedics, our call-takers and all of the ACT Ambulance Service staff. They do extraordinary work under extraordinary pressure. They respond to people on the worst days of their lives, and they do so with professionalism, compassion and courage. They deserve our respect and, more importantly, they deserve a government that is honest about the pressures they are under and serious about fixing them.

What the minister has tabled today confirms something that we in the opposition have been saying for some time; that is, the pressure on our Ambulance Service is very real, it is ongoing and it is not minor. The government's own workforce strategy says that demand has increased materially over the past decade, by 70 per cent, that ambulance utilisation remains high and that our Ambulance Service is frequently operating with reduced system flexibility. It also says that the effectiveness of the 44-hour roster is being influenced by staffing pressures, recruitment constraints and limited support for back-of-house functions. That is a very long way from a system that is coping comfortably and, despite the minister's attempt to reassure the Assembly, the documents tabled today contain a number of very plain admissions.

The workforce strategy says that ACTAS remains heavily reliant on overtime. It says that high annual leave balances continue to affect workforce availability and that station closures occur intermittently when minimum crewing requirements cannot be met. These are not opposition claims. These are not claims by the Canberra Liberals. These are the government's own words. That matters, as the minister has also sought to suggest that minimum crewing, overtime and station closures should not overly concern the community because they are not key performance indicators used anywhere else.

If those things do not matter, why does the government's own strategy identify overtime, leave liabilities and station closures as workforce indicators? Why does it say

minimum crewing performance, overtime reliance and leave liabilities will be part of the performance measures used to assess progress? The government cannot dismiss these pressures in the chamber while simultaneously embedding them in their own workforce strategy.

There is another problem with the statement today. The Assembly asked for a comprehensive workforce management and implementation plan with clear milestones for roster stability, minimum crewing across all shifts and a timeline for when all stations will be staffed 24/7. That is not what has been tabled. What has been tabled is a three-year strategy supported by annual action plans to be developed later. The road map says the action plan for 2026-27 is not due to be developed and approved until August to October this year, with implementation from October 2026 to April 2027.

The Assembly asked for a plan to achieve roster stability and minimum crewing, and a timeline for stopping the rolling station closures. What we have been given is a plan for a future plan. Crucially, there is still no clear date in these documents for when all stations will be staffed 24/7, and that is a glaring omission. Canberrans do not experience ambulance pressures as a strategy document. They experience them in real time, when they call for help and expect a system that is properly staffed and properly supported.

I do want to acknowledge the new recruits that the minister mentioned today. Any additional paramedics and call-takers are very welcome. They are needed and they are appreciated. But announcing recruitment intakes is not the same thing as demonstrating that workforce pressures have been solved, especially when we have seen that staffing levels have declined since the implementation of the roster, and when the same documents tell us that the service is still heavily reliant upon overtime, still carrying high leave liabilities, and still facing station closures when crewing cannot be met.

Finally, the minister confirmed that the 13 recommendations of the roster review will be merely considered as part of the budget process—just considered. They will not be funded, implemented or committed to—just considered. That is not the language of urgency; it is the language of delay. Our paramedics deserve better than delay and our community expect better than delay.

Our paramedics deserve a government that responds to crises with urgency and methodical care. They deserve frontline staffing that meets demand. They deserve a roster that is properly resourced. Canberrans deserve confidence that, when they call for an ambulance, the system behind that response is not being held together by overtime, goodwill and crossed fingers. That is the standard that the community expect, and it is the standard that this government is still failing to meet.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (11.25): I say it occasionally: I was not planning to speak on this today.

Ms Cheyne: You say it every day.

MR COCKS: Not quite. I did not yesterday. But it was not until the minister read her statement that something jumped out at me that I find deeply concerning. The minister's statement contains the line that the government is set on reminding our community to

save paramedics for life-threatening situations. I am deeply concerned if the government is sending a message that people should delay calling an ambulance. There are many in our community who already delay calling an ambulance when quite possibly one is needed.

I was speaking with a constituent just this week about their mother, who had to be persuaded to call an ambulance when they were actually having a stroke. That is a life-threatening situation, but we do not all know that we are in a life-threatening situation when it comes up. I would like to take a moment to urge our community: if you think you need an ambulance, call one.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Administration and Procedure—Standing Committee Membership

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (11.26): I move:

That the resolution of the Assembly of 3 December 2024 (as amended), in relation to general purpose standing committees, be amended to omit paragraph (13) and substitute:

“(13) Ms Carrick and Mr Emerson may attend and participate (without voting) at meetings of the Standing Committee on Administration and Procedure;”.

I think that the motion speaks for itself. The admin and procedure committee has discussed changes to membership, and we welcome both Mr Emerson and Ms Carrick to be part of our meetings going forward.

Mr Parton: They are good people, aren't they?

MS TOUGH: They are good people.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (11.27): Thank you, Ms Tough, and thank you, Mr Parton. Feel free to stand up and put that in the *Hansard*, in your remarks on this motion. After 18 months of proving that, as Mr Parton says, we are people who are all right, I am very much looking forward to participating in the committee, beyond just looking at the order of business, ahead of sitting weeks. I hope that the committee continues not voting on matters and just coming to collaborative agreement, and that we can be a part of that.

I want to thank members for engaging on this over a period of time and coming to a resolution that I think ultimately will benefit everyone. Of course, it is to the advantage of all of us if the Assembly runs smoothly and we are on the same page about how best to achieve that. I thank everyone who is supporting this motion, and Ms Tough for bringing it forward today.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (11.28): I would also like to thank the admin and procedure committee for inviting us to be members of the committee, and I look forward to contributing to it.

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (11.28): Crossbench three for three! I rise to reiterate briefly the Greens' position that we have supported, and will continue to support, the inclusion of Independents on the admin and procedure committee. The committee covers matters relating to the ongoing operation of the Assembly, the running of sitting weeks and the order of business.

Given the presumption that those who sit on admin and procedure will liaise with their respective party rooms and link them in on most items of business running through the committee, it has always struck me as odd that Independents would be the only people in the building without access or input to those items. Ultimately, I am pleased to hear that the majority of the Assembly now recognises the pragmatism of including Independents, and I look forward to having them both on our committee.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Papers

The Clerk presented the following papers, pursuant to standing order 213A and the resolution of the Assembly of 24 June 2025, as amended on 18 September 2025, together with the transmittal letter from the Head of Service, ACT government, to the Clerk, dated 25 March 2026:

Early Childhood Education and Care Incident Records—Order to table—Copy of—

Index of additional returned documents.

Additional returned documents (1 folder).

Voluntary assisted dying—carriage service restrictions

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) (11.30): Together with Ms Stephen-Smith, I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) recognises that:
 - (a) the Federal Parliament restored the Territories' ability to legislate for voluntary assisted dying (VAD) in 2022, enabling the ACT to enact its own framework;
 - (b) the ACT Legislative Assembly passed the *Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2024*, and the ACT's safe, compassionate and highly regulated VAD scheme commenced on 3 November 2025; and
 - (c) VAD is now lawful in all Australian sub-national jurisdictions except the Northern Territory;
- (2) recognises telehealth and other electronic communications are integral to contemporary health care and critical to equitable access;
- (3) notes with concern that:

- (a) sections 474.29A and 474.29B of the *Criminal Code Act 1995* (Cwlth) create offences relating to the use of a “carriage service” for suicide-related material;
 - (b) in *Carr v Attorney-General (Cth)* [2023] FCA 1500, the Federal Court found these offences capture communications about VAD conducted under state and territory law;
 - (c) as a result, health professionals and patients engaging in otherwise lawful VAD care risk criminal liability if they use telehealth, email or telephone to discuss aspects of VAD; and
 - (d) this causes harmful delays and unnecessary travel, particularly for people who are frail, house-bound, or living in regional and remote communities;
- (4) notes leading health, legal and consumer organisations, including the Australian Medical Association, have called for urgent legislative reform so that otherwise lawful VAD communications are not captured by these offences;
- (5) affirms that, regardless of one’s views on VAD, patients and practitioners acting within ACT law should be able to use telehealth and other electronic communications to deliver lawful, safe and compassionate care;
- (6) draws the Federal Parliament’s attention to:
- (a) the Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights, including the right to healthcare services and treatment that meet a person’s needs; and
 - (b) Australia’s international obligations requiring health services to be accessible to everyone, without discrimination;
- (7) further notes:
- (a) prior parliamentary efforts to address this issue, including a 2024 private member’s bill proposing an express exception for lawful VAD communications under the *Criminal Code Act 1995* (Cwlth) and regrets that it did not proceed;
 - (b) the ACT Government has consistently maintained in Health Ministers’ meetings and the Standing Council of Attorneys-General (SCAG) that this issue must be addressed as a priority; and
 - (c) despite repeated calls on successive federal governments, including at the SCAG meeting of 27 February 2026, no progress has been made;
- (8) calls on the Federal Parliament to:
- (a) resolve that no Australian should be disadvantaged in accessing lawful end-of-life care because of where they live or their capacity to travel; and
 - (b) urgently introduce and debate a bill to amend the *Criminal Code Act 1995* (Cwlth) so that acts or omissions carried out in good faith in accordance with a state or territory VAD law are not offences under subdivision G of division 474; and
- (9) invites the leaders of ACT Labor, the ACT Greens, the Canberra Liberals, Ms Carrick, Mr Emerson and any interested Member to sign a letter to all federal parliamentarians, attaching this motion, by 26 March 2026.

I want to say from the outset that this is not a debate about voluntary assisted dying.

That debate has been had. It has been had in every state. It has been had in this chamber at length, over years, with care and with sincerity on all sides. We passed our Voluntary Assisted Dying Act in 2024, and the scheme commenced on 3 November last year. This is not that debate. This is a simpler, yet in some ways equally tragic, question. It is this: now that voluntary assisted dying is legal, why are some dying Australians unable to access it?

We are an Assembly that knows something about being told that we do not quite count, when our access and rights are restricted. We know what it feels like when a federal law overrides the will of this legislature and the people of this territory. We lived with that for 25 years. We fought back, and we won. In late 2022, the federal parliament restored what should never have been taken away from us. We used that right. We did the work, and we did it properly. We passed a careful, compassionate, highly regulated scheme.

Now, we are here again, because while we were given back the right to legislate for voluntary assisted dying, while voluntary assisted dying has been operating in this country since mid-2019, nobody has fixed the federal law that limits how it can be delivered, resulting in devastating outcomes for clinicians and patients. Sections 474.29A and 474.29B of the Criminal Code Act, which is a commonwealth act, create criminal offences for using a carriage service—a phone, the internet, email, videoconferencing—to engage in what the law calls suicide-related material.

The code makes it an offence to use a carriage service to counsel or incite suicide or attempted suicide, or to promote or provide instruction on a particular method of committing suicide. These offences were introduced in 2005, primarily to combat pro-suicide chatrooms, and in response to Philip Nitschke's efforts to promote suicide methods for the terminally ill. That was occurring because voluntary assisted dying was not legal. It was not even being contemplated anywhere. They were written before voluntary assisted dying was legal anywhere in Australia, and they were not written with voluntary assisted dying in mind.

The law was ambiguous about whether it applied to voluntary assisted dying. In 2023, the Federal Court confirmed the worst fears of health professionals across the country. In *Carr v Attorney-General*, Justice Wendy Abraham found that these offences do capture voluntary assisted dying communications conducted under state and territory law. The word "suicide" in the Criminal Code, the court found, applies to a person ending their life under a lawful voluntary assisted dying scheme.

The court found a direct inconsistency between state voluntary assisted dying laws and the commonwealth Criminal Code, meaning that, to the extent of that inconsistency, state law is invalid. In effect, a federal law written for one purpose—preventing the promotion of self-harm—was found to have the unintended consequence of criminalising lawful, compassionate, regulated end-of-life care.

The practical effect is stark. A doctor cannot use telehealth to conduct a voluntary assisted dying consultation. A nurse practitioner cannot use the telephone to explain the process to a patient who is too ill to travel. A prescribing practitioner cannot send documentation electronically without risking prosecution, certainly in Queensland. Every substantive step must be face-to-face or on paper, or it is, potentially, a criminal

offence, with a penalty of up to \$313,000.

Here in the ACT, our scheme is working. In our first three months of operation, 14 people died after accessing voluntary assisted dying. Eighty-seven registered, and 61 had a first request accepted by an authorised practitioner at the time of reporting. The scheme is operating safely, compassionately and lawfully. That is a tribute to the practitioners who have put their hands up to be part of it, to the care navigators, and to the courage of the patients and families who have gone first.

Yet every single one of those practitioners is operating under the shadow of a federal criminal law. The Canberrans who live in the territory's rural area, or who travel to Canberra from Queanbeyan, Yass and the surrounding region—the people who use our health services but live across the border—face the full weight of this barrier, let alone someone who is frail, housebound or who cannot be easily moved—someone who might have respiratory issues or neurodegenerative issues. This is not just a problem for the states. It is a problem wherever, whenever, if ever a dying person cannot easily travel.

I want to address directly the federal government's explanation for its inaction, because it has now been given repeatedly, and it deserves a direct response. The current Attorney-General's office said this month that the interaction between federal law and state and territory voluntary assisted dying schemes raises "complex issues". The Attorney-General and the Minister for Health, we are told, continue to "consider the matter in consultation with states and territories".

Let us talk through what the evidence actually shows. The University of Queensland's peer-reviewed systematic review, published in the *Australian Health Review* late last year—a review of 230 articles from across the globe—found that Australia is the only country in the world with legislation preventing telehealth from being used for voluntary assisted dying. It is the only one. It is not the most cautious country; it is the only one without it. The researchers found nothing—nothing—in the literature to suggest that telehealth for voluntary assisted dying poses a risk. Instead, they found evidence, in jurisdiction after jurisdiction, that it is beneficial—more consultations, more informed decisions, more access for people who cannot travel.

New Zealand has allowed telehealth for voluntary assisted dying since its scheme commenced in 2021. Ann David, President of the End-of-Life Choice Society of New Zealand, said this year:

We are fortunate in New Zealand not to have this barrier. There have been no negative repercussions ... because of this.

In every country where voluntary assisted dying is legal, doctors and patients, guided by clinical standards, make sensible decisions about when telehealth is appropriate and when it is not. Nobody has to drive 1,000 kilometres. Nobody has to post a prescription and hope that it survives Australia Post. Describing the issue as complex is an excuse—a poor excuse.

There is also a suggestion, sometimes implicit but sometimes more direct, that there is no real demand for this reform—that it is niche, that it can wait, that it is only affecting

a handful of people, that it is a relatively new issue, and time is required to consider it and work through it. That is plainly not the case. From day one of Victoria's scheme, it issued guidance that included an expectation that all voluntary assisted dying consultations and assessments occur face-to-face because of the commonwealth Criminal Code. I quote from a seminal QUT paper from 2021:

Victorian doctors were already reporting by then that this poses an "immense burden" on very sick patients to travel or, if this is not possible, it requires doctors to travel large distances to see patients.

There are currently limited specialists willing to participate in voluntary assisted dying, leaving patients in rural and remote areas with constrained access.

The Commonwealth Government's refusal to remove this legal risk for doctors and associated patient burdens seems increasingly difficult to justify as voluntary assisted dying becomes lawful in more jurisdictions.

To illustrate this point, the Queensland Premier wrote to the Prime Minister in 2021, urging the code to be amended before their laws commenced at the beginning of 2023; the Australian Medical Association has written to the federal A-G about this issue as a matter of urgency; in December 2023; and, again, in May 2024, in a joint letter signed by every state and territory AMA president. The AMA's current president, Dr Danielle McMullen, just last year, said:

This is not a new issue and problems with the current legislation are well known to the federal government.

The AMA's 2025 position statement explicitly calls for the prohibition to be removed. The inaugural voluntary assisted dying conference in 2023 raised that one of the consistent pain points for practitioners and patients was telehealth restrictions causing delays and complicating the VAD process. There were three votes on policy issues over the two days of the conference, which I was lucky enough to attend: what are your top priorities for voluntary assisted dying reform, what three reforms do you think are most achievable, and which three reforms will be most beneficial to patients? Allowing telehealth to be used for voluntary assisted dying assessments topped each question.

The Law Council of Australia has called for urgent amendment to the code, saying Australians considering voluntary assisted dying deserve to be "armed with all the medical knowledge and support they deserve". Voluntary Assisted Dying Australia and New Zealand, the professional body representing our VAD practitioners, has said the inability to use telehealth is "unconscionable".

VAD review boards across the country are unanimous in recommending reform. Twenty or more of Australia's leading health organisations signed a joint statement calling on the federal government to act, including Beyond Blue, Lifeline, Everymind, and the Black Dog Institute. Peak suicide prevention organisations in Australia signed a statement saying that suicide and voluntary assisted dying are two very different things and that the conflation is damaging.

That is the groundswell; that is the breadth of it: every major medical body, every legal peak body, every review board, the suicide prevention sector, patients and families

across every state and territory.

In 2024, the member for Curtin, up on the big hill, introduced a private member's bill—a one-clause bill. It proposed that acts or omissions carried out in good faith in accordance with a state or territory voluntary assisted dying law are not offences under the relevant subdivision of the Criminal Code. The bill lapsed.

When the peak body for Australia's doctors, Australia's peak legal body, every review board, 20 or more health organisations, attorneys-general, health ministers and the suicide prevention sector are all calling for the same straightforward legislative fix, and a one-clause bill is allowed to lapse without a word of debate, that is not complexity. At best, it is inattention and, at worst, it is evasion. Yet people are dying in circumstances they did not choose, and they did not have to, if this law did not exist in the form that it does.

I want to say something about the particular cruelty of this situation that I do not think gets said enough. People affected by this are not people who have not thought through their decision. They are not people acting on impulse. Voluntary assisted dying is acting with courage. These are people who have engaged in the process, and they are ready to engage in all of the steps; then, having done so, and having gone through the mental anguish, they are told, "You might have this right, but whether you can actually exercise it depends on whether you can travel, whether you can sit in a car for hours in pain, whether the postal system works, whether a doctor can come to you."

This is in the face of the Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights, which affirms the right of every Australian to healthcare services that meet their needs. And Australia's international obligations require that health services be accessible to everyone without discrimination. We are failing that standard, and we have been failing it since the first state enacted voluntary assisted dying. It is a healthcare equity issue. It is a geographic equity issue. In the ACT's case, it is also a territory rights issue, because we fought for the right to legislate for voluntary assisted dying. We have legislated for it. It is operational, yet successive federal governments have left in place a law that undermines it.

The motion that is before the Assembly today calls on the federal parliament to resolve that no Australian should be disadvantaged in accessing lawful end-of-life care because of where they live or their capacity to travel; and urgently to introduce and debate a bill—to list the bill for debate—to amend the Criminal Code Act so that lawful voluntary assisted dying conduct is not captured by these provisions.

The people waiting for this reform are running out of time, by definition. Thousands across the country have navigated the system under the shadow of a federal criminal law that should have been fixed years ago. Many of them did so with dignity and grace, and without complaint. There are too many examples of families who have been failed by the system, by the law. Their families spoke for them, and we are speaking today.

The federal government has had the Carr decision since 23 November. It has had the AMA's urgent letters, the Law Council's position and Kate Chaney's bill. It has had three years of SCAG meetings. It has had the systematic review from UQ. It has had this Assembly's consistent advocacy. It has had all of it, but what it has not done is act.

We are calling on it, respectfully but without equivocation, to act—not at the next SCAG meeting, not after the next round of consultation, not when it is no longer complex, but now. For the people that this affects, there is no later. There is only right now. I commend the motion to the chamber.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (11.45): This motion goes to a fundamental principle of our health system: that care should be accessible, equitable and responsive to the needs of people—patients. I want to start by acknowledging my colleague, Minister Cheyne. We are all aware that her strong advocacy was instrumental in ensuring territory rights were restored to enable us to debate the establishment of a voluntary assisted dying scheme in the ACT. As her speech clearly showed, she is across the detail, and her passion for ensuring people can access healthcare services that meet their needs has not dimmed.

Voluntary assisted dying is already lawful in most Australian jurisdictions, with carefully designed safeguards. This debate is not about expanding eligibility for voluntary assisted dying, although I know that we will continue to have that debate at other times. It is about ensuring that lawful care can be delivered in a way that is practical, safe and fair. Currently, as Ms Cheyne so eloquently outlined, commonwealth laws relating to the carriage services create a legal barrier and uncertainty around the use of telehealth in the context of voluntary assisted dying. These provisions were not drafted with modern telehealth in mind, let alone contemporary end-of-life frameworks. Compared with other jurisdictions, the ACT does not have the same pressures in providing health services to rural and remote communities. We are a small jurisdiction, but that does not mean that access is equal.

Person-centred care means recognising that equity in health care is not just about where you live; it is also about a patient's capacity to engage with care. Even in the ACT, many people face very real barriers to attending in-person consultations. They may be living with advanced illness, in significant pain or experiencing profound fatigue. They may have mobility limitations or rely on carers to attend appointments. For families, there can be financial, emotional and logistical pressures in coordinating care. For these Canberrans, telehealth is not just a convenience; it is also the most practical way of enabling access to lawful healthcare services. This is especially true in the context of end-of-life care.

Patients seeking voluntary assisted dying are often in the late stages of serious illness. Requiring multiple in-person consultations can impose unnecessary physical strain and distress at an already vulnerable time. A compassionate, patient-centred system should minimise that burden wherever it can do so safely. The ability to access telehealth services to discuss voluntary assisted dying and receive assessments and support would not displace the protections provided through our rigorous safeguards. It would complement the face-to-face patient care that will continue to be required by most people from highly skilled general practitioners, nurses, allied health professionals and specialists. But the reality is that there is a limited number of voluntary assisted dying practitioners. Enabling access to these doctors and nurse practitioners by telehealth would simply provide greater choice and flexibility for patients and clinicians, so they can engage in a way that preserves the person's dignity and comfort. Choice is a

fundamental component of our voluntary assisted dying framework.

In addition to the impact on patients, families and carers, the current carriage service law also impacts significantly on health practitioners. Our health professionals should not have to worry about whether they are acting lawfully in their communications with patients or are potentially exposed to risk simply because of the ambiguity in the commonwealth's laws. That uncertainty serves no-one—not patients, not clinicians, and not the integrity of the system. A targeted amendment to the Criminal Code Act 1995 would provide clarity and confidence, ensuring that practitioners can deliver lawful care in good faith and in a way that works best for patients. I think Ms Cheyne articulated clearly how simple such an amendment would be. It has already been drafted. It has already been before the federal parliament.

Telehealth is now an established and essential part of healthcare delivery. Across our system, it is used to improve access, reduce burden on patients and deliver high-quality care. It is absolutely inconsistent to exclude one lawful health service from that model, particularly one as sensitive and highly regulated as voluntary assisted dying. Ultimately, this is a question of fairness, and it is one that state and territory ministers have raised repeatedly with the commonwealth minister, who does not have primary responsibility for the Criminal Code, but, as Ms Cheyne said, attorneys-general have also been having this conversation for far too long.

Without reform, inequities will persist. This motion calls for a measured technical amendment to commonwealth law that maintains existing protections while removing what we believe is an unintended barrier to lawful and compassionate care. It is about ensuring that our legal frameworks keep pace with how health care is actually delivered in a person-centred health system. I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (11.51): There is no question that voluntary assisted dying is one of the most sensitive and deeply personal areas of health care. It is precisely because of that sensitivity that the legal framework must be clear, workable and responsive to the realities of modern medical practice. The provisions of the Criminal Code Act 1995 relating to the use of a carriage service were never designed with voluntary assisted dying in mind. They were introduced, as has been articulated in this chamber already this morning, to prevent the misuse of telecommunications to promote or facilitate suicide, which is an objective that remains critically important and must continue to be upheld, but things have changed dramatically in this space.

The current law has created uncertainty for clinicians and patients operating within the lawful parameters of voluntary assisted dying laws across the states and our territory. An amendment to the code, which this motion advocates for, seeks to address that gap. It is a necessary step to ensure that healthcare professionals can communicate with their patients in a way that is consistent with contemporary care, particularly for those in regional and remote communities. But, of course, it does not only apply to those in regional and remote communities. If this change is made, it will instantly have a positive impact on the way that GPs on the ground in this jurisdiction are able to communicate with those under their care.

It is important to acknowledge that expanding access via telehealth and other electronic

communications introduces genuine and complex challenges. They have to be taken seriously, and I am sure they will be taken seriously. Unlike most other forms of health care, voluntary assisted dying involves the deliberate ending of a life. That distinction demands a higher threshold of oversight, stronger safeguards and extremely careful consideration of how care is delivered. Face-to-face interactions remain a critical component of those safeguards, and they always will remain. They allow clinicians to assess capacity more thoroughly, detect coercion, observe nonverbal cues and ensure decisions are being made freely without undue influence. These are not peripheral concerns; they are central to maintaining the integrity of voluntary assisted dying laws.

The use of telehealth raises legitimate risks that must be clearly recognised: reduced ability to fully verify a patient's environment and circumstance; greater difficulty in identifying subtle coercion or external pressure; challenges in confirming identity and ensuring informed voluntary consent; and increased potential for miscommunication in high-stakes, irreversible decisions. These are not theoretical concerns; they go directly to maintaining public trust and confidence in the system.

There is also a broader policy consideration. The commonwealth has a responsibility to maintain strong, consistent national protections against the misuse of communications technologies in relation to suicide. The reality is that any exemption, even a targeted one, must be carefully constructed to avoid unintended consequences beyond voluntary assisted dying. For these reasons, supporting this motion must go hand in hand with the clear expectation that safeguards are not diluted but reinforced, and that reform should be accompanied by robust clinical guidelines, clear accountability and ongoing oversight to ensure that risks are actively managed.

We know that there is a range of views in the community, and there is a range of views in my party when it comes to voluntary assisted dying. Minister Cheyne has suggested that this motion is not actually a debate on voluntary assisted dying, but it kind of still is, in that obviously it is intrinsically linked to it. As a consequence, the members of my party will have a conscience vote on this motion. I am certainly standing up and saying that I absolutely support this reform. We did not have a great deal of time to assess and consult, but the assessment that I have done and the consultation with those who were involved in the space certainly led me to believe very quickly that this is a change that should be made. I want to say that expanding access should never come at the cost of weakening the very protections that make this system safe, but I am certainly registering my support today.

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) (11.56): I am proud to speak in support of the motion moved this morning by Ministers Cheyne and Stephen-Smith calling for reforms to sections 474.29A and 474.29B of the Criminal Code Act 1995, the commonwealth act, to allow voluntary assisted dying consultations to be conducted by telehealth.

I am a passionate advocate for voluntary assisted dying. I believe that it is a fundamental human right for those who are experiencing intolerable suffering at the end of their life to choose how they die.

While the ACT was the second last jurisdiction to legislate voluntary assisted dying, our scheme is the most progressive in Australia. Ministers Cheyne and Stephen-Smith, thank you both for your work in establishing the scheme and for your ongoing work and advocacy now that the scheme is operational. You should both be very proud of what you have achieved.

Last term, I was privileged to be a member of the select committee which inquired into the bill. Ultimately, through my participation on the committee and in my dissenting report, my advocacy is based primarily around the fact that I believe that with appropriate safeguards, our voluntary assisted dying scheme should be as accessible as possible. Accessibility is a key consideration in where our act differs from other jurisdictions. But I think there are multiple ways that we can improve accessibility.

While I know this debate is not about expanding eligibility, I cannot forgo an opportunity to advocate for this. I believe our scheme should go further. Last term I drafted legislation and ultimately moved a motion proposing a model that I believe will make the scheme more accessible by beginning to address the question of capacity: the voluntary assisted dying attorney model combined the eligibility requirements of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Act and the ordinary powers that exist for making healthcare and end-of-life decisions under the enduring power of attorney model.

In May last year, Minister Stephen-Smith provided a response to the motion, stating that the government would do the work to explore models to address where an individual has lost capacity following the final assessment report. This may include enduring power of attorney or advanced care directives. I look forward to this question being explored further to expand access to voluntary assisted dying in the ACT.

Since COVID, telehealth has become more common in our community—and it may again, now that we are facing the implications of the conflict in the Middle East. Making healthcare accessible is one of the cornerstones of not only a strong public health system but a healthy society. On telehealth, the federal health department states:

Australians living in rural and remote areas need to travel long distances to see their healthcare provider. Telehealth improves their healthcare by improving access to timely services.

This directly supports the intent of the motion we are discussing here today.

As Attorney-General Cheyne stated, in *Carr v Attorney-General (Cth)*, the Federal Court held that the term “suicide” in the Criminal Code does apply to the ending of a person’s life through voluntary assisted dying. Carr notes that the relevant section of the Criminal Code was added in 2005, a time when voluntary assisted dying was not legal in any Australian jurisdiction. It is reasonable to argue that the views of society have changed from a time when voluntary assisted dying was not legal to now, when we have virtually all states and nearly all territories allowing access to voluntary assisted dying. The consequences of *Carr v Attorney-General* are significant. This decision means that practitioners risk criminal charges should they use email, phone or telehealth to discuss aspects of voluntary assisted dying.

While the Victorian legislation, which was the focus of Carr, is silent on suicide, section

8 of our ACT act explicitly provides that if a person dies by voluntary assisted dying, they did not die by suicide. Allowing a person to access voluntary assisted dying information through telehealth must not be viewed as a crime. The ongoing criminalisation of accessing VAD by telehealth is discriminatory. It places a grossly unfair burden on those who cannot easily access a doctor, or anyone else who is suffering intolerably and is seeking support or information. This is the antithesis of our legislation, which focuses on the ensuring the scheme is as accessible as possible.

Advocacy groups around Australia, as the Attorney-General stated, are also incredibly supportive and recognise the urgency and importance of this change. Dr McMullen, the president of the AMA, for example, states:

Doctors have an ethical duty to provide their patients with quality end-of-life care that strives to alleviate pain and suffering, supports an individual's values and preferences for care, and allows them to achieve the best quality of life possible.

Dr Linda Swan, CEO of Go Gentle, is also publicly supportive of these reforms, stating:

Telehealth should be available, when needed, to support all types of healthcare, including VAD.

The criminalisation of telehealth for voluntary assisted dying is also in stark contrast to the Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights. This charter provides that patients receive healthcare services and treatment that meets their needs.

Standing with my ACT Labor colleagues, I will proudly continue to advocate for improving access to voluntary assisted dying for those who wish to access it at the end of their life. I will be more than happy to add my signature to a letter to send to the federal government, and I hope that all other members of this place will join us to send a strong message regarding the importance of access to health care.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (12.02): I would like to thank Ministers Cheyne and Stephen-Smith for bringing this motion to the Assembly today, which I will be supporting, and for mobilising the Assembly to call on all of our counterparts up on the hill to progress this really important and completely logical reform.

I would also like to acknowledge the work of Kate Chaney MP, the Independent member for Curtin, who tried to progress these important reforms through the drafting and introduction of her Criminal Code amendment bill in 2024, which is referenced in the motion and was referenced in Ms Cheyne's remarks.

I understand that the federal Labor government blocked Ms Chaney's bill from progressing to the debate, and I appreciate that this motion expresses regret that it did not proceed. It is truly encouraging, I think, to see Minister Stephen-Smith and Minister Cheyne calling out their federal counterparts on this and being strong advocates for their constituents, for our community here in the ACT, who are overwhelmingly supportive and proud of our voluntary assisted dying scheme which we fought so hard for in the territory.

The reforms proposed are no-brainers. Even those who may have a philosophical opposition to voluntary assisted dying would, I hope, understand that this motion at its

core addresses a different issue: equitable access to healthcare and to human rights, and the fact that medical practitioners and others involved in end-of-life support may face criminal charges due to a legislative oversight that means they cannot engage in telehealth appointments or communicate over email or other digital means about voluntary assisted dying. The absolutely pervasive use of these forms of communication in 2026 makes them virtually impossible to avoid.

This is a sensible and straightforward correction that can and should be made as a priority, and it should have been already. The last thing those choosing voluntary assisted dying need, or those supporting others through voluntary assisted dying, is a threat of prosecution for a criminal offence. This is clearly a legacy issue: a simple case of the Criminal Code not having kept up with our safe, compassionate and lawful administration of voluntary assisted dying. There is no logical reason this should not be addressed with urgency.

I appreciate and I welcome Minister Cheyne's calls for an evidence-based approach, and I am shocked to hear that Australia is the only country that does not enable voluntary assisted dying via telehealth appointments. I also welcome her rebuke of suggestions by the federal government that the interactions between commonwealth and state and territory legislation on this matter are complex; this is a poor excuse.

I welcome the opportunity to sign the joint letter and thank the minister for circulating a draft ahead of this debate this morning. I also welcome the opportunity to join my colleagues across the Assembly in calling on our federal counterparts to prioritise this law reform to ensure equitable access to the humane choice of a peaceful death through voluntary assisted dying.

MR COCKS (Murrumbidgee) (12.05): I think it is important to provide a bit of a contrary view to some of the views put forward so far in this place, because it is very clear in this debate that, no matter the line in the motion—notwithstanding personal views on VAD or supporting VAD or not—this is very much a discussion around voluntary assisted dying. It invokes questions of conscience and, indeed, it is not the simple consideration that some members seem to think it is.

I am quite disappointed at the view that seems to dismiss any concerns about complex interactions, because essentially what we are being asked to do is call for an urgent change to a federal law that is not within the scope of this Assembly's jurisdiction. It is not like the territory rights debate that we have had previously in this place. That is very important to understand up-front. It is not an area where the commonwealth is simply saying, "We can over-rule states and territories and therefore we are going to stop them doing what they want." Actually, what we are talking about is a law that was introduced very specifically to deal with a very clear risk around suicide and suicide prevention.

When the law was introduced—and it was very clearly discussed in the debate then—it was introduced because there was a real need to protect vulnerable individuals from people on the internet with destructive intent to counsel or incite others to take their own lives. It was targeted towards places and people on the internet that advocate suicide, discourage people from seeking psychiatric or other help, and provide explicit suicide method instructions. That is very important context when we start talking about interactions between commonwealth laws and what the ACT does. There is an

absolutely important and imperative policy rationale for why this particular law was introduced. I do not believe it is as simple as the very minor change that has been suggested.

I completely acknowledge that, as things stand, there are barriers to doctors and practitioners and, indeed, to people who wish to discuss aspects of voluntary assisted dying via the internet or include other people in a consultation around voluntary assisted dying. However, a risk management approach is absolutely essential whenever you are looking at any sort of legislative change. The comment was made that, for the people this affects, there is no later. I agree with the Attorney in that respect: for the people this affects, there is no later. For anyone who is impacted by the risks that this legislative change was introduced to impact, there could be no later.

In its current form, I could not support this particular motion. It is more complex than has been suggested here today, and I think it is critical that a measured approach is taken to considering matters of life. It should not be a matter for a rushed, urgent piece of legislation. This is a space in which the commonwealth ought to consider the balance between ensuring states and territories can deliver health services and mitigating against suicide risks that can be exacerbated using the internet, video conferencing, and carriage services. This is a space where there are additional risks. Indeed, when a practitioner is undertaking a consultation with someone via telehealth, you do not know who else is in the room at the other end. You do not know what views are being put behind the scenes. There are risks. It is important that we do not decline to dogmatic ideology that promotes one policy outcome to the exclusion of consideration of potential impacts on the life of individuals under other scenarios. I think it is critical that the commonwealth look at this but in a measured and considered way.

MS LEE (Kurrajong) (12.11): As both Mr Parton and Mr Cocks noted, this issue is a conscience vote for the Canberra Liberals. Every member of the Canberra Liberals party room will have a personal and free choice to vote with their conscience on this motion. I confirm that my comments today are my personal comments as a Liberal member of this Assembly. I rise to speak in support of this motion.

Back in 2024, when we debated the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2023, I spoke in strong support of the then bill. The reasons I gave then stand today. I support voluntary assisted dying because, fundamentally, I believe that the right to choose how we live and how we die is a profound expression of individual autonomy. At its core, voluntary assisted dying is about respecting personal choice at the end of life. I believe that every one of us should have the right to choose what is right for ourselves. Indeed, one could argue that the right to decide is the ultimate expression of the individual, which I believe is a core Liberal belief.

At the core of this motion is the principle that no Australian should be denied lawful and compassionate end-of-life care simply because of where they live or their capacity to travel. As members in this place, we have the responsibility to ensure that all Canberrans, no matter their location or capacity to travel, have the same access to VAD as everyone else, if they so choose.

In 2022, the federal parliament restored the territory's long-overdue right to legislate for voluntary assisted dying. This Assembly took that responsibility seriously. We

debated carefully, we listened respectfully to differing views, in 2024 we passed the Voluntary Assisted Dying Act, and, on 3 November 2025, the ACT's VAD scheme commenced. That achievement matters. It matters because voluntary assisted dying is about dignity, autonomy and compassion at the end of life.

As this motion outlines, telehealth and electronic communications are integral to how modern health systems function. They are essential for people who are frail, housebound, living with disability, or residing in rural and regional communities. Yet, despite VAD being lawful in the ACT and in every state, except, of course, the Northern Territory, federal criminal law has not kept pace. Sections 474.29A and 474.29B of the Criminal Code were never designed with voluntary assisted dying in mind. Yet, in the case of *Carr v Attorney-General (Commonwealth)* [2023] FCA 1500, the Federal Court confirmed that these provisions capture communications about VAD, even when those communications are lawful under state or territory law. Doctors, nurses, and patients acting entirely within ACT law risk criminal liability simply for speaking over the phone, using telehealth or sending an email. This is not acceptable.

This motion is not about re-opening the debate on voluntary assisted dying. That debate has been had. This motion is about access and it is about consistency. It is about ensuring that federal law does not actively frustrate state and territory laws that parliament has clearly chosen to enact. The Australian Medical Association, legal experts and consumer advocates have all urged the federal parliament to act. This is not going to come as a surprise to our federal colleagues. A private member's bill was introduced into the federal parliament in 2024 by Kate Chaney MP. The bill sought to make a simple change to the Criminal Code, clarifying that lawful VAD is not within the definition of suicide under the relevant section. In introducing her bill, Ms Chaney said:

I have heard heartbreaking stories of terminally ill people travelling long distances in agony ...

Pharmacists are afraid to even discuss processes with doctors over the phone.

This tragic anomaly is causing unnecessary harm, pain and distress to dying people and also to their friends and families.

It is difficult to argue with this. This motion is straightforward. It is saying to the federal parliament: "Fix this. Get on and introduce the necessary amendments to make it clear that acts or omissions carried out in accordance with legal frameworks in state and territory VAD schemes are not criminal offences." They now need to get on with it. I support the motion.

MRS MORRIS (Brindabella) (12.17): I want to begin by acknowledging what a deeply sensitive and personal issue this is for so many people. This is the first time that I have spoken on this issue. That we even have to contemplate the ending of someone's life as a means of managing their pain is a reminder of the broken world that we live in. It is a world that is marked with suffering; there are some decisions that are final and, once they have been made, they can never be undone, and there can never be any going back. That is why I approach this issue with the deepest sense of gravity and respect, and I am so sorry that I am crying.

For many of us, this is an issue about compassion, and restoring the dignity and autonomy that have otherwise been stripped away by human frailties. I know there are many people in our community who have endured suffering and they have watched their loved one die. Death under any circumstance is a tragic experience. And it is even more tragic when the experience is so prolonged and suffering that even the most advanced medical care cannot overcome it. My heart mourns for anyone who has experienced that pain, and I have spoken to those individuals in our community. For others, there are deeply-held moral, ethical and social considerations, and concerns around the risk to patients of coercion—essentially, a form of domestic violence.

Going to the closest family and friends, to regret, and to the trust and integrity of our medical professions, these reservations centre on the sanctity of life, a duty to protect the most vulnerable in our society, irrespective of their age, health or capacity, and the preservation of the relationship between a doctor and patient, historically protected under the precept of “first do no harm”. It is for these morally and emotionally charged reasons, both for and against, that the Liberal Party does regard this to be a matter of conscience, and that is why we will be viewing this accordingly. As Ms Lee said, everything that we say is in our personal capacity.

The question that we are being asked today involves, through advocacy to the commonwealth, effectively making euthanasia more readily available to the community through telehealth services, email and digital communications, without consideration being given to safeguards and medical integrity. The implications of such a change are profound and irreversible, and I am concerned that it was brought to the attention of this Assembly just three days ago, without any consultation or proper examination.

I note that the 2024 select committee inquiry into voluntary assisted dying, which was undertaken before my time in the Assembly, never examined this question of accessing voluntary assisted dying online or by telehealth. The decision to end one’s life is the most irreversible act one can make, and that is why it is important that we give consideration to appropriate safeguards and requirements to protect the vulnerable patient, their loved ones and the medical profession.

I want briefly to touch on some of the concerns that I have. Removing the requirement for personal doctor-patient interaction from end-of-life conversations risks enabling undue pressure or coercion which, as I said, is effectively a form of domestic violence and, in and of itself, is a growing issue that I know this government, our police and our frontline services are working very hard to counter. Only by sitting in a room with a patient can a doctor truly detect a person’s capacity to freely consent. They can read the room, and they can sense the atmosphere and the body language of individuals within that room. They can assess whether the hand on the shoulder is an act of comfort or coercion. Behind a screen, a doctor cannot see whether there is another person in the room, hiding just out of sight, exerting quiet coercion over the patient. Given the gravity and finality of death, a doctor cannot afford to get this wrong.

There is then the unanswered question of how far a telehealth consultation in the case of voluntary assisted dying will be permitted to go. I know that proponents will argue that it is just to provide them with more information. However, this motion makes no reference to the scope. There are no limitations or safeguards in this motion and, as it stands, this motion calls for an endorsement of laws that might enable a person to make

an irreversible decision online, without the comfort and counselling and, critically, the safeguards that can only be provided by human company.

I know that we live in a digital age, where all aspects of our lives are undertaken online. We shop, we bank, we work and we play online. But I must contend that the decision to end one's life is too profound and too irreversible to simplify over Zoom or with a phone call, when someone and their family are in the darkest, most difficult and most vulnerable point in their lives.

We are fortunate here in the ACT that we do not have the tyranny of distance with healthcare challenges that jurisdictions with remote and regional communities have. Remote and regional communities present legitimate healthcare challenges for other jurisdictions in ways that even the health minister has acknowledged that the ACT does not have to deal with.

Again, I want to reiterate what a deeply sensitive and personal issue this is for many people in our community. Yesterday, I met briefly with Dr Kerrie Aust, and she shared with me some of her concerns with the current federal legislative settings. By the end of our conversation, I was a blubbing mess, kind of like I am now, because I find this issue to be deeply complex and morally challenging, and I find it very difficult not to get emotional. I recognise how strongly members of our community and ministers feel about this issue.

I put my hand up to serve in this place, to fight for my community, to help to give them hope in the future, and I take my position here very seriously. I understand my responsibility and the power of my vote—and, on an issue like this, where, by my vote, and by the vote of each member here, Canberrans will live or die. I have not reached a position where I can, in good conscience, and in faithful service to the people that I represent, support this motion.

With the greatest respect to everyone here and in our community, I cannot sign myself up to be a participant in the end of someone's life, especially when there has been no consideration or examination of the risks and the safeguards of online voluntary assisted dying services.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Tough**) adjourned to a later hour.

Sitting suspended from 12.26 to 2 pm.

Questions without notice

Canberra Institute of Technology—Chief Executive Officer

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Skills. Minister, I refer to documents tabled yesterday afternoon in relation to the appointment of the CIT CEO. In the email from your Chief of Staff to the CIT board, dated 19 June 2025, it says:

I have discussed with the Minister who agrees the Public Sector Standards Commissioner is the appropriate entity to consider these matters. While it may have already been included, we ask that the referral ask the Commissioner to consider Dr McNeill's conduct during the recruitment process.

Minister, was this matter referred to the Public Sector Standards Commissioner, as per that email? If so, when?

MR PETTERSSON: I will take that one on notice and seek guidance from the CIT board as to the actions undertaken.

MR PARTON: Minister, how can you retain confidence in the CIT board if you do not even know in the context of question time when or if the Public Sector Standards Commissioner investigation commenced, is concluded or is in the process?

MR PETTERSSON: I will take that one on notice to ensure I provide accurate information. I have, I believe, an understanding of the events that have occurred in that space, but I would like to take it on notice to provide absolute certainty and not mislead the Assembly.

MRS MORRIS: Minister, what have you done to satisfy yourself that the CIT board has taken all necessary action on this matter?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mrs Morris for the question. I have sought to respond appropriately at each stage in this process. In December, upon learning of a substantiation of a finding of misconduct, I sought the establishment of an independent review of the board's processes in this matter. I am awaiting the outcome of that independent review, which will guide any future decisions.

Canberra Institute of Technology—Chief Executive Officer

MR PARTON: My question is to the minister for skills. Minister, I refer to documents tabled yesterday afternoon in relation to the appointment of the CIT CEO, which included a letter from the ACT Integrity Commission, which was sent to you enclosing a copy of the anonymous complaint. The complaint states:

Initial findings were that out of the multiple complaints and PIDs submitted, there were over 40 categories of wrongdoing that warranted investigation and these included reports of maladministration of salaries budgets, maladministration of temporary and contract staff, chronic and substantial waste of public money (over \$100M), conflicts of interest in recruitment, conflicts of interest in procurement, improper engagement of private contractors ...

Minister, in letters to the CIT chair, you rightly expressed your deep concern about the possible reputational damage this could cause to CIT. Given your deep concern about this, what action have you taken to find out whether any of these allegations formed part of the finding of misconduct by TAFE NSW?

MR PETTERSSON: I would like to thank Mr Parton for the question. As he is well versed in the correspondence, I would direct him to it. It outlines the actions I have undertaken, including in December seeking the establishment of an independent review of these processes to inform any future decisions.

MR PARTON: Minister, are you saying that you have never sought information from anybody, be that TAFE NSW or any other relevant body, on what the actual misconduct

was?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Parton for the question. I recognise the distinct and separate responsibilities that I hold and that the CIT board holds. Central to consideration of these matters must be the actions of the CIT board who are responsible for her appointment and ongoing employment. As such, I do not conduct my affairs with a mind to a direct relationship to the CIT CEO.

MR COCKS: Minister, how can you express deep concern over the potential reputational damage to CIT but not take any direct action to alleviate this concern?

MR PETTERSSON: I thank Mr Cocks for the question. I have sought to respond appropriately at each stage of this process and I will continue to do so. I am currently awaiting the results of an independent review which I commissioned in December, which will inform any future decisions.

Macquarie—swimming pool

MS CLAY: My question is to the planning minister. Minister, Access Canberra is in negotiation with the Big Splash leaseholders about the future of Big Splash. There has been very little information issued by Access Canberra about the status of those discussions. Community members tell me they saw construction workers at Big Splash this week from construction company ShevGroup. The community wants to know what these workers were doing there. In fact, I have just had an update from one of those community members, two minutes ago, saying that the site is now being ripped up. Was the construction company ShevGroup maintaining the site for safety and doing engineering checks on the slides? Or were they scoping the site for demolition and redevelopment?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Clay for her question. I have been advised today that the owner of the Big Splash water park has advised the ACT government of their intention to commence work to secure the site with new fencing, as well as work to empty the pools and undertake clean-up of the site. The government was advised that works are to commence this week. So, if you are seeing works on site then our assumption is that they are the works to clean up the site.

Obviously, Access Canberra continues to undertake an investigation in relation to the Big Splash matter. I do not have any further update from Access Canberra to provide to the Assembly.

MS CLAY: Minister, are these works consistent with a future use on that site of a pool and a water park?

MR STEEL: Nothing has indicated anything to the contrary, Mr Speaker. The works are as advised in the previous answer to the question.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, as the ACT community owns the land, when can we expect an update from the ACT government, Access Canberra or the owners of Big Splash about the next steps for Big Splash?

MR STEEL: Once the investigation has progressed, Access Canberra has committed that they would provide an update at an appropriate time about the regulatory action that they are undertaking. But, obviously, if there are matters such as the update which I have just provided in relation to the clean-up of Big Splash that can be provided, I will do so to this Assembly and the public.

Canberra Stadium

MR PARTON: My questions to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, concerns are growing by the day about the condition of Canberra Stadium not only in areas used by patrons but also in facilities relied upon by visiting sporting teams, including change rooms and the coaches box.

Given this is the territory's premier sporting venue, and with the Raiders and Brumbies games this weekend, will the government now commission an independent safety audit?

MR BARR: That work is already in place. There is a comprehensive asset management plan for the stadium, and the government is actioning that plan.

MR PARTON: Chief Minister, do you accept that players, staff, visitors and workers are entitled to safe, functional, hygienic and professionally maintained facilities?

MR BARR: Certainly, that is the objective, so yes. What did happen last Thursday was that the stadium was hit with an extraordinary rain event.

Mr Parton: Yeah, but come on!

MR BARR: No; it was hit with—

Members interjecting—

MR BARR: The Bureau of Meteorology issued a severe thunderstorm warning at 6.26 pm warning that the thunderstorm was slow-moving, and it would lead to flash flooding. It did, Mr Speaker.

MR MILLIGAN: Chief Minister, if the NRL and Super Rugby find Canberra Stadium is no longer fit for purpose, what is plan B?

MR BARR: Well, that is a hypothetical question, because neither organisation has made such a suggestion. But Manuka Oval is of course available for elite sport and has hosted games in the past, and there are other rectangular football venues in the city.

Roads—procurement

MR EMERSON: My question is to the Minister for Transport.

As discussed in this chamber on 24 February this year, senior officials in the ACT government signed off on a \$3 million settlement to a contractor for work on the Gundaroo Drive duplication, despite an independent adjudicator rejecting the contractor's initial \$7.5 million claim and finding that the firm was due less than

\$830,000 for a progress payment. Minister, has any settlement deed or payment of a similar nature been made by the ACT government to the same contractor for works on the Monaro Highway upgrade? If so, how much was paid?

MS CHEYNE: Mr Speaker, this is a question for me. I will have to take it on notice, Mr Emerson, but I might be able to come back by the end of today. I think I can come back quicker than 30 days.

MR EMERSON: Minister, has there been any advice given or received within the ACT government not to award the Monaro Highway job to the same contractor? If so, what was that advice and can you please table it?

MS CHEYNE: I will take it on notice.

MS CARRICK: Minister, do you have confidence that the ACT government is getting value for money on its road projects?

MS CHEYNE: Yes.

ACT public service—enterprise bargaining

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for the Public Service and pertains to the current impasse between the ACT government and the CPSU on their public service pay deal. Noting that the CPSU is now the single-largest union affiliate to the ALP and by far the largest union of the ALP left faction—the faction to which you belong—

Ms Stephen-Smith: True that!

MR PARTON: Minister, can you explain to this Assembly how it is not a massive conflict of interest that you are, on behalf of ACT taxpayers, negotiating with the union that is primarily responsible for ensuring your preselection as a Labor candidate?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Parton for the question, but it portrays a fundamental misunderstanding of ACT Labor preselection processes. We have a 100 per cent rank-and-file preselection and the majority of Labor Party members in the ACT are actually not faction members. To correct the understanding of the way the Labor Party works, not only are we the most transparent party, in having our conference open to the media, but we also have a full rank-and-file preselection. Everybody knows that I am a member of the Community and Public Sector Union—it is on my declaration of interests—and everyone here clearly understands that I am also a member of the left faction. There is no conflict, and any interest is very transparent.

MR PARTON: Are you a member of the same Labor branch as CPSU Regional Secretary Maddy Northam? Do the two of you discuss these matters either before, during or after branch meetings?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I am a member of the same Labor branch as Ms Northam. We discuss these matters regularly in many fora. That is the way of the world: these discussions take place. But I would note that formal negotiations in relation to enterprise agreements are held by our public servants. They are the ones drafting clauses and

bringing them to the government and to cabinet for consideration. And decisions are not made by me alone; they are made by relevant ministers in different portfolios, and they then go through an Expenditure Review Committee and a cabinet process, as is appropriate, before any agreement would go to ballot.

MR CAIN: Minister, if the CPSU were to withdraw their support for you at the next preselection, would you have a snowball's chance in hell of getting preselected?

Mr Pettersson: Point of order: that question is wildly unacceptable and entertaining hypothetical matters at a minimum.

MR SPEAKER: I have to agree, Mr Pettersson. We will move on to new questions.

Sustainable Household Scheme

MS TOUGH: My question is to the Minister for Finance. Minister, the ACT government's Sustainable Household Scheme has provided significant benefits to Canberrans and works towards creating a cleaner future. Could you please provide the Assembly with an update on the Sustainable Household Scheme?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Tough for her question. Indeed, the Sustainable Household Scheme continues to deliver real cost-of-living relief while driving our transition to a cleaner energy future. In last year's budget, we committed a further \$75 million to expand the scheme, ensuring more households can access low-interest loans for energy efficiency upgrades. Since commencing in July 2021, the scheme has supported more than 27,000 households to take practical action to reduce their energy use and bills by investing in technologies like rooftop solar, battery storage, and efficient heating and cooling, as well as to purchase electric vehicles. These upgrades are not just good for the environment but also delivering real, tangible cost-of-living relief for around one in eight homes in Canberra.

Collectively, households participating in the scheme have generated more than \$100 million in lifetime bill savings. At the same time, the scheme has driven a substantial increase in renewable energy generation across our city, helping to reduce emissions and support our transition to a net-zero future. This is a policy that is working as intended—cutting emissions, lowering bills and making sustainable choices more accessible for everyday households.

MS TOUGH: Minister, can you provide an update to the Assembly on the popularity of different products available on the scheme?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary. The data from the Sustainable Household Scheme shows that Canberrans are highly engaged with and responsive to both new technologies and broader policy settings. The Sustainable Household Scheme complements the Albanese Labor government's Cheaper Home Batteries Program, which commenced on 1 July 2025. SHS data shows that additional support has made battery storage even more accessible, and households are clearly recognising the value of storing and using their own solar energy. Battery systems have accounted for more than half of all loan applications this financial year—around 53 per

cent; up from only about 10 per cent prior to 1 July 2025. Over the life of the scheme, 63 megawatt hours of battery storage have been delivered, which is enough to fully charge 170 Transport Canberra electric buses, I am told.

At the same time, rooftop solar remains one of the most popular and impactful products under the scheme, and it continues to play a critical role, particularly for low-income households—the only ones eligible for solar under the current rules—because it delivers immediate and ongoing bill reductions. We are also seeing a strong uptake in electrification technologies, like efficient heating and cooling, as households move away from gas and towards all-electric homes. Taken together, these trends show that Canberrans are not just participating in the scheme but are also making smart, forward-looking decisions that reduce their bills and improve energy resilience.

Mr Werner-Gibbings: A supplementary?

Mr Braddock: A supplementary?

MR SPEAKER: Mr Werner-Gibbings, a supplementary?

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, which areas of Canberra have benefited most from the Sustainable Household Scheme?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the supplementary and Mr Braddock for his efforts. Honestly, I was expecting it to be Ms Clay.

The benefits of the Sustainable Household Scheme are being felt right across Canberra. It is particularly encouraging to see strong uptake in some of our outer suburbs. Belconnen has seen the highest participation, accounting for more than 7,000 loans—around 28 per cent of the scheme uptake. Mr Werner-Gibbings and Ms Tough will both be pleased to know that the figure is closely followed by Tuggeranong at more than 6,800 loans, reflecting 27 per cent of uptake, and Gungahlin at 21 per cent for more than 5,300 loans. This distribution reflects where the scheme can actually have the greatest impact: areas with a high proportion of detached homes, where upgrades like rooftop solar and batteries can be more easily installed. It also shows that the scheme is reaching a diverse cross-section of the community, including families, who stand to benefit the most from reduced energy bills. The strong participation in Tuggeranong demonstrates that this is not an inner city-only initiative.

The scheme is delivering meaningful cost-of-living relief in parts of Canberra where households can really significantly benefit from lower energy bills. This is a demonstration of ACT Labor's commitment to taking practical and progressive measures to support households and reduce emissions through a scheme that is equitable, accessible and delivering for the whole community. At this particular point in time, I would note that there was some recent media in relation to the increased interest in purchasing electric vehicles, which are also eligible for a loan under the scheme for eligible households.

Domestic Violence Crisis Service—funding

MR RATTENBURY: My question is to the Minister for the Prevention of Domestic,

Family and Sexual Violence. Minister, in recent public comments about funding for the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, you indicated that the territory would not leave DVCS high and dry and that interim cost pressures would be addressed. This is very welcome. You also said, “DVCS is not the only organisation that is facing a funding cliff.” How many organisations are you aware of that are facing a funding cliff?

DR PATERSON: That was in reference to DVCS and CRCC, who were both facing a funding cliff mid-year.

MR RATTENBURY: Minister, can you outline to the Assembly what level of funding will be provided to DVCS for the 2026-27 financial year, and whether you have committed to ongoing funding or just a one-off at this point for next year?

DR PATERSON: As Mr Rattenbury would be aware, we are currently undertaking a budget process at the moment. So these are matters that are for the consideration of the ERC and cabinet over the coming months. In reference to that particular funding cliff, we have made DVCS and CRCC aware that there is a guarantee that particular funding will extend until next year to try to alleviate some of the pressure and the concern around that funding in particular ending, but these are ongoing conversations we will have through the budget process.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, when will the other organisations facing a funding cliff be given clarity about their funding for future years so that they can plan their services and give their staff some certainty over their jobs?

DR PATERSON: Yes, so we are working through a budget process at the moment. As soon as that process is finalised, I will look forward to communicating with other services and programs that may be ending mid-year.

Teachers—enterprise bargaining

MR MILLIGAN: Mr Speaker, my question is to minister for education. Minister, in question time yesterday, you said you maintained confidence in your directorate's ability to negotiate with the teachers in good faith. Minister, how can you retain that confidence when the education union clearly does not share this confidence?

MS BERRY: Thank you for the question. I am confident that the Education Directorate will negotiate in good faith with the education union. We have gotten to a stage of the negotiations where the AEU has expressed frustrations. They have expressed those frustrations with me and with the education directorate. We are communicating with them, and we are still on track to continue those negotiations in good faith. Of course, at the end of the day, if the education union is not happy with those negotiations, then they can take action—which they have alluded to in their communications to me. But in the conversations that I have also had with the education union, I have indicated that I do take these negotiations seriously and that I am keen to continue our negotiations, and so is the Education Directorate.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, what have you instructed your directorate to do, to demonstrate they are willing to genuinely engage in the bargaining process?

MS BERRY: I have discussed the matter with the Director-General of the Education Directorate. I have discussed it with the education union. And I have expressed my willingness to continue to have good faith negotiations with the education directorate, and with the education union.

MS BARRY: Minister, what was the date of the last meeting held between the Director-General of the Education Directorate and the leadership of the AEU, on the bargaining process?

MS BERRY: Yesterday, 25 March, I believe there was a meeting with the director-general and the education union about a range of different issues including the negotiation process.

Fuel security—impact on food security

MS CARRICK: My question is to the Chief Minister.

Chief Minister, Many Canberrans are increasingly anxious about the effects of the war in the Middle East on fuel and food prices. These concerns are compounded by existing cost-of-living pressures, with high housing costs and rising interest rates leading to many of Canberra's adults now being considered vulnerable to financial shocks.

Recent ACTCOSS data shows a sharp rise in poverty and disadvantage, with escalating demand on community organisations providing food and other essential support.

Chief Minister, have you called a cabinet meeting to discuss contingency plans to prepare for potential impacts on food security and cost-of-living pressures for vulnerable households?

MR BARR: Yes, the cabinet Security and Emergency Management Committee has met this week.

MS CARRICK: Chief Minister, has the government consulted with food relief providers and the community sector, which are already experiencing a sharp increase in demand, and what immediate support is being considered to ensure these organisations can continue to meet basic food needs?

MR BARR: Yes, certainly the government through both the community services directorate and, indeed, in the more coordinated mechanism across whole-of-government, and working with our commonwealth counterparts as well as part of a national approach here, are engaging with all different sectors of the community and the economy to seek to understand impacts to date and to plan for future contingencies. There will be a national cabinet meeting next week.

MR EMERSON: Chief Minister, what other levers is the government prepared to use to minimise cost pressures on households and charities, and what is being done now to ensure access to affordable food is retained?

MR BARR: I am not announcing government policy in question time, Mr Speaker. But, certainly, we are aware of the issues. We are getting information across all sectors

in all states and territories. There is a very strong desire for a nationally coordinated approach here.

As we are an island within New South Wales most of our distribution is part of a broader New South Wales-ACT footprint, so we are working closely with the New South Wales government and the commonwealth government. Question time is not the forum to announce government policy, but I will repeat that there is a national cabinet meeting next week, and this will be a national approach.

Nurse-led walk-in centres

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, the federal member for Fenner recently circulated a newsletter to residents in Gungahlin in which he states he has been “working hard” to deliver a network of Medicare urgent-care clinics in Canberra. The member for Fenner further states that there are already five urgent-care clinics in the ACT, with a sixth on the way. Minister, can you please confirm whether there are plans to move from the current nurse-led operating model to the urgent-care clinic model which includes the addition of general practitioners in these centres?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Castley for the question, but I am surprised that she is unaware that the walk-in centres have been part of the Medicare urgent-care clinic network for some years now. There is now, of course, another urgent-care clinic that has recently been opened in Phillip, so that is the sixth that the member for Fenner was referring to. But walk-in centres with a nurse-led model have been part of the urgent-care clinic network for some time.

Mr Cocks: A point of order under 118AA. I acknowledge that the minister has attempted to respond to a question about what networks these clinics belong to, but the question was clear and very specific about the model of the centres.

MR SPEAKER: I do not think there is a point of order under 118AA, because she did respond to it. There was a question about whether doctors would be incorporated. She did not go to that, so even though she responded, there was a bit of a relevance issue, I would accept. But she has concluded her answer, unless she is going to respond to the point of order. Minister?

Ms Stephen-Smith: No, it is all good.

MR SPEAKER: It is on the boundary, Mr Cocks, but I am going to let this one go through to the keeper. A supplementary question?

MS CASTLEY: Minister, so that I can confirm that I understand you correctly, there are no plans to move from the current nurse-led operating model to urgent-care clinics; they are one and the same?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Yes, I can confirm that Ms Castley’s understanding is correct. There is no plan to introduce doctors into our nurse-led walk-in centres. I think I described them, in response to the first question, as nurse-led walk-in centres. They are also part of the urgent-care clinic network, and co-funded by the commonwealth as urgent-care clinics. This has been the case for some years. It was announced years ago

that the commonwealth would start to co-fund walk-in centres and expand the scope of services available in walk-in centres, and provide funding for additional equipment like slit lamps, that enable our fantastic advanced practice nurses, nurse practitioners, with the training to use a slit lamp to look in people's eyes and identify if there is a minor injury to the eye that they can then treat. There are a range of other expansions of scope for our nurse-led walk-in centres, as part of the urgent-care clinic network and as urgent-care clinics.

Water—data centres

MISS NUTTALL: My question is to the Chief Minister. It is with regard to the regional water supply and economic development. Chief Minister, you were quoted in a *Region* article last week in reference to the development of data centres in the ACT and water use. The quote was:

... the ACT's current water supply could cope for another 10 to 15 years, but the government faced a decision after that ...

Chief Minister, what modelling has been done to underpin this assertion? And what is the decision that you are referring to?

MR BARR: Thank you. In relation to the ACT's water storages that work occurs in partnership with Icon Water. In relation to data centre water use, the data centres that principally operate in the ACT have closed circuit water recycling, so they are not big users of water.

MISS NUTTALL: Chief Minister, do the 10 to 15 years account for additional uses such as data centres or do they only account for expected ACT population growth?

MR BARR: There are a number of factors that impact future water demand and supply projections. Population is definitely a factor. Climate change would be another.

MS CLAY: Minister, has the government taken into account future demands on the ACT water supply by surrounding New South Wales regions that also plan to grow in population? And have any New South Wales local governments sought access to the supply of ACT water?

MR BARR: Yes, we have. And, yes, the Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council, who we already supply water to through a longstanding agreement that predates self-government, have sought access to extra water, and there is an in-principle agreement. New South Wales would then have to replace that water for the ACT.

Roads—safety and maintenance

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. Minister, can you update the Assembly on how the government is delivering safer, more reliable roads for Canberra through targeted upgrades, maintenance and investment across the territory?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for his question. This financial year, the

ACT government has made strong progress on the road resurfacing and rehabilitation program, and we have been welcoming some dry weather—at least until recently. To date, approximately 85 per cent of the planned resealing program, around 820,000 square metres, has been completed along with 40 per cent of the asphalt resurfacing program, which is around 60,000 square metres of the planned 150,000 square metres. Micro-surfacing works were completed in early March, and we expect the remaining resurfacing works to be completed by mid-May, weather permitting.

The government is also delivering targeted rehabilitation projects through the commonwealth Roads to Recovery program. Projects delivered this year include on Kuringa Drive in Spence, Sulwood Drive in Kambah and Sawmill Circuit in Hume. Rehabilitation works on Wiluna and Lithgow streets in Fyshwick will commence in April and further projects including Pialligo Avenue—and I know Minister Stephen-Smith will be excited to hear this—Barrier Street in Fyshwick, Gungahlin Drive in Mitchell and Overall Avenue in Casey are currently in design and investigation. We are also continuing to roll out targeted road safety improvements across the territory, including intersection upgrades, pedestrian crossings, school safety upgrades, traffic calming and road safety barriers at a range of locations across Canberra.

MR WERNER-GIBBINGS: Minister, how are these investments improving everyday travel and safety outcomes for Canberrans?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the supplementary. These are investments that make a real difference to everyday travel for Canberrans. Road resurfacing and rehabilitation works improve skid resistance, reduce potholes and extend the life of our roads, which makes journeys safer and more comfortable for drivers, cyclists and bus passengers. Targeted safety upgrades are also improving safety where it matters most. For example, pedestrian crossing improvements have been completed in Deakin, Gowrie and Barton and new raised crossings, refuge islands and traffic-calming measures will soon be under construction at Watson and Kambah.

In more rural and high-risk areas, new road safety barriers have been installed in locations including Gibraltar Falls, Long Gully Road, Erindale Drive and Brindabella Road, with new line marking also completed on Long Gully Road earlier this year. The ACT government has also adjusted speed limits, to reduce the risk of severe collisions on Tharwa Drive, Corin Road, Apollo Road, Boboyan Road and Orroral Road. These are practical, on-the-ground improvements that reduce speeds, improve pedestrian access and make our roads safer for everyone who uses them, whether they are driving, walking, cycling or catching the bus.

MS TOUGH: Minister, how is the government preparing for the potential impacts on road construction and maintenance in the ACT as a result of fuel pricing and supply issues?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Ms Tough for her question. We are actively monitoring the potential impact of rising fuel and bitumen costs. In the short-term, the impact on this financial year's resurfacing program is expected to be minimal as most of this financial year's program is already close to completion and it is expected to be finalised by mid-May. However, in the long term, if there are significantly higher bitumen prices and if

those higher prices are sustained, particularly by around 50 per cent or more, this would have a substantial impact on resurfacing and pavement works in the next financial year as well as increasing costs for contractors through higher diesel and operating costs. Our directorate is working closely with Infrastructure Canberra and Treasury to develop a consistent, whole-of-government approach to managing these cost pressures.

We are actively collaborating with industry groups and delivery partners to review cost implications, associated timing and appropriate management strategies for current and future major infrastructure programs. This includes looking at current stocks of materials for projects. Contractors have already provided early warning that rising fuel costs are impacting delivery costs, and the government is considering how best to respond. If those cost pressures continue, the government will prioritise resurfacing works on our most critical roads and consider a range of measures similar to those used during COVID, including scope adjustments, value management, program reprioritisation and, where necessary, seek additional funding. In this situation, our focus will of course be on ensuring that critical safety works are prioritised.

Of course, this is a situation that is still evolving, but we will continue to monitor these costs closely and respond in a responsible and measured way. I am happy to provide any further detail that we might have in our update to members that the government is providing next week.

Hospitals—Caesarean sections

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Health. I recently asked for the monthly data on c-sections in our hospitals. I was alarmed to see the average caesarean section rate at the Centenary Hospital has gone from 30 per cent in 2019-20 to almost 48 per cent in December 2025, and spiked to 50 per cent in several months of 2025. That is a very steep increase in a very short amount of time and it is well above the 10-15 per cent rate that the World Health Organization says is medically necessary.

I want to ask about comparing the Centenary Hospital to other hospitals in Australasia that would be considered peer services, comparing like for like, those with similar size and capability. Minister, is the Centenary Hospital's c-section rate higher or lower than other peer hospitals in Australasia and why is that?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Clay for the question. My understanding is that it is higher and indeed, the new Chief Operating Officer at Canberra Health Services is looking into better understanding the reasons for this. It is unsurprising that the caesarean section rate at Canberra Hospital is higher than, for example, at North Canberra Hospital, given that it is a tertiary referral hospital for the surrounding region and that those who are birthing at Canberra Hospital from the surrounding region are more likely to have complex high-risk births. But we do recognise, and I have recognised before in conversation, and I think in this place, that the caesarean section rate is higher than we would necessarily expect for this type of setting. So the Chief Operating Officer is doing some work to better understand that with the team in the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children.

MS CLAY: Given that the Maternity in Focus strategy states intervention rates are lower when women and pregnant people are provided continuity of care, how is the

government tracking on its target to give 50 per cent of women and pregnant people access to continuity of care by 2028?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will take the question on notice in terms of the actual data, Mr Speaker, but certainly one of the challenges we have had in relation to expanding access to continuity is recruitment of midwives, which everybody, I think, in this place now understands is an ongoing challenge. But I am pleased that there are more midwives training at the University of Canberra than there previously have been and I hope that they will come and work for us at Canberra Health Services.

Also the employment arrangements for continuity midwives in the enterprise agreement have presented somewhat of a challenge in terms of midwives getting into that service at early stages of their career. I was very pleased last year we had the first intake of graduates who were able to participate as a continuity midwife. That work is still underway in terms of working with the midwives at Canberra Health Services around models of care and how continuity is going to work into the future.

MISS NUTTALL: Minister, is the standalone birth centre being planned at the North Canberra Hospital an additional facility, or is it a replacement of birthing beds that are there now?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Miss Nuttall for the supplementary. As Ms Clay is aware, having been briefed on this matter in quite some detail, the current design for North Canberra Hospital includes two birth suites as part of the birth centre. There are currently two birth suites in the birth centre at North Canberra Hospital and six birth suites. It is currently the plan to be replicate that at the new northside hospital, but we do continue to interrogate that data and there is potential opportunity for expansion of those numbers both in the short term, in the first build at the North Canberra Hospital, and also potentially in subsequent stages. As members would be aware, it is a large campus and there will be ongoing growth at that campus into the future. I have had some pretty detailed conversations with Ms Clay about those matters, but any other members who might be interested are welcome to approach me and my office.

ACT Ambulance Service—staffing

MRS MORRIS: Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. In a ministerial statement today, you listed the number of new graduate and lateral recruits joining ACT Ambulance Service but did not mention how many staff have left. Minister, since the Assembly resolution on 2 December 2025, how many additional frontline ambulance officers have entered the service, and how many have left?

DR PATERSON: Again, I would speak to the fact that Mrs Morris continues to pull out these abstract dates and measures and markers in time. I will provide the exact data. I will take that on notice. But, it was confirmed with me the other day by the chief officer that ACTAS was at full capacity with their full-time-equivalent positions. They are all filled. So, we have a fully functioning, incredibly impressive ambulance service that does incredible work for our community. And, I think, if Mrs Morris could focus on the work that she has asked the public service to do, and the documents that we have

released, and the FOIs that we have released—

Mr Cocks: Point of order. I seek your guidance on this one; I am not sure whether the member is being directly relevant to the question by asking an opposition member to do something.

MR SPEAKER: She was relevant in answering the question, but I accept that she is now meandering off into a dissertation about Mrs Morris's performance, and that is not relevant. So, I uphold the point of order—and I presume you have finished your answer?

MRS MORRIS: Minister, how many overtime hours does ACTAS currently require each week to keep the roster standing?

DR PATERSON: I will take that on notice.

MR CAIN: Minister, have there been any ambulance station closures in the last fortnight?

DR PATERSON: Yes.

Magistrates Court—Chief Magistrate vacancy

MS BARRY: My question is to the Attorney-General. Attorney-General, tomorrow would be Chief Magistrate Lorraine Walker's last sitting day before Her Honour retires, and there has been no news about a new appointment

Attorney-General, why has it taken the government so long to announce the appointment of a new magistrate, when courts are already under immense pressure?

MS CHEYNE: I would note how Ms Barry has framed the question—as taking time to announce a new magistrate. What I would say is that why an announcement has not yet been made about the next Chief Magistrate is that a decision has not been made.

Ms Barry: She has answered the question!

Ms Cheyne: I did.

MS BARRY: Yes, you did. Minister, who has the government consulted throughout the process of appointing a new magistrate, and when will the appointment be made?

MS CHEYNE: Well, the appointment will be made when the decision is made, which I look forward to happening as soon as we can. In terms of consultation, consultation has been occurring, including with the ACT Bar Association, with the ACT Law Society, with the Chief Magistrate herself and with the Chief Justice. I think that is it.

MR CAIN: Minister, why is the government failing to respond to the chronic under-resourcing of ACT courts by streamlining the process of appointments?

MS CHEYNE: Could that question be asked again?

MR SPEAKER: I think it could. Mr Cain, are you happy to ask that again?

MR CAIN: Why is the government failing to respond to the chronic under-resourcing of ACT courts—as an example of a suggestion—by streamlining the process of appointments?

MR SPEAKER: Attorney-General?

Mr Cain: Which you could do!

MS CHEYNE: Appointments are set out for government under the legislation in the Magistrates Court Act, and the government can make its appointment processes through that primary legislation. I would refer the member to those notifiable instruments which are publicly available, and that is the process as it stands.

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

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

City services—e-bikes and e-scooters

MS CHEYNE: I am sorry that I missed question time yesterday, despite giving as much notice as possible. But here we go. I promised the Chief Minister that I would finish before 3 pm. In terms of e-bikes and e-scooters, there was a question from the Greens. Neuron did not lose the contract. They have provided a professional service continuously since 2020. They have been a stable and cooperative partner through changing and challenging circumstances.

What actually happened was that the government released an updated dockless shared micromobility policy for the ACT with enhanced objectives. This provided an opportunity to refresh our program with new approaches, services and devices, including the potential introduction of shared e-bikes. Government announced a competitive application process mid last year, and we made clear that, depending on the proposals received, the ACT government may issue one or more permits for a three-year period.

I would note that Minister Steel was right yesterday, in that when Beam exited the market, we did operate with one provider. For the market size of the ACT, a single operator model offers distinct advantages in terms of governance, service consistency and strategic collaboration and, given the size of the ACT market, more resources can be directed to operating a service by a single provider than could be done by splitting the market with two providers. The single provider approach enables the territory to maintain clear oversight, enforce equitable service coverage and co-design innovative approaches with a committed partner.

Following a comprehensive evaluation process, Lime was selected as the preferred provider. This was because their proposal provided strong solutions to identified needs, including a broad range of device features to help people travel longer distances and to carry things, and they demonstrated a commitment to provide services in areas where there is less access to public transport.

Community legal organisations—funding

MS CHEYNE: Regarding community legal organisations' funding, again, Minister Paterson was right. We are going through a budget process. I regret that, at this stage, I cannot commit to 12-month advance notice certainty, but I do respect the pressure that this puts our organisations under, and I do recognise that we are at that point again, and we are conscious of it. As we work through the budget process, we will seek to provide as much certainty as possible, as soon as possible.

Playgrounds and play spaces—Watson

MS CHEYNE: Regarding the Watson playgrounds and play spaces, we have provided Mr Emerson with this response. For the benefit of the Assembly, the surface failed within the defects liability period, so it is being replaced under the contract conditions. No, the territory is not footing the bill. For a properly prepared, applied and quality soft-fall product, we would expect a seven to 10-year lifespan. Synthetic soft-fall is widely used in playgrounds in the ACT and Australia, for a combination of safety, durability, accessibility and maintenance reasons. Of the upcoming 13 playground upgrades to be delivered, it is anticipated that in the range of 650 to 900 square metres of synthetic soft-fall may be installed. This is not based on design work; rather, it is based on what could be provided, so do not quote me.

ACT Courts—case management system

MS CHEYNE: On the courts case management system, yes, the system has been updated since it was installed, including two scheduled major releases each year. We have not neglected calls to improve inefficiencies. I draw the member's attention to the addition of the 10th magistrate—Mr Cain might also like to be reminded—through the budget last year.

On the CMS specifically, the ACT Courts and Tribunal has been working for several years on consideration of future service requirements, technology risk management and strategic review of the platform. The contract that expires is a support contract from the service provider. It does not affect Courts and Tribunal's access to the system. Replacement arrangements are being progressed across government, and current work is focused on maintaining operational stability and uninterrupted access to justice while those arrangements are being progressed.

Stromlo Forest Park—Tracks and Trails Masterplan

MS CHEYNE: On Stromlo Forest Park, detailed design is complete, including key stakeholder engagement; ecological heritage and heritage assessments are complete. The preferred alignment was adjusted from the original feasibility to avoid impacting environmental values and to achieve the desired user experience. Planning and lease change approvals are what is still progressing, due to land access negotiations being required to support the preferred alignment.

These approvals are complex and they are engaging legal considerations. Regrettably, no timeframes for the commencement of construction are able to be provided until this planning and lease change approvals issue is resolved. The Stromlo Forest Park website,

as the Chief Minister indicated yesterday, will be amended in April to provide ongoing updates on the progress of implementing the Tracks and Trails Masterplan.

ACT Ambulance Service—staffing

DR PATERSON: I need to correct the record, with respect to my answer to Mrs Morris’s question. We are not currently at full establishment of full-time equivalents. The recruitment round that I spoke about this morning in my speech will see us at full establishment by 30 June. I will take on notice the part of Mrs Morris’s question asking how many officers have left the service since December last year.

Papers

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

Auditor-General Act, pursuant to section 21—Auditor-General’s Report No 7/2025— 2024-25 Financial Audit Program—Overall Results—Government response, dated March 2026.

Education and Care Services National Law as applied by the law of the States and Territories—Education and Care Services National Further Amendment Regulations 2025 (2025 No 711)—Revised explanatory statement, dated March 2026.

Transport Canberra—Rapid bus network

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (2.54): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) Rapid buses are an integral part of the public transportation network of Canberra;
- (b) the Network 2026 changes, caused by the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge works, have resulted in a serious reduction to buses along key north-south routes such as the R2, R3, R4 and R5; and
- (c) ACT Labor’s Transport Plan stated that “ACT Labor will also increase the frequency of existing Rapid Services”;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) since the discontinuation of the Xpresso services, many growing areas of Canberra have been left without a fast connection between Town Centres, particularly in Gungahlin and the Molonglo Valley;
- (b) ACT Labor previously committed to introducing an additional three Rapid services in this term of government; and
- (c) Network 2026, combined with the protracted MyWay+ saga, has damaged the public’s confidence in Canberra’s public transport network; and

- (3) calls on the Government to:
- (a) undertake a detailed review of the existing Rapid Bus Network, including all Rapid bus routes;
 - (b) as part of this review, identify:
 - (i) service gaps in the frequency of Rapid routes across the network;
 - (ii) instances of overcrowding on Rapid routes, including the specific times of day and days of the week when overcrowding occurs;
 - (iii) instances of low patronage on Rapid routes, including the specific times of day and days of the week when low patronage occurs; and
 - (iv) potential new Rapid routes based on demand or projected demand in line with Treasury's population projections;
 - (c) outline plans for the introduction of any new Rapid routes based on demonstrated demand or projected demand, including demand projections aligned with population forecasts produced by Treasury;
 - (d) investigate establishing new bus routes connecting Gungahlin Town Centre with:
 - (i) Woden Town Centre;
 - (ii) Fyshwick Commercial Area;
 - (iii) Brindabella Business Park; and
 - (iv) the Canberra Airport;
 - (e) provide an infrastructure plan identifying existing and proposed bus priority measures to be implemented along Rapid routes to improve travel times for buses; and
 - (f) commit to tabling the results of this review in the Assembly by 24 September 2026.

I am going to start by saying that I note that we have some amendments coming from the government on this, but I also want to say that the motion appears on the notice paper as a review of Rapid bus services. That is what the motion is about. It is about a review of Rapid bus services. But the minister felt the need to amend it to say, "light rail". At the moment, it basically says, "Rapid buses are an integral part of the public transportation network in Canberra," because that is what the motion is about—it is about Rapid buses. The minister felt the need to amend it to say, "Light rail and Rapid and local bus services are also integral parts"—and I do not really understand. We could have amended Ms Carrick's Burrangiri motion and actually put in there that light rail is getting to Burrangiri at some stage soon—but we did not do that.

This motion was borne out of feedback that has come from consumers. I would like to believe that most motions in this place come from that place. Many constituents, many public transport users, have been in touch with my office over a long period of time, but particularly in the last couple of months, about changes that have been made to the network, how they are not being serviced properly by it and how they would like it changed.

Rapid buses are an integral part of the public transportation network. The Network 2026 changes were a disaster. Not a day goes by where there is not a post on Facebook or an

email in my inbox—and probably in yours, Mr Speaker—with constituents saying that they got left behind by a full Rapid on their way to work. This is a fairly straightforward motion that simply asks the government to conduct a network-wide review of the Rapids and see what areas can be improved on and where the opportunity for new Rapid services exists in Canberra—because we are pretty sure that there are. The Network 2026 changes caused by the Commonwealth Avenue Bridge works have certainly resulted in a serious reduction to buses along the key north-south routes, such as the R2, R3, R4 and R5. I would note that ACT Labor’s transport plan stated emphatically that ACT Labor would also increase the frequency of existing Rapid services—and we do not see that occurring.

Since the discontinuation of the Xpresso services, many growing areas of Canberra have been left without a fast connection between town centres—and I particularly focus on Gungahlin and the Molonglo Valley. I have had a hell of a lot of correspondence that has come from residents of Gungahlin—as I know that my colleague Mr Milligan and, indeed, my colleague Ms Castley has—because they do not feel that they are being serviced by a public transport network that is fit for their purposes. The Network 2026 changes, combined with the protracted MyWay+ saga, have damaged the public’s confidence in the public transport network. There is no question about it. So this motion calls upon the government to undertake a detailed review of the existing Rapid bus network, including all of the Rapid bus network. The motion also seeks to inform Transport Canberra’s future fleet procurement plans and identify which areas of Canberra have the greatest need for this sort of infrastructure investment, which I know is something that my friends—should I keep on calling them the Greens political party, do you think?

Miss Nuttall: Yes, that is fine.

Ms Clay: Yes.

MR PARTON: Yes; all right. My friends in the Greens political party are also of the view that this is desperately important. We want to outline plans for the introduction of any Rapid bus routes on demonstrated demand or projected demand, including demand projections aligned with the population forecasts of Treasury. The proposed review seeks to identify any service gaps in the present Rapid network and how they can be addressed. I know from people in my electorate that the 180 and 181 buses that go into and out of ANU each day during the peak are extremely popular. Perhaps a Rapid along a similar alignment may benefit commuters in Brindabella. I know Ms Tough is not going to argue with me about that broad concept, in principle. I understand that Mr Milligan has similar feedback from the people of Gungahlin, and I would be surprised if Ms Carrick does not have similar. It is all right, Ms Carrick; I am praising you—it is okay. I know that she would have similar, because she gets a lot of feedback, does Ms Carrick. She is getting some right now, in fact—it is amazing.

The specific “calls-on” in the motion as it stands calls for an investigation into establishing new bus routes connecting Gungahlin town centre with Woden town centre, the Fyshwick commercial area, Brindabella Business Park and the Canberra Airport, because this is what people told us—and not just four people or eight people but lots of them. The motion calls upon the government to commit to tabling the results of that review in the Assembly on my birthday. We thought we would go with my

birthday, because it is a special day. It will be my 60th, and I do not know if you can think of a better way to celebrate a 60th birthday than being here and getting a gift from my good friend Mr Steel in terms of the tabling of results of this review on 24 September 2026. So I am counting down the days till my birthday specifically for that. I commend this motion to the Assembly.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (3.00): I thank Mr Parton for bringing this motion to the Assembly today, because I am always happy to talk about how we can improve public transport services in Canberra. That is the government’s focus. I was quoted, I think, three times on ABC in a recent segment in relation to public transport saying the exact same thing. Our focus is on services, not cutting the revenue that it supports and not cutting the services that Canberrans rely on.

What this motion is really about is flogging a dead horse, which is the Canberra Liberals transport plan that they brought to the 2024 election, which was not supported by the Canberra community, and of course had as its central premise to not proceed with light rail stage 2B of the light rail network and instead replace it with a lower quality, lower capacity, greater road impact transport corridor plan for Woden that would have removed lanes of Commonwealth Avenue and, of course, their even weirder plan to run bus services along the current stage 1 light rail route—duplicating an existing service does not sound very efficient to me—stopping less than the light rail does, but of course getting caught up in congestion because light rail has the right of way. That is one of the benefits of the system, other than the fact that it is mass transit. It carries more people, many more than any bus does, and it attracts people to public transport in a way that buses have not in our city. But buses do remain an important part of our public transport system integrated with that mass transit. Their call for new bus routes connecting the Gungahlin town centre also reminds me of their plan around the new orbital Rapid route in their election commitment—albeit flipped north—which, again, Canberrans voted no to at the election. It would be remiss of me not to point out the specific “calls-on” to review and report on instances of low patronage on Rapid routes. I hope in doing so Mr Parton is not suggesting that we should reduce or remove these routes. So I will give him the benefit of the doubt in this instance.

I do not know if this motion from the Canberra Liberals tells us that they are in denial about what Canberrans voted for in the 2024 election when it came to a plan for the public transport network, want to undermine confidence in our bus network by completely redesigning the Rapids that people rely on in that legible public transport system or they just want to remind the Canberra community that they are anti-light rail. I am really not sure. But certainly the latter continues to be the case, because at its core this is an anti-light rail motion. It is a distraction from the plan that Canberrans voted for in 2024.

At that election, our commitment to deliver on Labor’s transport plan through the agreement that we struck with the Greens to deliver improved frequency across the public transport network on local routes and introduce new Rapid routes to serve the growing areas of our city was reaffirmed. I am happy to remind the Assembly about what that agreed plan is and what those agreed priorities are. It included better connecting the Lanyon Valley into the city by replacing the existing peak bus with a Rapid service—potentially replacing the 180-181 service. We want to do some

consultation with the community about that. I updated the Assembly in February in my ministerial statement that we would begin that consultation this year. Our other commitment was to deliver a new Rapid service for the growing areas of Ginninderry and West Belconnen through to other Belconnen suburbs and the city. We also committed to deliver a new Rapid service for our newest and fastest-growing district, the Molonglo Valley. There is already a plan to address known service gaps in Rapid routes across our network and increase the frequency of Rapid 2 services for our Belconnen to city corridor and increase the frequency of the Rapid 10 services for our busy Molonglo to city corridor. We have already committed to investigate options to improve public transport flow in these corridors. We already took steps, following the election, to deliver on our plans to improve the frequency on the R10 and the R2 and to address frequency on the weekends, particularly on Sundays.

But, of course, things have now changed with the temporary period of disruption that we are in with the NCA's bridge works and the closure of one span of Commonwealth Avenue Bridge. I know that it is very convenient for members of the Assembly not to recognise the reason for that impact on our public transport network at the moment and just claim that the ACT government has reduced services for no reason, but there is a very clear justification for that. That was critical to maintaining reliability on the public transport network during a time of change and disruption. I have responsibility, as Minister for Transport, for actually operating our transport network, and I have to make decisions to make sure that we can maintain that reliability. I appreciate that the opposition do not have that responsibility and they can go and say whatever they like about whatever they want on public transport without making responsible decisions. But, as minister, I have to make responsible decisions. We had to respond to the circumstances on our traffic network, and that is what we have done. But it is temporary, and we remain committed to the plan that we took to the election to deliver improved services this term, including those Rapid transport services.

Transport Canberra is doing a great job in monitoring ongoing performance of the network and does respond to reports coming through from drivers of full services by allocating high-capacity vehicles to the routes and letting incoming services know. There is already a great plan to deliver high-frequency and high-capacity public transport services between the Gungahlin and Woden town centres, and that is known as light rail stage 2B: a single-seat journey from Gungahlin through to Woden—what more can you ask for in a public transport system?—high capacity, mass transit for a growing city with more benefits than buses provide, including land-use benefits and a whole range of different benefits that are there when you have solid tracks in the ground.

Light rail services currently run between the Gungahlin town centre and the city every five minutes during that morning peak—incredibly frequent, given the high capacity of those light rail vehicles—and every six minutes during the afternoon peak periods, moving 10,000 passengers per weekday along the corridor, a capacity that simply cannot be matched by bus services, at least not without detriment to our other road users through taking lanes off Commonwealth Avenue Bridge. That was the Liberals' plan that they brought to the election, along with reducing Capital Circle down to one lane. Imagine what that would do to the road network on the south side every morning. At the moment, passengers can then jump onto a connecting Rapid bus service. So, if they are taking Gungahlin down to the city, they can then jump on a Rapid 4 or Rapid 5 service through to Woden; they could jump on a Rapid 2 service through to Fyshwick;

or they could jump on a Rapid 3 service through to Canberra Airport and Brindabella Business Park.

I think an important point to make is that Canberra's public transport network is a hub-and-spoke model. This is the best model for our city because, with Rapid services running between our town centres and the city centre and local services connecting the suburbs into these, it is designed to offer the highest level of service and frequency while taking into account network coverage and operational efficiency. Frequency is freedom in a public transport network, and you get that through a hub-and-spoke system, not through direct services to every single place in Canberra from one location. That is a very poor use of services and it would reduce frequency across the network for everyone that needs to use the system.

I always encourage people to look at the evidence. The bible on public transport is *Human Transit* by Jarrett Walker, a former consultant to the ACT government. His previous edition of this book had a whole chapter on, with a case study, the Molonglo Valley, where he had provided the ACT government advice on the planning for Molonglo Valley, which was very much based on a transit-oriented style design. He is very much a big fan of hub-and-spoke models. He particularly loves grid-patterned cities. We do not have that benefit in the ACT, and so we have to look to hub-and-spoke transit network designs in order to serve our city with the highest frequency transport that we can. I encourage members to have a look at that book and the literature around that, because it is important to inform network design, which we should leave to the experts—people in Transport Canberra that do this every day and experts like Jarrett Walker, who provide input to transit agencies in designing a network. It should not be a network designed by a Legislative Assembly motion; it should be a network design that meets the needs of our community based on the expert knowledge of network designers in our transit agencies that understand how you can get the most out of the public transport system.

We know that the changes to or the introduction of new bus services needs to be considered in the context of a range of factors beyond patronage demand alone, such as fleet allocation and shift allocation; connectivity between light rail, Rapid and other local bus services, including their timetables; general traffic conditions of the road network; and overall network legibility for our passengers—all of which will be considered by the operational experts in Transport Canberra who work on building the updates to our network and timetables, generally on an annual basis. It is really important, I think, that we do have that incremental change to maintain the legibility of our network and, as we introduce new Rapids, to engage with the community about those. That is what the government intends to do once we have developed further work on the proposed options for the new Rapids that we have put forward.

Politics is about priorities, and we set out our priorities clearly at the election. We got the support of the community at the election for our plan: delivering on light rail down to Woden, delivering three new Rapid bus services, delivering more frequent local bus routes and delivering more frequent weekend services. We are getting on with the delivery of those as well as investing in the transport infrastructure that our city needs.

I seek leave to move my amendments together.

Leave granted.

MR STEEL: I move:

1. Omit paragraph (1)(a), substitute:

“(a) light rail, and rapid and local bus services are all integral parts of the public transportation network of Canberra;”.

2. In paragraph (2)(b), omit “and”, substitute:

“(i) a new rapid service between Lanyon and the city to replace an existing peak bus service;

(ii) a new rapid service from Ginninderry, West-Belconnen and other Belconnen suburbs through to the city; and

(iii) a new rapid service for the Molonglo Town Centre;”.

3. Omit all text after paragraph (2)(c), substitute:

“(3) also notes that:

(a) the supply and confidence agreement between the ACT Greens and ACT Labor commits to the following being delivered in the 11th Assembly:

(i) progressively increasing bus service frequency to every 20 minutes on weekdays through the term starting in 2025;

(ii) increasing bus frequency on weekends starting in 2025 (hourly) and making further improvements subject to future engagement with the workforce; and

(iii) increasing frequency on key Rapid bus services and introducing new Rapid bus services before the end of the term;

(b) the Assembly resolution of 5 December 2024 regarding Bus Frequency Improvements called on the Government to provide progress reports on bus frequency improvements, including the introduction of new Rapid services, to the Assembly every six months until October 2028; and

(c) the Assembly resolution of 16 September 2025 regarding South Canberra Buses called on the government to, amongst other things, release a future bus network which outlines the proposed rapid bus network, including interchanges between rapid bus services and light rail, and connections between light rails and rapid and local bus services across Canberra’s south;

(4) calls on the Government to:

(a) continue to progress the work needed to meet the Assembly resolutions of 5 December 2024 and 16 September 2025;

(b) table an infrastructure plan identifying existing and proposed bus priority measures to be implemented along Rapid routes by the last sitting day of 2026;

(c) undertake community consultation on the preferred routes for the three new Rapid services outlined at paragraph (2)(b) and update the Assembly on the outcomes in the bus frequency updates tabled from March 2027 onwards; and

(d) include a refresh of the light rail network plan as part of the new integrated Planning and Transport Strategy.”.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (3.12): I thank Mr Parton for bringing forward this very, very important motion here today. It will be very interesting to see how our colleagues support this motion going forward. Canberrans deserve a public transport network which works for them. The primary goal of any public transport network is to get people to where they need to go. Whether it is a retiree going to a GP clinic, a parent returning home before school finishes or Canberrans simply trying to save money on petrol by using public transport, everyone benefits from a well-run organised bus network. Public transport needs to be accessible, it needs to be reliable and it needs to be direct and affordable.

Governments too often try to influence the behaviour of people when it comes to transportation through raising taxes, regulating and vetting activities. Unfortunately, in last year's budget, the government chose to raise parking fees across Canberra by six per cent, well above what was needed to keep up with inflation. This has had a terrible impact on local business, particularly here in the city for our nightlife economy. A lot of parents and other people are deciding whether or not to go into the city, because now they have got to pay for dinner and they also have to pay for increased parking fees—and that is simply not fair. This is not the route—pun intended—to attract people to use public transport.

As is outlined in the notes of this motion, Canberra's public transport network is not currently fit for purpose. The government has failed to meet the simple standard of connecting Canberrans to destinations across Canberra efficiently, and the people on the ground are feeling this neglect. Canberra is expanding and nowhere is it more evident than in Yerrabi. Yerrabi is one of the fastest-growing regions across the country. We currently have around 95,000 residents, with that number predicted to grow to around 132,000 by 2065. With that growth comes increased demand for transport, not just to the city but across Canberra.

A recent survey conducted by the Gungahlin Community Council found that, out of all transport options for Gungahlin, buses were rated the worst, scoring 2.3 out of five. The results of the survey further showed that 90 per cent of residents worked outside of Gungahlin and that 74 per cent of residents were in favour of trialling new Rapid bus networks to main employment areas across Canberra. These are not abstract ideas. They are practical routes that would support jobs, reduce congestion and improve quality of life. For Yerrabi, this is critical.

Our network largely reflects the hub-and-spoke model, just as Mr Steel has already indicated, focusing on moving people in and out of the city utilising the light rail. One would think that the idea behind this is to drive more people onto light rail to boost passenger numbers. The thing is, though, if you are travelling to Fyshwick, to Belconnen or to Woden from Gungahlin, why would you want to have to go through the city and change different modes of transport several times? This is not appealing to anyone. That is why this motion is calling for a commonsense approach to develop a network that makes sense.

For argument's sake, let's compare the time it takes to get to some of these destinations from Gungahlin using the current transport network, by public transport, and by car. If you are a resident of Gungahlin and you want to leave to get to work by 9 o'clock

Monday to Friday, it would take you an hour and 30 minutes by public transport to get to Woden town centre compared to 45 minutes by car. That is one-way. So that is three hours a day if you wanted to use public transport to get from Gungahlin to Woden. Similarly, for Fyshwick, it is an hour and 45 minutes to get to Fyshwick. You have to use public transport, get to Gungahlin, get to the city and then get from the city to Fyshwick—an hour and 45 minutes compared to 35 to 45 minutes in a car, and it is an hour and 25 minutes to get to Brindabella Business Park and/or the airport. It just does not make sense to use public transport in that way. You have to make it attractive, you have to make it direct and you have to have people using that network and being able to spend more time with family. The difference in these travel times may not sound like much to some people, but they can mean the world to others. Reducing these times could mean, for example, that a parent will not have to leave home before their kids wake up just because they have to catch a bus. The changes to the public transport network proposed in this motion would mean that parents could spend an hour or more every morning and evening with their children, because it is not taking them up to an hour and 45 minutes to get to work.

Our community expects accessible reliable direct public transport with better connections to key areas across Canberra. I note that Mr Steel has brought forward an amendment to Mr Parton's motion. I move as an amendment to Mr Steel's amendment to Mr Parton's motion .

“(e) investigate establishing new bus routes connecting Gungahlin Town Centre with Woden Town Centre, Fyshwick commercial areas, Brindabella Business Park and the Canberra Airport.”.

I am deeply concerned by the minister's amendment to the original motion, as it removes any mention about Gungahlin entirely. I just mentioned the whole concern about public transport for Gungahlin residents and the time it takes to travel anywhere. Completely removing that and not even be willing to investigate or look into it, rings alarm bells for me. Mr Braddock has foreshadowed another amendment, but we can speak to that later on down the track. Let's see how my colleagues in this place support my amendment to Mr Steel's amendments, because I think it brings in a whole lot of common sense.

This motion rightly calls for the government to conduct a comprehensive review of the Rapid bus network, a review that focuses on real-world outcomes, where services are overcrowded, where they are underutilised and where there are gaps that exist. Importantly, it also looks into the future, ensuring that new routes align with projected population growth. Today I encourage my fellow members, particularly my fellow members of Yerrabi—looking at you, Mr Braddock—to support this motion. I am sure Mr Braddock knows that there has been some talk in the electorate of Yerrabi for quite some time about the possibility of direct bus routes to these destinations. That would mean taking so many cars off the road and removing congestion on our road. A bus holds 50 passengers. That could potentially be from 50 cars coming off the road. If you run it during peak times, you could actually remove that congestion. I think it is a commonsense approach, and I hope that my colleagues in this place decide to support my amendment and this motion.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.21): Before I start, I wanted to wish Mr Parton a happy

birthday. We will see whether we can get a motion through today in recognition of his work. There is a bit to be said about this motion as was presented. There is some good, honest stuff. Some of it was unhelpful, but I really do thank Mr Parton for bringing it forward and also Mr Steel for consulting with my office about the amendments. The calls duplicate a lot of work that has already been done as a consequence of other motions made by members of the Eleventh Assembly, including myself, Ms Clay and Ms Carrick. We have asked for updates on bus frequency improvements, the restoration of Rapid services to West Belconnen and meaningful plans for the future south side network. For that reason, I am happy to support Mr Steel's amendments today. I am particularly glad that his amendments recognise that light rail is an integral part of the network as well as local buses, which a lot of people do depend upon to move around our city.

I also welcome Mr Steel's proposal to table an infrastructure plan for bus priority measures. This is something that has been garnering a lot of attention recently, and additional clarity on the government's plans will be helpful. As we all know, bus priority measures help keep buses running on time even through heavy traffic and make more efficient use of our bus kilometres throughout the week. A bus that can move through the city faster is one that can turn around and service a new route quicker. Furthermore, as the minister has spoken to, monitoring of overcrowding and similar capacity issues is something that needs to be, and is being, conducted on an ongoing basis rather than one-off studies. I have been very critical in this chamber of MyWay+, which was a mess for supporting data collection. But is slowly getting better and, hopefully, there will be decision-grade data very shortly. In the absence of this data, it is extremely challenging to be able to fulfil this function. With this data, we will be in a much better position to be able to do so. I struggle to envisage a meaningful study that could be conducted that would produce useful information more comprehensively and more quickly than what has already been done with the support of bus drivers.

We should also be careful when calling for routes that would duplicate light rail services, which is why I will go to Mr Milligan's amendments today. My primary concern is in terms of the duplication of the light rail service, which will mean buses will be running down Northbourne alongside light rail vehicles.

Mr Milligan: Fyshwick is the other direction. Woden is a different direction.

MR BRADDOCK: Fyshwick is a different matter, and I will get to that in a second. This is why I will be moving further amendments to Mr Milligan's amendment today. While I appreciate and support Gungahlin residents who wish to use public transport to commute to Woden or even further, duplication of services where there is an existing light rail service is not efficient use of public money. Going to the issue of Mr Milligan calling for new bus services between Gungahlin and some of those locations, I would encourage all members here to read Paul Mees, a public transport expert, who coined what is called the "network effect" in terms of increasing the effectiveness of our networks in delivering services to the community. Through interchanges, you can generate a far more effective and broader coverage of the city in providing that public transport service.

I would like to add that Network 2026 and the MyWay+ debacle are not the only things that have shaken the public confidence in Canberra's public transport network. Rewind

a decade, the government was talking about building a new stage of light rail every five years. Some delay to stage 2 was inevitable, arising from the combined challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for additional layers of commonwealth approval. Nonetheless, we are looking to building half a stage every eight years, give or take. Stage 2A is likely to be completed in 2028, just in time for the next territory election—how convenient, I might say. Stage 2B is slated to get a business case brought to the government at around the same time. Factor in a lack of timeline for the NCA works application, which will trigger the commencement of commonwealth-level consultations and debates on stage 2B, I struggle to see how the government of the Eleventh Assembly plans to get the project finished before the Thirteenth Assembly. This chronicle of delays and downplaying of expectations has had an effect on public confidence. When you talk to people about stage 4 in Tuggeranong, they roll their eyes and say something to the effect of, “In my lifetime?” The hope and desire is there, but the confidence is shaken. We need some real and visible efforts to improve confidence. A refreshed master plan will probably help with that.

As for the other measures, members can expect that the Greens will bring us back to this at some point in a future sitting. The delays in light rail works have no doubt had a flow-on effect for the rest of network planning, as the ACT government knew 10 years ago that it needed to more than double its bus capacity to meet its mode share targets—which, by the way, was meant to be in 16 per cent by now. A serious part of the effort was clearly going to involve light rail from Gungahlin to Woden being up and running by now, significantly reducing the extent to which bus capacity would be required along the central city spine. I will talk further when I get to my second amendment, but I am going to move my amendment to Mr Milligan’s amendment. I move:

Omit “investigate establishing new bus routes”, substitute: “review public transport”.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: The question is that Mr Braddock’s amendment to Mr Milligan’s amendment to Mr Steel’s amendment to the motion be agreed.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (3.27): I am happy to talk to whichever one of those amendments you went with. I just wanted to lend my support to Mr Milligan for boldly reinserting something that was taken out of this motion. I would remark that this motion was actually born in Mr Milligan’s office—that is where we gave birth to it. It came from a stack of correspondence that came to me but also a lot of engagement that came to Mr Milligan and Ms Castley specifically pertaining to Gungahlin town centre. There was thought given initially to putting up a standalone motion specifically calling for these changes. In the end, we made the decision to go with something that was a little broader and all-encompassing. But I think it is exceptionally important that this aspect of the motion is reinserted, and I believe that it would be extremely disrespectful to Mr Milligan but more so to the residents of Yerrabi if this was taken out of the motion, because I think it is extremely important.

Mr Milligan articulated perfectly the challenge that faces someone who is going from Gungahlin to one of these other major employment hubs, in that the travel time under the current scenario is just not sustainable and not workable. They do not even have to have an exceptionally busy life. When you are talking about spending three hours on public transport every day to get to and from, it ain’t workable. I take on board Mr

Steel's comment that, at the end of the day, he is the only one here who has actually got to make it work. We come in here—myself and Mr Braddock and even my friend Mr Emerson from time to time—with ideas that have been born from conversations that we have had with people and we think they are great ideas. When I say “we”, I mean Ms Carrick and others. We believe that it is our job to come in here and communicate these ideas to the Assembly. I acknowledge that Mr Steel is the one who actually has to put it all together and make it work and that there are challenges often that are outside of—what am I doing sticking up for you, mate?—of his control. But we bring this forward and we reinsert it back into the motion because we think it is important.

I think that there are some other things that have been taken out of this motion that are also important. I applaud my good friend Mr Emerson when he seeks to impose himself on motions in this place. I note that there are some things that he is seeking to put back in. I am going to sit down now and start planning my birthday.

Mr Braddock's amendment to Mr Milligan's amendment to Mr Steel's amendments agreed to.

Mr Milligan's amendment, as amended, to Mr Steel's amendments agreed to

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: The question is that Mr Steel's amendments, as amended, be agreed to.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (3.32): I would like to speak briefly to this motion, and to my amendment to the amendments. I will not make too much of a contribution. I think that the issues have been covered. One could read the number of amendments that have been circulated as evidence of disagreement, but I also think it is evidence of the level of interest in this Assembly and our community in improving public transport services across the ACT. Nine out of every 10 kilometres travelled in the ACT are travelled by a private vehicle. That is a lot, and it is a number that we can and should change.

Back in 2012, ACT Labor pledged to increase the public transport share of all work trips to 10.5 per cent by 2016 and 16 per cent by 2026. We reached seven per cent in 2016. That dropped to six per cent in 2021. That was during COVID, so it might have been an exception. This year, when the target was 16 per cent by 2026, we have a census, I think, in August, so maybe there is still a chance that we will hit that target of 16 per cent. If we do not, the measures that are being proposed here by a range of different members for consideration, hopefully, will help us get there.

The amendment that I have prepared, as Mr Parton indicated, reinserts some of the elements of the original motion to which I was sympathetic. This is not an attempt to impose myself on the motion. I did seek Mr Parton's view on whether it would be worth reinserting them, and whether he would support that. He granted permission for me to get involved.

These look sensible to me. They are issues that are raised with me—overcrowding on rapid routes, as well as on light rail, which I have included here, and it is something that I have experienced myself from time to time. To me, it makes sense. It is a relatively open call for the work that is already going on in this area, as reflected in prior motions

moved by different members, to also consider some of the elements that are brought forward in Mr Parton's motion today, including service gaps in the frequency of rapid routes across the network, overcrowding, as I have touched on, and the extent to which new rapid services, which are discussed in Mr Steel's amendments, should be based on demand or projected demand, in line with Treasury's population projections.

I hope to see this supported, and I very much appreciate everyone's interest in this subject. Hopefully, we end up with some positive change and an increased uptake towards that target of 16 per cent by 2026.

I move:

After all text in paragraph (4)(a), insert:

“(b) as part of this work, consider:

- (i) service gaps in the frequency of Rapid routes across the network;
- (ii) instances of overcrowding on Rapid routes and the light rail, including the specific times of day and days of the week when overcrowding occurs; and
- (iii) basing new Rapid services on demand or projected demand in line with Treasury's population projections;”.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Treasurer, Minister for Planning and Sustainable Development, Minister for Heritage and Minister for Transport) (3.35): The government will be supporting Mr Emerson's amendment to my amendments to Mr Parton's motion today. We think this is reasonable work to consider, and it aligns with the ACT Transport Strategy 2020 to optimise the network. What might be part 4(a)(iii), in relation to basing new rapid services on projected demand, based on Treasury's population projections, comes with the assumption that there is transit-oriented development along some of the key rapid bus corridors and light rail corridors, including in Mr Emerson's electorate.

This is critical, because it is not just about bringing buses to where people are today; it is about allowing housing to be built next to rapid bus and light rail networks that are available today and will be in the future. We know that when people live near really good public transport, they are much more likely to use it, and there is a positive feedback loop that occurs with the government looking to increase services in those areas to meet that demand. That is critical, in order to have a sustainable city.

One of the challenges of running a bus system in this city has always been the fact that it is incredibly spread out. We are not a dense city at all. This goes back to the Ebenezer Howard style of planning that the NCDC and its predecessors took on, in creating a car-based city with large parkways that were not very public transport-friendly.

We are trying to improve that through our urban planning frameworks. That is something that the ACT government has done on the north side, with the introduction of light rail stage 1, and the transit-oriented development work that is happening in the northern gateway. We are also looking at that, as part of the multi-modal corridor planning with stage 2B of light rail and the Southern Gateway Planning and Design Framework that will go out for consultation around the middle of the year.

What is important in order to improve the environment for pedestrians and people using public transport? There are a range of different pull factors onto public transport, not just living near it—good public transport services, and having, particularly, bus services that are clean, quiet and comfortable to use. That has been part of Transport Canberra’s transition to zero emissions which has been the most successful in the country. We are leading the country in terms of the number of electric buses in our fleet, and the proportion of our fleet that is electric. With 106 electric buses on the road and in operation, out of a fleet of 450, and with 30 buses currently going through procurement, we will continue to see more of those services on the road.

Our government is committed to supporting more electric buses and light rail which are also powered by 100 per cent renewable electricity. This is particularly important at the moment, because it has made our public transport system much more resilient in the face of this oil price shock. I cannot help myself; I have to table this. It is not a prop. It is just a document. It is, of course, the Canberra Liberals’ opposition to our transition to electric buses, which goes hand-in-hand with their motion today, which opposes light rail. I present the following paper:

Canberra Liberals—ACT Government planning to invest in electric buses despite serious reliability problems—Copy of social media post, dated 9 October 2019.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (3.39): As I said this morning, seamless public transport is one of the most effective ways to encourage people to leave their cars at home. Convenient, reliable and frequent services matter, especially as higher fuel prices force many Canberrans to look for cost-of-living savings. But buses will only be used if they actually go where people need to go. There are still significant gaps in our public transport network, and I thank Mr Parton for his motion.

I welcome the government’s commitment to a new rapid route for the Molonglo Valley, and I strongly support a service running from Belconnen through the Molonglo Valley and on to Cooleman Court and Woden. I would also like to see a direct service trialled between the Molonglo Valley and major employment areas, such as Parkes and Barton. Another clear missing link in the network is a direct connection between Woden and Fyshwick, extending on to Canberra Airport. Why do we have to go north to the city and then head south again to get to Fyshwick? I am not talking about the Fyshwick Markets, but Fyshwick proper—the industrial area.

If the network should be designed by experts and not by the Legislative Assembly, please show us what evidence they use to design the network. What are the preferences of the people? We need to know this to be able to design a network that will attract people to it. How many times are people willing to transfer to get to work? What is the journey time that they will tolerate before they say, “It takes too long; I will just drive”?

Why is it that, after all these decades, we do not have a dedicated bus lane and cycle path to connect the north and the south, all the way between Woden and the city? If you want us to use public transport, give us great services. Of course, none of this is possible without more buses and more drivers. That is why I welcome the Greens’ amendment to ensure that there are appropriate budget appropriations to deliver the bus network expansions that our growing city needs.

Mr Emerson's amendment to **Mr Steel's** amendments, as amended, agreed to.

Mr Steel's amendments, as amended, agreed to.

MADAM ASSISTANT SPEAKER: The question now is that the motion, as amended, be agreed to.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.41): I move the following amendment that has been circulated in my name:

Add:

“(5) further calls on the government to make serious considerations on how it can provide the funds for expanding the bus fleet to the extent needed to meet the expectations of the Canberra community in the 2026-2027 budget and in future budget cycles”.

I strongly suspect that a meaningful part of the congestion and capacity issues that we are experiencing today relate to light rail. To be blunt, as long as light rail is delayed, we need more buses. We have always needed more buses. In the current fiscal situation, the government is scared shitless about the consequences of trying to procure them. There are some very hard decisions that the government needs to make in the lead-up to the June budget—hard decisions about the efficiencies and expenditure across government, sustainable and equitable revenue sources, and unlocking the ability for the ACT to deliver the services that the people of Canberra demand and expect.

The Greens have suggestions. These include: stopping subsidising the horseracing industry, taxing big business and getting our fair share of commonwealth investment, all of which we can use to buy the buses, and on which I hope I will have the support of the entire chamber when the time comes for a debate on the budget.

If Mr Milligan wants to get his buses between Gungahlin town centre and Fyshwick or Brindabella Business Park, there will be an excellent opportunity for him to speak up for that when the budget debate comes on, because there is a lot riding on this budget.

I will not ask the Treasurer to duplicate his work. We have already piled on the pressure regarding what we want to see in terms of increased rapid bus services, plus light rail, plus local bus services across our great city. For at least the next few months, I want him to focus on delivering those, but we do need to address the resourcing problem that is before the government. If they are to meet the demand for bus services, we need to invest in more buses and more drivers.

Mr Braddock's amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Aged care—Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (3.44): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) Canberra faces a significant shortage of dedicated respite beds. Demand for respite care will continue to grow as the ACT population ages and access to timely respite is essential to sustaining more than 58,000 carers and enabling older people to remain living at home;
- (b) Burrangiri is a 15-bed, purpose-built residential respite facility that delivers close to half of the ACT's dedicated short-term and emergency respite care for older Canberrans with moderate to high care needs due to the 24/7 registered nurse care. Noting that carers cannot book the 14-bed Baptist Care clinical program designed to support patients transitioning from hospital;
- (c) closing Burrangiri would significantly limit access to respite with registered nurse care and the ability of carers to support older Australians with moderate or high care needs;
- (d) the Government claims respite is a federal responsibility. On 6 March 2026, the Commonwealth committed to Burrangiri being eligible to apply for a Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) grant to provide Commonwealth supported cottage respite services, ensuring older Canberrans and their families have access to care;
- (e) the Government claims the Burrangiri building is not fit for purpose based on a study commissioned to re-purpose the building to a residential alcohol and drug rehabilitation centre. A response to a 213A order for production fully redacted the study (GHD Alcohol and Drug Facility – Site Feasibility Study);
- (f) the Government claims that the community does not want a gap in service provision. The community's concern was with closure with no plan for a replacement service. Carers would generally support temporary closure for refurbishment if this leads to a better and sustainable service;
- (g) on 21 April 2025, the Commonwealth Government committed \$10 million to new capital infrastructure to deliver more aged care respite beds in the ACT; and
- (h) service providers have indicated they would be interested in using the Commonwealth's \$10 million to add respite capacity and operate Burrangiri;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) lower-needs respite is delivered through cottage-style facilities embedded in local communities; and
- (b) a combination of higher-needs care, such as that provided at Burrangiri, and lower-needs cottage-based care is essential to meet the diverse requirements of carers and the people they support; and

(3) calls on the Government to:

- (a) work with the Commonwealth Government to finalise the post mid-2027 funding model for respite services currently funded under CHSP block funding, including Burrangiri funded as a cottage;
- (b) immediately release the unredacted GHD Alcohol and Drug Facility – Site Feasibility Study;

- (c) undertake an Expression of Interest process, to commence by May 2026, to identify not-for-profit Registered Aged Care Providers willing to invest the Commonwealth's \$10 million to refurbish, extend and operate Burrangiri so that it can deliver additional aged care respite beds with 24/7 registered nurse care; and
- (d) provide a final report to the Assembly for (3)(a) to (3)(c) by the first sitting day in October 2026.

I seek leave to amend the motion.

Leave granted.

MS CARRICK: I move the following amendment to the motion:

Omit all text in paragraph (1)(d), substitute:

- “(e) CHSP grant funding continues under the new Aged Care Act 2024 until 30 June 2027 and will then transition to a new funding model currently being developed by the Commonwealth;
 - (f) all respite facilities must comply with the National Construction Code (NCC). The key issue is the building classification applied under the NCC, which determines the applicable technical requirements, including:
 - (i) small cottage respite (Class 1b)
 - (ii) community respite centres like Burrangiri (Class 3)
 - (iii) residential aged care respite (Class 9c)
 - (g) the ACT Government has claimed that the Burrangiri building is not ‘fit for purpose;’ based on the 2025 GHD Alcohol and Drug Facility- Site Feasibility Study. The study states that the ‘building is assumed to be classified as a Class 9c aged care building, however could be a Class 3’ (p 6). If Burrangiri is appropriately classified as a Class 3 building, it is capable of meeting NCC requirements without the major Class 9c-level refurbishment assumed in the study;
 - (h) the NCC requires Burrangiri to be safe for people who can still get themselves out of a building (Class 3), not to function like a nursing home designed for people who cannot (Class 9c);
 - (i) a modern respite policy would recognise different types of respite, along with their respective building classifications and funding requirements, to ensure service sustainability and regulatory clarity;
 - (j) the ACT Government has stated that the community does not want a gap in service provision. The community’s concern has been with closure without a clear replacement plan, and carers would generally support a temporary service reconfiguration or closure for refurbishment where this results in a sustainable long-term respite service;
- (2) further notes that:
- (e) on 21 April 2025, the Commonwealth Government committed \$10 million to new capital infrastructure to deliver more aged care respite beds in the ACT; and
 - (f) service providers have indicated they would be interested in using the

Commonwealth's \$10 million to add respite capacity and operate Burrangiri;

- (3) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) work with the Commonwealth Government to:
 - (i) confirm, through an independent and transparent process, the appropriate NCC classification of Burrangiri as either:
 - (A) a Class 3 community respite centre; or
 - (B) a Class 9c residential aged care facility, noting that Class 9c classification would require substantial refurbishment;
 - (ii) enter into an ACT-Commonwealth Memorandum of Understanding to clarify governance arrangements, decision-making responsibilities and processes to utilise the Commonwealth's \$10 million capital commitment to refurbish and expand Burrangiri to increase the number of aged care respite beds in the ACT;
 - (iii) ensure that Burrangiri remains eligible for the funding arrangements that replace the CHSP cottage respite block funding system from July 2027;
 - (iv) invite suitable service providers to submit proposals to refurbish, expand and operate Burrangiri from July 2027;
 - (b) provide a progress report to the Assembly for (3)(a) by 11 June 2026 and quarterly reports thereafter.”.

This debate has been framed as though the Assembly faces a simple choice: either accept that Burrangiri is not fit for purpose and must close or risk operating an unsafe and substandard facility. That framing is wrong, and it has led us away from the real issues that this Assembly should be addressing. This is not a debate about whether Burrangiri meets standards. It is a debate about what type of facility we want, how we classify the building, how we fund respite properly, and how we maximise value for money in a constrained budget environment to deliver more services for the community.

When the issue is reframed correctly, the conclusions change. Canberra faces a significant and growing shortage of respite beds. More than 58,000 carers rely on timely, planned and emergency respite to continue supporting older Canberrans at home. With an ageing population, demand is only going one way—up. Public policy in this space must be judged against a clear test: does it result in more respite capacity for the ACT? Closing Burrangiri fails that test.

Burrangiri currently provides 15 dedicated respite beds, close to half of the ACT's short-term and emergency respite capacity, and does so with something that is critically important—24-hour registered nurse care. That nursing presence allows Burrangiri to support people with moderate needs safely, and gives carers genuine confidence that their loved ones' care needs will be met. This is why Burrangiri is so well known, so relied upon and so well loved by the community. Yet we are told repeatedly that the building is not fit for purpose.

The building reports do not support that claim. The government has relied on the 2025 GHD feasibility study to justify this position. That study was commissioned for a very specific and unrelated purpose—assessing whether Burrangiri could be repurposed as

an alcohol and other drug residential facility. GHD itself states clearly that its conclusions are limited to that purpose and should not be relied on for others.

Madam Assistant Speaker, more importantly, when you read the report, it does not describe a failing or unsafe building. It describes a midlife asset in generally good condition with serviceable systems and maintenance needs that are entirely consistent with normal capital renewal. That assessment is reinforced by ACT Health's own asset management plan, which identifies routine upgrades over time, measured in low millions over 15 years, not the kind of wholesale reconstruction that we have been told is necessary.

Where does the idea of a massive, unavoidable rebuild come from? It comes from an assumed building classification, not from the condition of the building itself. The GHD report states that the building is assumed to be a class 9C residential aged-care facility, but acknowledges that it could be a class 3 community respite centre. That distinction matters enormously. Class 9C standards are designed for nursing homes—facilities where residents cannot evacuate without physical assistance.

Applying that classification automatically drives costs higher, regardless of the actual service delivered. Burrangiri does not operate like a nursing home. It never has. If Burrangiri is appropriately classified as a class 3 community respite centre, the National Construction Code does not require a gold-plated rebuild. It requires targeted fire safety, evacuation and amenity measures consistent with people who can evacuate with guidance—exactly what Burrangiri's service model assumes.

In a constrained fiscal environment, getting this right matters. We do not have the luxury of expensive buildings that we do not need, and nor can we afford policies that reduce service capacity and push costs elsewhere in the system—on to carers, hospitals and emergency care. This is where policy, funding and value for money come together.

The commonwealth government has made two crucial commitments. First, the commonwealth has committed \$10 million in new capital funding to deliver additional aged-care respite beds in the ACT. That funding is explicitly intended to ensure that, following the ACT government's decision to close Burrangiri, the overall number of respite beds in the ACT does not fall. Importantly, that funding can be used either to build a new facility or to extend an existing one.

Second, the commonwealth has amended the Commonwealth Home Support Program grant guidelines, creating a clear funding pathway for cottage and community-based respite services in the ACT. For the first time, Burrangiri can now access commonwealth operating subsidies for respite services where they previously could not. As a result, Burrangiri can now apply for the CHSP funding to deliver commonwealth-supported respite care, building on the \$10 million in capital funding.

This fundamentally changes the picture. There is now both a capital pathway to grow respite capacity and an operating funding pathway to sustain services over time. The responsible question is no longer whether we can afford to keep Burrangiri; the responsible question is whether it makes sense not to.

From a value-for-money perspective, extending or expanding Burrangiri delivers clear

benefits. It leverages an existing publicly owned asset. It builds on an established workforce with 24-hour registered nursing care. It avoids the duplication costs of setting up new services from scratch, and it delivers more beds faster and more efficiently. It also leverages the great day programs and the chef's meals. This is ambition grounded in fiscal responsibility.

That is why this motion calls on the ACT government to: work with the commonwealth to confirm Burrangiri's correct NCC classification through an independent and transparent process, enter into an ACT-commonwealth memorandum of understanding governing the use of the \$10 million commonwealth commitment, and ensure Burrangiri remains eligible under the funding arrangements that replace CHSP from July 2027. It did invite service providers to put forward proposals to refurbish, expand and operate Burrangiri in a way that increases respite capacity. This last point did not get up in the final negotiations, but I hope it will become part of the process outlined in the MOU.

I would like to thank Minister Stephen-Smith for negotiating with me to get the best outcome that we can, and I appreciate it.

Reframing this debate matters. This is not about lowering standards; it is about determining what sort of respite is appropriate for Burrangiri, applying the right standards, spending public money carefully, and delivering the greatest benefit to the community. Keeping Burrangiri, classifying it correctly and using commonwealth funding to expand capacity is not the risky option; it is the responsible one. It is what carers are asking this Assembly to do.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (3.52): I apologise to members that the following amendment was somewhat late in being circulated. It has taken a little while to get to this point, but I understand that my amendment to Ms Carrick's amendment will be supported. I move:

Omit all words in paragraphs (3)(a)(iii) and (iv), substitute:

- “(iii) finalise the post mid-2027 funding model for respite services, including seeking to ensure that Burrangiri or an equivalent service is eligible for the funding arrangements that replace the CHSP cottage respite block funding system from July 2027;”.

I missed the beginning of Ms Carrick's contribution. I want to start by thanking her for bringing this matter back to the Assembly yet again and giving me an opportunity to talk about where we are up to. It is frustrating that, while I have met with the Save Burrangiri Action Group, with some Save Burrangiri Action Group members, and while I have met with Ms Carrick and we have had detailed conversations, she did not come and talk to me at any time last week to give me any indication that she was intending to move a motion this week. There was no conversation about how we could bring an agreed motion this week and show the clear agreement of the Assembly to deliver a good outcome for the community, and the outcome that the community wants.

It has been a very poor process, trying to negotiate through this motion. While I thank Ms Carrick for finally negotiating and reaching agreement, there was almost no

compromise on her part, despite the fact that I showed good faith by tabling the document she had never asked for before, since April last year, when it was not returned as part of the 213A. I tabled that in the Assembly yesterday, so that the debate today could be well informed. Instead, what has happened is that Ms Carrick has cherry-picked from that report to come up with a completely spurious argument, which we have then had to spend today talking about and trying to correct.

Let me be very clear, Madam Assistant Speaker. The definition of class 9C buildings in the National Construction Code is relevant only if you are refurbishing a building. If you are refurbishing a building for a particular purpose, you need to look at the National Construction Code to see what requirements you need to meet. If you are refurbishing a building as a residential alcohol and other drug rehabilitation facility, it is possible that it could be a class 3 building, because people who access alcohol and other drug rehabilitation facilities are, by and large, mobile, healthy adults who are getting counselling and rehabilitation for addiction issues. They are not frail older people.

By contrast, the class 9C buildings are residential-care buildings that may contain residents who have various care-level needs. They are a place of residence where 10 per cent or more of persons who reside there need physical assistance in conducting their daily activities and to evacuate the building during an emergency. An aged-care building where residents are provided with personal-care services is a class 9C building.

This is an aged-care building where residents are provided with personal-care services. Burrangiri is a facility and the Salvation Army is a service that supports frail older people in our community—frail older people who may have a falls risk, frail older people who may have some level of dementia, frail older people who may need some support getting out of bed, and frail older people who would not—90-plus per cent of them—be able to evacuate themselves in an emergency.

That is not the primary issue here. They are frail older people who require care at home and require care in a residential respite facility that Ms Carrick herself, in her motion, describes as a facility for higher needs than cottage respite, and which Ms Carrick herself consistently insists requires 24/7 registered nurse availability—24/7 registered nurse availability and higher needs care.

She is clutching at straws here to say that the Burrangiri building in its current form is completely fine. If that were the case, Madam Assistant Speaker and members of the Assembly, why would I be creating so much trouble for myself? Why would I be doing that? I am not making it up to create drama for myself. We have reams of information telling us that if we are going to refurbish the building—which would need to be done if we were going to have a new service in there—we need to meet code; then we need to start making even more changes to have the building reach that standard.

I am not opposed to doing that. I am totally open to the option of refurbishing Burrangiri. But last year, when we debated this matter, that option was not on the table. Last year, when we debated this matter, the Legislative Assembly called on me, on 5 March, to “extend the contract with the Salvation Army and delay the closure of Burrangiri respite centre until equivalent alternative respite care capacity is available”. On 8 May, it was even clearer: “cause the Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre to continue its operations to 30 June 2026 (or later) with no break in service”.

There was no option presented at that time that would have said, “Okay, cool; we’ve got to May. The commonwealth government has committed \$10 million for capital. Let’s take that \$10 million and let’s refurbish Burrangiri, if the commonwealth can commit to a funding stream for it.” I was given no time, following the 2025 election, to work with the commonwealth government to find a solution.

Now, when Ms Carrick knows that we are in detailed discussion with the commonwealth to find a solution, and I have said to her and to representatives of the Save Burrangiri Action Group that we are flexible about what that solution looks like, she comes in here with another demand that I do something specific. It is not a matter of saying, “Find a solution,” or, “Here’s the outcome we want; please go away and work with the commonwealth to find a solution.” It is, “Do this thing that I think is the right thing to do, or nothing. No compromise.”

It is, as you can tell, Madam Assistant Speaker, extremely frustrating that this is the attitude, because I do want to achieve an outcome. I have been working with my colleague Senator Gallagher and with my colleague the health minister, Mark Butler. My team has been working with Minister Butler’s office, Minister Rae’s office and Minister Gallagher’s office to work through what the options are.

When we believed that the option was no break in service, that we had no capacity to have a break in service, the only option appeared to us to be to use the commonwealth’s \$10 million to expand the availability of cottage respite. It had a clear funding path for the future through CHSP. We believe that four cottage respite beds, spread across the ACT, so that it is more accessible to people in geographically dispersed areas—four four-bedroom cottages—would more than replace the capacity of Burrangiri and provide funded respite.

That was the option that we were exploring—what we have talked to the community about. We have talked to the Save Burrangiri Action Group about it and we have talked to Ms Carrick about it. We understand that that is not the option that people would prefer, and we understand that, potentially, there are alternative options, particularly now that the commonwealth has agreed to extend eligibility for the Commonwealth Home Support Program grants to Burrangiri, although I note that that has not come through yet.

The feasibility studies and concept designs are required to determine actual costs of refurbishment. Based on the GHD feasibility report on the possible conversion of the site to be used as a 13-bed alcohol and other drug facility, which I note is not proceeding, and we have ruled that out some time ago, works that implement the findings of the asset management plan and bring the building up to the current building code would cost approximately \$7.4 million. As I said, for the information of members and in advance of the debate today, I tabled a copy of the report yesterday.

I ask the Assembly to note that the estimated timelines and costings are likely to be complicated by the age of the building, and this is an indicative cost of refurbishment for that particular purpose. As Ms Carrick has pointed out, that is a different purpose. The reality is that refurbishment for the purposes of a 15-bed residential aged-care respite cost is likely to be significantly higher, or at least somewhat higher, than for an

AOD facility, due to the higher number of beds, more stringent expectations around infection prevention and control, more stringent expectations around mobility support, and clinical care.

Furthermore, the refurbishment—and GHD makes this clear—is likely to require addressing the presence of asbestos, in-slab plumbing, load-bearing walls and, of course, going through the development application process. The work to be undertaken to bring it up to current building code includes renovating all wet areas, upgrading the commercial kitchen, installing new roofing, replacing both sunrooms with safe, fit-for-purpose extensions, installing a wet fire system, updating building fabric fittings and fixtures, and electrifying the asset.

The fire system is particularly important because it is one of the key areas of difference between a class 3 building and a class 9C building. A class 9C building that is expected to support people who would have difficulty evacuating in the event of a fire requires a sprinkler system. Any modern aged-care facility requires a sprinkler system. Burrangiri does not have one because it meets the code that existed in the 1980s.

Apart from the process issue that we cannot just declare something a class 3 building, something that only met the standard of a class 3 building would not be able to take more than 10 per cent of residents who required support for the activities of daily living and required support to evacuate. If your dad needs help getting out of bed, sorry, no access to Burrangiri. If mum has mobility challenges, sorry, no access to Burrangiri. If grandma is a falls risk, sorry, no access to Burrangiri. If grandpa has dementia and cannot find his own way out of the building without a bit of help, sorry, no access to Burrangiri.

Burrangiri is an aged-care respite facility. It is there to support people who have care at home and who need care in respite. It is there to take pressure off carers, and the pressure on carers exists because those people that they care for need help with their activities of daily living. That is what creates the pressure on carers. It is, by definition, what Burrangiri is there for.

I am up for the idea that we refurbish Burrangiri to be completely fit for purpose, to be a modern residential respite facility for older people; or that we build a new fit-for-purpose facility that would be there and would provide at least 15 beds for older people who need respite, and to provide that support for their carers. But we need to work with the commonwealth to understand what realistic options are available to achieve that outcome and whether we can do it without any gap in service.

I am very pleased that we have now reached a point where it has been made clear that, if there is a clear pathway forward or if Burrangiri was going to be refurbished, people would say, “Okay, we recognise it needs to be shut down for a little while to be refurbished because it’s going to reopen even better than it was before.” That is great news. That gives me, my officials and commonwealth officials more flexibility in having these conversations. But that has only come to my attention in the last two weeks. That has only been part of the conversation in the last, maybe, three weeks.

I do want to work with you, and I recognise all the people in the gallery here supporting Burrangiri. I want to deliver an outcome for the community, but I cannot be—

An incident having occurred in the gallery—

MR DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members of the gallery, please desist. Members of the gallery, I am sorry, but we are here to have a debate. Members, if this continues, I will suspend the sitting. Very well; I suspend the sitting.

An incident having taken place in the gallery, at 4.08 pm the sitting was suspended until the ringing of the bells.

The bells having been rung, Mr Deputy Speaker resumed the chair at 4.14 pm.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (4.14), by leave: I think Ms O’Dea’s interjection highlighted the complexity of the people we are talking about who require care, and the reasons why this facility—either Burrangiri, as refurbished, or a new facility—needs to be fit for purpose for a range of people with a range of complexities. It cannot be only for those people who are able to walk and evacuate themselves in the case of an emergency.

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (4.15): We will be supporting the amendment from Ms Stephen-Smith. I want to thank Ms Carrick for her dogged determination, which I know on occasions frustrates Ms Stephen-Smith—and I get that. Ms Carrick reminds me often of my favourite kelpie--though Ms Carrick does smell better than my favourite kelpie. Whenever you go out into the backyard, my favourite kelpie, Gaffy, goes and grabs his favourite ball, Gilbert, and he insists that you play with him, and he has this one-track mind. Ms Carrick has a couple of favourite balls, and this is one of them. I think it is a credit to her as a local member, and I think that the community—some of whom have gathered in the gallery today—should be extremely thankful of Ms Carrick’s dogged determination in standing up and trying to get a result.

I had discussions with Ms Stephen-Smith in her office today about this potential amendment. I note that, when we got to the “calls-on” of the motion from Ms Carrick, we worked through things that were possible and things that perhaps were not quite possible. As a consequence, I was more than happy to arrive at a situation that an amendment would be put forward that by and large replicates an original clause from the motion as it appeared on the notice paper. We think it heads in the right direction. Although I am sure it is not entirely what Ms Carrick was looking for, I think it is 85 per cent of what she was looking for.

I am here to take the heat out—and there is a bit of heat. I am hoping that there is broad agreement across this Assembly that respite services play a critical role in supporting some of the most vulnerable members of our community, as well as their families and carers. The question is not whether respite care is important but how we ensure that it is sustainable and delivered into the future. With the current funding arrangements set to change beyond mid-2027, it is essential that the ACT government works constructively with the commonwealth to finalise a long-term funding model for respite services—and this must be a priority. Uncertainty in funding creates instability for provider staff and, most importantly, the people who rely on these services. It is

interesting when it comes to this issue that it is possible to have a conversation with Ms Stephen-Smith and then have the same conversation with Ms Carrick and land at completely different points. I think this motion now lands somewhere in the middle of that, and I would like to believe that it is helpful.

I understand that there is enormous frustration, and we saw that frustration spill out in the gallery here today. We do not often see that here. We do not often see that sort of emotion and passion and that, “I am at the end of my tether.” Ms Carrick has been listening, and we are all listening—and I know that Ms Stephen-Smith is listening as well. I know sometimes that there is frustration that the solutions need to be simpler, but in many cases they are not. Burrangiri has long been a part of the conversation in this space. While there are some differing views about the condition of the facility, what is not in dispute is the strong connection that many families and stakeholders have to the service it has provided over time, and those voices matter. They should be part of any future planning.

The Canberra Liberals support an approach that keeps options on the table, whether that is Burrangiri itself. Here is the thing: on the amendment from Ms Stephen-Smith, although we are fighting—we are fighting to save and we are fighting to keep this model in place—we have to concede that it is possible that we will not win. I understand that Ms Carrick is absolutely convinced that we can confirm through an independent and transparent process that the NCC classification of Burrangiri will have it as a class 3 and that Ms Stephen-Smith is absolutely convinced that it will end up as a class 9C. It is one of the reasons why we have no drama whatsoever supporting the “calls-on” that we should work with the commonwealth government or indeed anyone else—because I do not know that that process is handled by the commonwealth—and that we should go through that process to absolutely confirm where we sit in this space.

Cottage respite models of course can offer a more personalised home-like environment that is often better suited to the needs of individuals requiring short-term care. They are an important part of a diverse service system and they should not be overlooked in favour of only larger-scale or institutional models. Ultimately, this is about outcomes, and I am always about outcomes. When we sat down to talk about the motion and Ms Stephen-Smith wanted to start grumbling about some of the things in the notes, I said, “Don’t worry about the notes; let’s just get to the outcome.” I read a book from the final chapter. I go straight to the end and find out how it finishes. I just want to know how it finishes. The “calls-ons” here from Ms Carrick are relatively sensible, I think, with this amendment in place. Thanks, Ms Carrick; thanks, Ms Stephen-Smith. Let’s just chill.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (4.22): On behalf of the Greens, I am pleased to rise today and indicate my support for the outcome that we have got to. I particularly acknowledge Ms Carrick in starting this discussion. It has been quite the week of conversations. There has been a lot of back and forth and a lot of research going on this week, and I think that through that we have managed to get to a really important place which will move this issue forward. I am pleased that we have been able to achieve that, because this is a really important issue. As we fully understand—and we have just been clearly reminded—this really matters to people in Canberra. It matters to people who are working incredibly hard to support loved ones and it also matters to those who are working in this space who are very passionate about caring for others in our community.

Respite care is fundamental to the shared goal of both the ACT and commonwealth governments to enable older Australians to live at home for as long as possible. I think that is a view that many in the community share as well. Carers provide extraordinary levels of unpaid care, often under significant physical, emotional and financial strain. Without reliable respite services, carers can burn out and older people are more likely to experience crisis admissions to hospital or prematurely enter into residential aged care. We know that the ACT's population is both growing and aging. Our population of over-85-year-olds in particular is expected to double by 2041. If there are not enough suitable respite beds available, more people will end up in hospital than is necessary. That really is an outcome we should be seeking to avoid. Not only is it not the best place for those who require respite care to be, but let's face it: if you had a choice about being in a hospital ward or being somewhere in a respite cottage that feels a bit more like home, we know where, frankly, just about anybody would rather be. That is for the individual but it is also for those who are caring for them. They want their loved one to feel they are in a homely kind of place where they feel safe and comfortable.

We also know there is an economic case around it. It costs around \$1,200 per bed night to be in hospital. This underscores the importance of honouring the commonwealth government's commitments to put the \$10 million towards new capital infrastructure for more aged-care respite beds in the ACT. We know we are going to need more, and we need to be thinking very carefully and working together to work out how we are going to achieve that.

Certainly when it comes to Burrangiri, their particular contribution to hospital avoidance is clear. In 2023-24, the centre provided 314 respite admissions with approximately 43 per cent of those linked to hospital avoidance or reduced hospital length of stay. So this motion not only is about compassionate policy and human-centred outcomes but also sound health system planning, sound health policy and good economic policy for the territory. More than that, Burrangiri has a 98 per cent occupancy rate, a 96 per cent satisfaction and nearly 40 years of service. It is also the only respite centre in the ACT that caters to moderate- to high-level needs patients. Although small cottages could be turned into moderate- to high-level care in theory, the economies of scale certainly suggest that, in practice, that is probably not economical and not a model that anybody is going to be able to make sustainable. So a 15-bed facility like Burrangiri, and models like it, I think, are an important part of thinking about the spectrum of what respite care needs to be.

It is clear that, in the ACT, Burrangiri is a unique facility. Having sat and thought about this, looked at all of the discussions and looked at all the policy papers and the various debates we have had in this place this week as we got ready for this motion, I have come to the conclusion, as you look around the country, that no-one has anything like this—and you kind of go, “Why is that?” I have come to the conclusion that the ACT actually has a better respite care service than probably the rest of the country when it comes to people with moderate- to high-level care needs, and I think that is something we need to nurture and protect. By giving the carers of such patients a chance to have a break, we are helping those they care for to remain at home for longer and not be put into permanent residential care before they want or need to be. So that is also a really important outcome.

In terms of the specifics of the motion, as I say, I think we now have an agreement

where we will be supporting Minister Stephen-Smith's amendment. I understand that is the unanimous view of the chamber, and that is a good outcome for today. Then that will fit into Ms Carrick's amendment as moved, and we will be supporting that as well. I think there were some really good outcomes in here. There is dispute around the class of the building and the like. I think we have a sensible process here to have an independent assessment of it and get an answer, and then we can all work from that basis. It also seems fair to ensure that Burrangiri or an equivalent service will be eligible for the funding arrangements that will replace the CHSP cottage respite block funding system from July 27.

There are, for me, really two important parts to this conversation. One is what we are trying to achieve and being really mindful of the people who need these services and not losing sight of that. The second goes to the technical elements of commonwealth funding models, building classes and the like. I think this motion has done an effective job of addressing both, and that is why we are pleased to support it today and pleased that the Assembly has been able to come up with a motion that is going to pass without a vote but with unanimous support across this chamber.

MR EMERSON (Kurrajong) (4.28): I would like to speak to both the motion and the amendments. I will start by thanking Ms Carrick and the many carers that rely on Burrangiri for their relentless advocacy for this absolutely vital service for our community. This advocacy has already had an immense impact on the lives of many families—delaying the closure of Burrangiri to begin with, and continuing to push for certainty into the future, which is the subject of today's motion.

I would also like to thank Minister Stephen-Smith for her work on this, and her office, for their collaborative engagement on this motion with all offices, including my own, starting early yesterday. It has, I believe, as Mr Rattenbury reflected on it, ultimately resulted in a really good outcome today. We are united around what I think is a fantastic result. They may be less sincere about opportunities for greater collaboration across the Assembly—I note Minister Berry, in fact, reflected on that yesterday, when we were all busy condemning Senator Gallagher and her colleagues—and opportunities to avoid the kind of frantic, last-minute information-seeking about the National Construction Code.

Those lessons aside, I think that the final product that we are set to agree on—in some ways, the nature of some of the debate today has been unfortunate—reflects the ability of the Assembly ultimately to come together to achieve good outcomes for our community. I think the remarks we have heard reflect that as well.

For clarity, having regard to anyone listening or visitors to the chamber today, we are supporting in the call-ons today the ACT government working with the commonwealth government, including by entering into an ACT-commonwealth memorandum of understanding to clarify governance arrangements, decision-making responsibilities and processes to utilise the commonwealth's \$10 million capital commitment to refurbish and expand Burrangiri, to increase the number of aged-care respite beds in the ACT.

That is a really great outcome. If we had this on the agenda and we knew that was where we were going to land, we would all be really pleased with it. It is a credit to Ms Carrick

for continuing to put this on the agenda, to advocates from our community for doing the same, and to the minister and other members for responding positively to that advocacy, in search of an outcome that reflects our community's desires and expectations.

I also briefly want to touch on the work of the social policy committee, which inquired into this matter, following some of that advocacy. We had an opportunity for valued voices from across our community to be heard and for the lived experiences of those requiring respite care for themselves or their loved ones to be able to inform the direction we are now seeing being pursued in the Assembly. It also armed the Assembly and the government with an evidence base from which to strengthen its advocacy to and its work with the commonwealth.

I note that, in the government's response to the committee report, it did not agree with the recommendation to report data on the total number of hospital bed days for persons who could have been accommodated in a respite-care bed if one had been available. While I appreciate that it is the commonwealth government that administers respite services, the ACT government should have data on the people who have been deemed fit for discharge from our hospitals, but who were unable to be discharged for various reasons, this reason included. I would expect that those reasons for delayed discharge are clinically noted, and that information should be available for publication to inform not just what happens with Burrangiri but what is happening across our respite system more broadly.

I briefly note again the government's response to that committee report, including committing to work closely with the commonwealth government to enhance and strengthen respite-care services across the ACT, and noting the commonwealth's commitment of \$10 million in infrastructure funding towards that aim.

It has been a challenging afternoon in the Assembly, but I think it is encouraging to now see this response reflected in the motion that we will pass today, and that the government will enter into an MOU with the commonwealth to clarify how this can be used for Burrangiri or an equivalent service moving forward.

I have mentioned the advocacy. We would not be here—I am certain of it—without the advocacy of the Save Burrangiri Action Group. It is a credit to them. It is a credit to carers relying on a respite service to have taken so much time out of the caring responsibilities and opportunities for respite to advocate for themselves, the people they care for and for what is a vital asset.

All of this is a lesson, in that 15 beds might not sound like much, but the scope of impact cannot be the only measure of the decisions that we make; it is also about the depth of the impact. What we have heard in the chamber this afternoon really reflects just how deeply, heavily and immensely this service has impacted the Canberrans who have come into contact with it. I think that is behind the passion and the desire to see it continued.

Ms Stephen-Smith's amendment to **Ms Carrick's** amendment agreed to.

MS CARRICK (Murrumbidgee) (4.33): In closing, this is about carers, and it is really

important that we support them. I would like to thank those in the gallery who have come along today. I would like to thank Penelope McKenzie and Peter Lyons. I think that Penny is the best advocate in town, and I thank her. I have really learned a lot from her; terrific.

Burrangiri fills a gap in the respite market. We have the cottages for low care; we have residential aged care. There is a serious gap in the middle. That is what Burrangiri attempts to fill. It will never be all things to all people, and we need to work out what is the purpose of Burrangiri. Who does it support? What people can it take and what carers does it therefore support? It might not be able to take the highest care needs that are out there, but the medium care, and around that, in the middle, takes in the bulk of the people that are caring.

We need to look at the options, at what is the best solution and where we can spend our money most wisely. Maybe those with really high care needs do not go there, and we have to find another solution for them; or we invest in Burrangiri and they can take those with really high care needs. These options need to be considered. We also need to talk to the providers that are good at this. We have Home Care, Goodwin and other providers that build infrastructure and operate the services. We need to talk to them about what they can do with the \$10 million at Burrangiri or elsewhere.

Unfortunately, that is the part that has come out of the motion. But all is not lost, because we do have a memorandum of understanding between the ACT and the commonwealth to clarify governance arrangements, decision-making responsibility and processes to utilise the \$10 million capital commitment. It is in there that the call to the providers can be part of the process in that memorandum of understanding. We hope to see it there. We hope we can find a great outcome for Burrangiri. We hope we can look after our carers. Thank you, Minister Stephen-Smith. We got there in the end.

Ms Carrick's amendment, as amended, agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Residential Tenancies (Posting Termination) Amendment Bill 2025

Motion (by **Mr Cain**) agreed to:

That, pursuant to standing order 152, order of the day No 1, Private Members' business, relating to Residential Tenancies (Posting Termination) Amendment Bill 2025, be discharged from the Notice Paper.

Papers

Motion to take note of papers

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

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

Voluntary assisted dying—carriage service restrictions

Debate resumed.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (4.38): The Greens are supportive of the intent behind this motion. As the “notes” section of the motion lays out, there are considerable good and practical reasons to support the change in order to provide accessible telehealth appointments for those who seek voluntary assisted dying but cannot physically attend an appointment for reasons of incapacity or distance. I have also been advised that the same law creates challenges for counselling services regarding suicide prevention.

This matter has been bubbling for a prolonged period of time, and it is disappointing that there has been no movement from the federal government, or even a willingness from the federal government to allow a private member’s bill addressing this issue to come on for debate. That is worse than inaction. That is a deliberate denial of steps from others to address the issue—a tacit endorsement of the status quo.

We will be supportive of the motion today. I do, however, wish to talk about paragraph (9) of the motion. I would like to note that, after much commentary over the course of the sitting week from the government about how we are writing to our federal counterparts, we now appear to be debating yet another motion from the government that seeks members to write letters. Methinks that the government protested too much during the course of this week on this particular tactic.

That being said, less of this style of tactic could be an improvement going forward for this Assembly. I am just saying that. I know I am not perfect in terms of my own history on this tactic, but perhaps we could find an opportunity to rise to a collective standard.

I also note that the Attorney-General and the health minister appear to need our help—being the ACT Greens, the Canberra Liberals and the Independents in this place—to lobby Labor federal elected representatives. I am happy to assist; do not get me wrong on this matter. It just seems to indicate that they lack the ability to persuade their federal counterparts on this problem. I find it amusing that the supposedly productive working relationship often referred to in this chamber and in the media by Labor members might not be as effective and as strong as proclaimed, in that assistance from the ACT Greens is required to help persuade those federal Labor members.

I will, of course, be taking this matter up with the Australian Greens about the balance of power in the Senate, but note that they will be reliant on federal Labor to bring the proposed bill forward.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (4.41): I am speaking to this motion today because I am fundamentally against what the government has proposed here. I want to thank Mrs Morris for her speech earlier this morning, when she spoke passionately on this matter, and Mr Cocks, who articulated the technical details quite clearly. I will not go through as much of that detail right now, but I want to put on the record that I do have concern about the approach that this government has taken on this particular matter.

As the motion notes, the ACT government has attempted to convince the federal government through the normal channels, such as the health ministers’ meetings. This

is the appropriate way for the different levels of government to work together. While the Chief Minister tells us that having a Labor government both federally and locally will lead to better collaboration and better outcomes for Canberra, obviously, he has quite clearly failed here.

They are now asking all of us to get behind them, and to interfere with another parliament—that is, the federal parliament—to bully them into submission and to force them to change federal legislation. I do not think that is what we in this place should be doing. I am not comfortable with doing that, and that is why I am opposing this motion today.

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (4.42): I rise to put on the record my support for this motion moved by the Attorney-General and the Minister for Health. I was not sure whether I would speak today, but I have decided that I would speak, in order to put on the record my support for this motion. I am giving my support for changing a law that is not about voluntary assisted dying; it is changing a law to allow people who would like to access voluntary assisted dying the dignity to do that in a way that respects their dignity and their autonomy.

It respects the medical practitioners who are assisting them in that process. It extends respect to people that do not have the ability to travel to see a doctor or are at a disadvantage when it comes to a doctor coming to see them because of distance, because of frailty—because of so many reasons.

It is really important that we recognise that there is, once again, a law at the commonwealth level that is stopping the ACT fully helping its citizens. In this case, the law is stopping all the states and territories—all jurisdictions—fully being there to support its citizens.

I want to put on the record my support for this motion, and I call on the federal government to look at changing this law, in order to give dignity to people who want to access voluntary assisted dying and their medical practitioners that want to do the best by them. I commend the motion.

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) (4.44): I really thank all members for their engagement with this debate. It has been encouraging to hear the genuine thought that has been applied. I particularly reflect on Mrs Morris's contribution in a genuinely positive way. I think anyone who was sitting here—and certainly Mr Parton was—could feel the anguish that was emanating from Mrs Morris. I hope I am not misrepresenting her here, but I felt that she felt inherently conflicted. I certainly respect her deep position against voluntary assisted dying, but I also felt very touched and impressed by the way that she had been engaging, her openness in listening to Dr Kerrie Aust, in particular, and in understanding and seeing another side of what is a very, very difficult conversation for some people. So I truly thank her for that engagement, and I thank all members in this place for working through this and for engaging with the intent that it was brought.

I think it is worth stressing that there is a lot that our doctors, our clinicians and our practitioners—those who are practising voluntary assisted dying and giving effect to

the scheme—that they are bound by. There is so much that governs their operations ethically and clinically, and there are many boards and associations with which they need to be compliant with. I think it is pretty clear that in-person appointments for something like voluntary assisted dying is always preferred by clinicians. But there are moments where people are going to be too unwell to travel or are living in remote areas. I think at worst it can be the difference between accessing care and not.

I am going to quote pretty extensively from Go Gentle because they say it so well—in sharing some of the stories that I did not touch on in my comments last week. Actually, I think I did talk about this, but there are some more details. Tom—not his real name—was a 79-year-old with end-stage lung disease in Far North Queensland. He was dying with a list of increasingly harrowing symptoms. Tom requested access to voluntary assisted dying, but he was too unwell to travel for in-person assessments by two independent doctors. He was denied the option of telehealth, and so a doctor in Ipswich made a 3,000-kilometre round trip to assess his eligibility. A week later, a second independent doctor travelled 2,500 kilometres to provide his second assessment. Finally, the first doctor had to return another 3,000 kilometres to witness and accept Tom’s final request. Yet those three weeks and 8,500 kilometres were to no avail. Tom was now a very sick man and he died. He died before the medication could be dispensed. He spent his final precious days stuck in a very stressful cycle of pain and uncertainty, when he should have been supported and at peace.

Suffering intolerably from progressive supranuclear palsy, a rare neurodegenerative disease, 82-year-old Victorian Alan Clark died just one day before he was due to receive his voluntary assisted dying medication. Despite applying for access to voluntary assisted dying six months earlier, he struggled to make his way through the process, partly because of the ban on using telemedicine. His wife Zenda told *ABC News* that Alan struggled to find voluntary assisted dying trained neurologists to assess him for eligibility and he could not physically attend multiple in-person appointments with doctors. “By the time all the approvals went through,” Zenda said, “it was too late. It was just the most horrific end. Everything he dreaded happened.” Zenda said that, in the end, Alan died in the very circumstances that he and his loved ones had feared the most. These are not edge cases. They are not aberrations. They are documented. They are foreseeable. They are entirely preventable consequences of a law that has not been updated. These are real stories, real Australian stories. This is what it looks like in practice. This is not an abstract proposition. It is not something that has not had much time for people to think about.

I appreciate the comments about the no notice been given with this on the notice paper. Well, I gave the maximum really that I could in this week. I could have lodged it with the clerk yesterday as an executive motion, but I put it on on Monday to give people as much time as possible with it. Given some of the antics that we have seen in the last few weeks in this place, I found the commentary about not enough time very surprising. But I assure you that this was not a revenge motion. This is very serious, and I had been giving plenty of foreshadowing, I thought.

To some of the concerns that were raised, electronic communication, including telehealth is used successfully in sensitive areas of medicine. It is used in mental health. It is used in palliative care. It is used in the termination of pregnancy. It is used for psychiatric appointments. The same high standards apply to voluntary assisted dying

care regardless of whether it is provided by a clinician by telehealth or in person. I would further note that telehealth consults are further covered by guidelines that people are expected to be engaging with.

In the two and a half minutes I have left, I want to particularly knowledge Kate Kyriacou for her advocacy. Her voice on this issue has been consistent, clear and grounded in the reality of what dying Australians are actually experiencing. She has been doing that in her position, a position of privilege, as a journalist at *The Courier Mail*—and strength to her arm. This is the kind of advocacy that moves things. I am grateful for it and I hope we see more of our local and national media taking a leaf out of Kate’s book.

I am going to be direct about something. The fact that the commonwealth law has not been fixed is not a failure of ACT Labor or Minister Stephen-Smith or myself, despite what you, Mr Deputy Speaker, said. It is not a failure of any state or territory government. It is not a failure of any individual member. No member in any parliament, of any stripe, in any jurisdiction, has been able to get this done at the federal level with two different parties at the helm since voluntary assisted dying started to become legal in Australia. That is a statement about the commonwealth, not about us. We will keep pushing. We will keep making the case. But the blocking is not with any one person. What we are trying to do with this motion is remind the commonwealth that there is a groundswell here and, in doing so, remind all federal parliamentarians that we expect them to be taking up the fight for us again, no matter their stripe.

Doctors do not stop being doctors on a video call; they remain bound by the same professional obligations, the same APRA guidance, the same ethical codes that govern every other sensitive consultation they conduct. Telehealth is already used every day in areas of medicine with profound life and death consequences. Voluntary assisted dying is the outlier, and it should not be. The commonwealth prohibition does not make voluntary assisted dying safer; it makes it harder—and for some people, people like Tom and Alan and too many others, it makes it impossible. Again, these are foreseeable, preventable consequences of a law that has simply not kept pace with the reality it governs, and we owe it to those people to keep saying so and to urge action.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Health, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Finance and Minister for the Public Service) (4.54), in reply: Very briefly, in closing, I just wanted to again thank Ms Cheyne for the work that she did on this motion. I think everybody probably appreciates all her work. I was very pleased to co-sponsor it. I also want to thank all of the members who spoke in such a heartfelt way and so thoughtfully in relation to this. I think Ms Cheyne has said everything that needs to be said in relation to why we are bringing this motion forward at this time, and I hope that it will get the majority support, at the very least, of this Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Statements by members

Mental health—Josh’s Legacy Gala Dinner

MR PARTON (Brindabella—Leader of the Opposition) (4.55): I rise to acknowledge the upcoming Josh’s Legacy Gala Dinner 2026, hosted by I Got You, which is going to be held on Saturday 18 April at QT—black tie. It is always a cracker of a night. This

event represents far more than a date on the calendar; it reflects the ongoing commitment of a community that is determined to confront one of the most difficult and deeply personal challenges we face, and that is suicide prevention. I am personally honoured to have been once again invited to serve as Master of Ceremonies for this year's gala dinner. It is an absolute privilege to play even a small role in an event that brings people together in support of such an important cause and to help highlight the stories, the advocacy and the efforts that continue to make a difference in this space at least.

This work being undertaken is critical. It is about early intervention. It is about building resilience. But, most importantly, it is about ensuring that nobody feels alone in their time of need. Initiatives like this help to break down stigma, encourage open conversations and remind people that support is always within reach. Josh's Legacy is one that continues to bring people together with a shared purpose to look out for one another, to check in and to act with compassion. I commend everyone involved in organising the gala, particularly Josh's mother and co-founder of I Got You, Leesa Mountford. I also acknowledge all those who continue to support the vital work of suicide prevention in our community. Every effort in this space matters. Every life matters. They still have tickets available; just search for I Got You on Facebook.

Thank Your Pharmacist Day

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (4.57): Today I want to acknowledge Thank Your Pharmacist Day and to recognise the extraordinary contribution of pharmacists across the electorate of Ginninderra, in particular, and the broader Canberra community. Most of us do not think twice about walking into our local pharmacy. It is a place where we feel welcome. We can get what we want and sometimes we can get more than we expect. In fact, the average Australian visits a community pharmacy around 18 times a year. In Ginninderra alone, about 25 to 30 pharmacies serve our growing community. Most of our pharmacies are open extended hours and many are open seven days a week, ensuring that care is never out of reach.

Pharmacists are not only providing medication; they are also delivering vaccinations and offering advice on minor ailments. Some pharmacies provide wound management, extensive support for many chronic health conditions, weight management programs, sleep studies, diabetic programs and management and medical certificates—amongst a whole list of other things they provide to our community; a growing service delivery location. They provide care and reassurance. So on Thank Your Pharmacist Day, if you happen to be in one in the next few days, please go ahead and thank your pharmacist.

Thank Your Pharmacist Day

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (4.58): I too rise to celebrate Thank Your Pharmacist Day, a chance to recognise a profession that quietly keeps our communities healthy, informed and cared for. My first job was working in a pharmacy. Like many first jobs, I expected to learn how to stock shelves, run the register and follow procedures. But what I did not expect to see up close was the human side of health care. I watched our pharmacist explain complex information with patience, reassure anxious patients and catch mistakes that truly mattered. He knew customers by name, understood their histories and took the time to listen, even on the busiest days. I learnt very quickly that

pharmacists do far more than dispense medication; they build trust. That early experience shaped my respect for this profession. Just this week I brought a motion about extending pharmacy access on the south side.

Pharmacists are often the most accessible healthcare professionals—answering questions, offering guidance and supporting people at their most vulnerable moments. Their expertise, attention to detail and compassion make a real difference every single day. So today, we say thank you—thank you for your knowledge, your care, your long hours and your unwavering commitment to patient wellbeing. To all pharmacists and pharmacy staff: your work matters and it does not go unnoticed. So happy Thank A Pharmacist Day.

Community events—school fetes

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) (5.00): I rise to recognise some community service, particularly in relation to some school fetes recently and upcoming in Belconnen. First of all, I want to acknowledge St John the Apostle at Florey just the other week. It was terrific. It was so busy. It was such a great show of community spirit. I had a ball on the barbecue, including with one of Mr Milligan's staff members. It turns out that, when we are working together, we can get a lot done. Who knew?

Mr Cain: That is great. I was there too.

MS CHEYNE: Not with me, you were not. Last week I was at St Monica's Primary School in the white elephant stall.

Mr Cain: I was there too.

MS CHEYNE: Not with me. It was also fantastic and such a lot of fun. The way that Barbara had prepared the area and the amount of goods that were able to be moved as a direct consequence of her efforts and all of those who donated. Finally, the St Thomas Aquinas fete is on this week in Belconnen, and I encourage people to get out and to support it.

Discussion concluded.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

LGBTIQA+ affairs—Trans Day Visibility

MISS NUTTALL (Brindabella) (5.01): Next Tuesday, 31 March, is International Transgender Day of Visibility. Every time I speak in this place on trans rights, I feel an acute need to strike a sincere balance in both celebrating the trans community and the joy they bring to those around them and in acknowledging that this is a really tough and

difficult time for this community. I think that is particularly worth noting in light of the upcoming Trans Day of Visibility, because this is first and foremost a celebration.

The idea for the day was developed in 2009 by Rachel Crandall Crocker, an American trans woman who did not feel like there was enough celebration of trans folks within the broader queer community. The only date she was aware of which was specifically for her community was another date that I have spoken of in this place: Transgender Day of Remembrance. It is deeply saddening that this kind of date not only is necessary but seems to only grow in its relevance every year. For Rachel and others in the trans community, there needed to be a space, yes, to mourn those the community have lost but also to celebrate the trans community as a whole and the joy they bring to each other and those around them.

Trans people are, after all, always far more than just the plight they face. Thus was born the Trans Day of Visibility, a day to hold celebrations and rallies organised by and for trans people to remind the world that while the trans community may indeed have faced deep challenges and have been hurt, they are not going anywhere.

Across Australia we will see this particularly displayed in events organised by the Trans Justice Project. In Meanjin, Brisbane, activists are holding a Transtravaganza, which will feature the unveiling of the world's largest trans pride flag. And if, like me, you have slight FOMO for not being in Meanjin next Tuesday, do not worry, Trans Justice Canberra is also unveiling the capital's very own huge trans flag on Kings Avenue Bridge from 9 am until 11 am next Tuesday. The sewing bee that was run by Trans Justice Canberra and the ANU Queer* Department last week promises to yield a brilliant flag here in Canberra.

Displaying massive flags with a bunch of awesome trans comrades and allies is, frankly, going to be a lot of fun and is fundamentally a display of joy. But this joy is also a form of resistance. It is joy in the face of oppression here in Australia and abroad. The record-breaking flag displayed in Queensland stands directly against the oppressive laws and lack of medical support trans young people have to deal with in that state.

One purpose of this display will be to help promote and raise funds for Project 491, an initiative initially developed to help young trans Queenslanders receive, often, lifesaving care, despite the ban within the Queensland public system. The Country Liberal government in the Northern Territory has introduced similarly draconian measures, and Project 491, since they began raising money, has tried to help kids in this territory as well. Queensland and the Northern Territory are just two examples of where trans joy and even just existence has become resistance. We have seen this under the Trump regime in the US and, increasingly, in the UK where health care for trans young people has been effectively banned.

Now, at this point, I will acknowledge again that next Tuesday is first and foremost a celebration, and I appreciate a lot of what I am discussing brings absolutely no cause for celebration. But I do want to bring it up to remind everyone why we must celebrate this community so much. It is not about trying to engage in the culture wars; it is about active solidarity in the face of real and material discrimination. But we also celebrate the trans community because it is genuinely good for all of us. The trans community have been at the forefront of queer liberation and other social movements from

Stonewall to much of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Even beyond that, celebrating freedom in gender expression helps us all to express ourselves, however we want to. So much of those culture wars I mentioned earlier were and continue to be, fundamentally, about keeping people in boxes. And, hey, if you grew up with very particular ideas about gender identity, maybe the idea of anything different feels scary, but once you get past those ingrained ideas, you can discover that gender can be incredibly fun and joyous and euphoric for all of us—trans, cis or otherwise.

So, please, if you can, come along to the Kings Avenue Bridge next Tuesday morning at 9 am to unveil a hell of a big flag and to celebrate trans joy. And if you can at all afford it, please consider donating to Project 491 to help trans kids who sure as heck need it right now.

Reverend Gayl Mills—retirement

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) (5.06): I rise today to congratulate Reverend Gayl Mills on her retirement from a very distinguished Australian Federal Police career as its Principal Chaplain.

Reverend Mills's innate ability to remain calm in times of distress is what has become her trademark over the past 21 years of service. She has provided strength and support to employees in their time of grief, especially at unimaginable critical incidents where frontline responders and the community are often experiencing some of their worst days. Being able to sit with people during some of life's major tests, sometimes in silence, lending them a shoulder to cry on, or an ear to listen, is something that Reverend Mills's colleagues say is one of her many superpowers.

She has also been able to share with many members in celebrating their professional and life achievements and milestones, including: marrying some members, baptising babies and children, and even baptising some members, bearing witness as children grow up over the years, and seeing recruits start their careers and watching them become sergeants, superintendents and commanders.

Reverend Mills's dedication in going above and beyond has resulted in her being awarded the following recognitions. In 2021 she was awarded the Medal of the Order of Australia for service to police chaplaincy and to the Anglican Church of Australia. She was awarded an AFP Operations Medal for the AFP's response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. She was awarded an AFP Service Medal with a 20-year clasp, an AFP Operation IRONSIDE Citation, an AFP Operation PROTECT Citation, an AFP 40th Anniversary Citation.

She was awarded the Commissioner's Certificate for Operation Arew, acknowledging the often under-recognised superior achievements of individuals undertaking AFP duties. She has also won the National Medal, recognising long and diligent service by members of recognised government and voluntary organisations that risk their lives or safety to protect or assist in enforcement of the law or in times of emergency or national

disaster.

She has been awarded the AFP Welfare Services Medal, awarded to individuals who have provided a significant contribution to the welfare and assistance of colleagues. She has also been awarded the Australia Day Medallion for dedication, commitment and support to the AFP workforce through chaplaincy. The Australia Day Medallion was awarded for her care of the staff, particularly in ACT Policing, creating a positive work culture and modelling the core values of the AFP, which epitomises the high regard in which the ACT Policing family holds Reverend Mills.

On behalf of the ACT government, I would like to thank you for your invaluable contribution to the welfare of the ACT community and our ACT Policing members. Your compassion and genuine care, love, empathy and humour are just some of things your colleagues and friends at the AFP will greatly miss. I truly wish you all the best for your retirement, and I hope that you enjoy a well-deserved break. Thank you.

Hospitals—Caesarean sections

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (5.10): I recently asked for data on C-sections in our hospitals. I was alarmed to see that the C-section rate at the Centenary Hospital was 50 per cent in several months of 2025, and the average has gone from 30 per cent in 2019 to almost 48 per cent by 2025. That is a very steep increase in a very short amount of time. We have gone from one in three to almost half in just six years. That is not good. A caesarean section is an amazing and lifesaving intervention that is medically necessary in 10 to 15 per cent of cases. Ten to 15 per cent is lifesaving, not 50 per cent. The World Health Organization says that caesarean sections are effective in saving maternal and infant lives, but only when they are required for medically-indicated reasons. At the population level, caesarean section rates higher than 10 per cent are not associated with reductions in maternal and newborn mortality rates. They do not save lives when they get past that.

A C-section is a major abdominal surgery. It can cause significant and sometimes permanent complications. The recovery is longer and harder. There is increasing evidence that having a C-section may have long-term health implications. A C-section has a higher risk of experiencing haemorrhage, postoperative infection, surgical and anaesthetic complications and needing a blood transfusion, hysterectomy or ICU admission. In the long term, a woman or birthing person who has a C-section has a higher risk of experiencing pelvic or abdominal pain, adhesions, incisional hernia, bowel obstructions, placental disorders, uterine ruptures, miscarriage and stillbirth in later pregnancies.

Recent research published in the *Lancet* found that women who give birth via C-section have almost double the risk of cardiovascular events for at least a year following birth. Compared to vaginal births, people who had C-sections were twice as likely to be hospitalised for heart-related issues within 12 months following the birth. Babies born by C-sections also have a higher risk of early respiratory problems and infections, and in the long term they have a higher risk of asthma and obesity in childhood.

If a C-section is not your choice for your birth, it is not a procedure to have when it is not necessary, and it is certainly not a procedure we should be performing on half of all

of our people giving birth. C-sections do not just happen. There is a cascade of intervention that happens in hospitals. One intervention leads to the next. If that cascade never begins, birth is much more likely to progress without unnecessary interventions—fewer episiotomies, fewer forceps, fewer unnecessary C-sections. Research shows the further you are from a hospital, the better your birth outcomes. That is partly because being away from a hospital interrupts that cascade of intervention. The better the birth, the more likely it is that the mother and baby will have a great start to life. They are more likely to bond, they are more likely to breastfeed and they are more likely to enjoy one another's company.

One of the things that reduces the rate of C-sections is continuity of care, where you have a known midwife or small team of midwives for your entire pregnancy, birth and postpartum care. Continuity of care is associated with better outcomes for both the mother and the baby, including a much lower risk of C-section. The ACT government's Maternity in Focus plan aims for 50 per cent of women and birthing people to have access to continuity of care by 2028. But in 2023-24 less than a quarter of women and birthing people had access. When my maternity motion passed in 2023, the government committed to 50 per cent by 2028 and 75 per cent by 2032. Now, 2028 is only 21 months away. It is less than two and a half pregnancies away. How are we going to get to 50 per cent of continuity of care in the next 21 months? My questions at estimates last year showed that the Labor government is not funding the additional 24 midwives we need to reach that target.

Our high and rising C-section rates are more evidence that we need a birth centre separate from the hospital, which the community has been asking for for decades, and that we need really well-funded continuity of care. We cannot keep doing the same thing and expecting a different result. Our health system is failing to support our women and birthing people to give birth in a place and a model of care that they have chosen and that will give them the best outcomes. We also need to make sure that our midwives and our consumers are genuinely involved in the co-design of these services and of our birthing facilities and our birth centre. They need to be involved in the site and the structure, not just decisions taken at the end, and we need to make sure that that birth centre is fully separate from the hospital.

ANZAC Day ceremony

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (5.15): I want to speak about Anzac Day, and I do so very deliberately because this is the last sitting day before we come to that very significant Australian public holiday, now in the ACT, but also a significant day for all Australians. The Gallipoli campaign took place during World War I, from 25 April 1915 to 9 January 1916; hence the significance of April 25. It was a commonwealth-French operation aimed at securing a sea route to Russia and capturing Constantinople, now called Istanbul. During this campaign, over 559,000 allied soldiers and 50,000 Australians fought, with 26,111 Australians losing their lives.

I will provide one little example of a story from that time. The youngest Australian to die in Gallipoli was Private James Martin. Unbelievably, at the age of 14, he obtained fake documents to enlist, driven by a principle to serve his country. He was there and he certainly did not have to be. I am not quite sure how he escaped the scrutiny of the enrolment process, but something must have been recognised about him. He went there

to serve a cause that he thought his country believed in, and he never returned. Although our Gallipoli generation has passed, I know the Anzac spirit is alive in every one of our soldiers and service men and women who have succeeded them. The spirit of Anzac is something I hope we proudly continue to honour, celebrate and identify with. We saw it in Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan and Iraq. Now, as we speak, personnel are active in the Gulf to protect Australians and get them home.

As I said, it was a very belated decision from the ACT government to recognise April 25th as a public holiday. I think that is a discussion for another time—perhaps even for next year or closer to next year—to see that we get that right without a sudden decision. I look forward to joining veterans and civilians on Anzac Day. My wife and I are delighted to have been invited to the Dawn Service, in my capacity as shadow minister for veterans, to attend a breakfast with other invited guests and to attend the 9.30 march on that day. Subject to my timetable on the day, I hope to be able to lay a wreath at the Last Post at the end of the day.

I invite all my colleagues in this chamber to join in and acknowledge Anzac Day, perhaps our greatest national day—some would certainly feel that way—not as a celebration of war but as a celebration of service and sacrifice. Even though there will be different opinions forever about the justness or otherwise of any conflict that our armed forces are called to participate in, I think we have to recognise that the people who do participate volunteer themselves at great risk to themselves because they believe in service and they accept the possibility of sacrifice.

So I encourage everyone, whether or not you attend the Dawn Service, to watch the march. Last year I did Anzac Day in the suburbs, because I had an invitation to celebrate on a cul-de-sac in West Belconnen at dawn with some veterans and neighbours from all different cultures, who got up to acknowledge something that was special. Whether you hold a candle in the driveway, as we were encouraged to do during COVID, or, if circumstances are more limiting, please watch the memorial marches that will be on our TV and broadcasts.

YMCA Youth Parliament

MS TOUGH (Brindabella) (5.20): I rise to reflect on the launch of the 2026 Y Youth Parliament, held at the Museum of Australian Democracy, or old Parliament House, last Friday, 20 March. The event marked the beginning of a year-long civics education program that brings together 25 young people from across the ACT to learn about the role of this Assembly and actively participate in representative democracy. It was an encouraging and energising occasion that highlighted the value of investing in youth leadership and civic engagement. One of the highlights for me personally was the opportunity to reconnect with Diya, who undertook work experience in my office just last year. It was wonderful to see her continuing her journey and engaging in public life through involvement in the youth parliament and to witness the confidence she and so many others had at the event. It would not surprise me if we saw Diya back here one day as an MLA. It was also great to attend alongside so many colleagues from here at the Assembly, including you, Mr Speaker, and from the federal parliament. That cross-parliamentary presence sends a strong and positive message to the young people involved about the importance we all place on youth participation in our democratic

institutions.

The 25 participants in the 2026 Youth Parliament will, over the coming year, take on the roles of MLAs, engage with the community and develop ideas for legislation that will ultimately be debated in this chamber. Along the way, they will build skills in public speaking, debate, consultation and leadership—skills that will serve them well, regardless of where their future paths lead. Later this year when the participants come here to the Assembly, they will debate their bills, deliver personal statements and experience firsthand the work of this chamber. These Y members, or YMLAs, remind us that leadership begins early and that some of the young people involved this year may one day stand in this chambers as elected representatives.

The success of this program is due in no small part to the work of the Y Canberra region and the support of partners, including the Office of the Legislative Assembly education team—and a shoutout to Lara who was there on Friday—the Snow Foundation, Hands Across Canberra and the Chief Minister’s Charitable Fund. The launch was a timely reminder that democracy is strengthened when young people are encouraged, supported and empowered to take part. I wish the 2026 Youth Parliament every success and look forward to seeing the contributions these young people make to our community and to our Assembly.

Lions Club Belconnen—Canberra Balloon Spectacular

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) (5.23): Every March, the skies above Canberra fill with colour and every March a small army of volunteers makes sure that the people watching those skies and those who have been up in those skies are well fed. Today I want to take a moment to recognise the extraordinary contribution of the Lions Club of Canberra, Belconnen, and its volunteers at this year’s Canberra Balloon Spectacular and, indeed, over 40 years of volunteering to serve breakfast at the Balloon Spectacular, the Balloon Festival, the Balloon Fiesta and all the other names it has been known as over the decades.

Over nine days, they served thousands of Canberrans—cooking sausages, flipping pancakes and pulling coffees, and doing it all with the kind of cheerful energy that, quite frankly, should not be possible at that hour of the morning. The numbers speak for themselves. There were 901 volunteer hours; 3,000 plates; 120 kilograms of pancake mix—and don’t I know it!; and 210 loaves of bread. These are not small numbers. This is a serious operation, run by people who give their time because they believe in their community.

And it is not just club members. Organisations to whom the club regularly donates and others who also provide a service came along. I was there, as were families, friends, Down syndrome families and Belconnen Rotary—in a joint service operation. We also had several AIS basketballers, who will be heading over to the US for their college basketball season when it restarts—I think in August or September. All of these people gave back as part of their community service. I have never seen a college basketballer in real life. One of these gentlemen, who I think was 18, was seven foot six. It is not a typo; it is not six foot seven—he was seven foot six. He really did make the height of

the barbecues quite pronounced. All these people showed up and all of them pitched in.

Then there were the services offered by those with whom the Belconnen Lions have had a very long relationship. Andrew Deans tests and tags all of their leads and appliances. It takes Andrew over two hours to complete all the equipment for the operation—and he does a terrific job. That’s Cool supplied the Belconnen Lions with a cool room at a discounted rate, with wonderful supporters Supagas and Coates—because, yes, those barbecues are run on gas.

The profits from this event go back into the community. That is the point, and it always has been. But the point is also community service. Despite increased costs prices were kept the same as last year. That is because Belconnen Lions is trying to offer the public value for money. It is not always about making profit to then reinvest back into the community; sometimes it is about how you are serving the community in the moment. Despite this, revenue was up from last year, but that was mainly due to the much better weather—something I can attest to. Canberra is lucky to have people like this. The Balloon Spectacular is a signature event for our city, and it is made better year after year by volunteers who ask for nothing in return.

I want to close by sincerely thanking Gary Jones. I hope it is not true—but he swears to me it is—that he will not be organising the Belconnen Lions for the Balloon Spectacular next year. That does not necessarily mean they are not going to be doing it. Gary has been organising it for the Belconnen Lions and for the community for 34 years, and so they are big shoes to fill. I look forward to catching up with Gary and Brian Inall, my very good friend, very soon to discuss what the future looks like. They have done an amazing job over so many years, and I know lucky we are to have them. I thank them and all of the Belconnen Lions, who show up every day and year after year—and I know that this Assembly joins me.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 5.28 pm until Tuesday, 5 May 2026 at 10 am

Questions without notice taken on notice

Domestic and family violence programs—commonwealth funding

Dr Paterson (*in reply to a question by Ms Barry on Tuesday, 24 March 2026*):

The answers to the Member’s question is as follows:

	2023-24 \$'000	2024-25 \$'000	2025-26 \$'000
CRCC (4 FTE)	505	518	532
YWCA (2 FTE)	341	350	359
Multicultural Hub (1 FTE)	0	154	158
DVCS (1 FTE)	150	154	158
Commonwealth contribution	871	796	828
ACT Government contribution	125	380	379

Dr Paterson (*in reply to a question by Ms Castley on Tuesday, 24 March 2026*):

Yes, funding provided by the Commonwealth under the 500 Workers agreement was used to fund organisations to engage new workers consistent with the commitments made to the Commonwealth.