



# Debates

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## Wednesday, 21 March 2018

**MADAM SPEAKER** (Ms J Burch) took the chair at 10 am and asked members to stand in silence and pray or reflect on their responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

### **Matter of privilege Statement by Speaker**

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Members, before I call on the first motion today, on 20 March Mr Wall gave written notice of a possible breach of privilege concerning certain aspects of the conduct of a witness before the Standing Committee on Economic Development and Tourism in its inquiry into the annual and financial reports 2016-17. Mr Wall sought my advice as to whether threats made constitute a contempt. I present a copy of Mr Wall's letter for the information of members.

Privilege—Alleged breach—Copy of letter from Mr Wall to the Speaker, dated 20 March 2018.

Under the provisions of standing order 276, I must determine as soon as practicable whether or not the matter merits precedence over other business. If, in my opinion, the matter does not merit precedence, I must inform the Assembly of the decision and the member who raised the matter may move a motion without notice forthwith and refer the matter to a select committee. If, in my opinion, the matter does not merit precedence, I must inform the member in writing and also inform the Assembly of that decision.

I am required not to judge whether there has been a breach of privilege or contempt, only to judge whether the matter merits precedence. When the matter was originally brought to my attention, I contacted the Chair of the Standing Committee on Economic Development and Tourism and sought advice as to whether the matters had been raised or discussed within the committee and, if so, whether there was an agreed position on the matter.

The chair subsequently advised that the committee had met and discussed the matter and agreed to include all the relevant correspondence and the *Hansard* extracts in report No 2 of the annual and financial reports 2016-17. The chair further advised that the committee did not believe that any further action was desirable. The report of the committee was tabled yesterday in the Assembly, and the Assembly agreed to a motion that it take note of the paper.

Having considered the matter, I have concluded that the matter does not merit precedence over any other business. I want to make a note of apology to Mr Wall. I understand that you were informed of that, but the formal response in writing is coming to your office. But, given the timing this morning, I do apologise for that delay.

**MR WALL** (Brindabella) (10.03): Madam Speaker, could I move that all advice and correspondence relating to my letter and the matter be tabled in the Assembly today by lunchtime, please?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I have tabled the letter. This is the advice.

**MR WALL:** Could you table the formal advice that you have received?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I will consider that; I will check with the Clerk. I am happy to provide it.

## **Health (Improving Abortion Access) Amendment Bill 2018**

**Ms Le Couteur**, pursuant to notice, presented the bill and its explanatory statement.

Title read by Clerk.

**MS LE COUTEUR** (Murrumbidgee) (10.04): I move:

That this bill be agreed to in principle.

I am enthusiastic about the fact that it is now over 15 years since abortion was made legal and removed from the Crimes Act in the ACT. That was a truly celebratory moment in the history of the Assembly. This bill was also introduced as a private member's bill by Wayne Berry, who was—is—a strong and consistent advocate for abortion law reform. He said at the time, “It is a fundamental right of women to control their own bodies without being overshadowed by outdated legislation based on the 19th century concept of ownership of women by men.” His legislation subsequently passed in 2002. It was, of course, supported by my Greens predecessor Ms Kerrie Tucker. The Greens have always stood up proudly for women's reproductive rights. This bill is another step on the journey.

Fifteen years ago the ACT led the way, but now medical practices have changed and the ACT has just not kept up with the times. In all other Australian jurisdictions, with the exception of South Australia, medical abortions or medical terminations are accessible without the need to visit a specified clinic. In the ACT, due to the way our legislation is written, they are only legal in abortion clinics approved by the minister. The ACT has only two of these: the Marie Stopes clinic and the Canberra Hospital.

This leads me to the most recent abortion-related legislation in the ACT. In 2016 my colleague Minister Rattenbury legislated to ensure that consumers accessing the private Marie Stopes abortion clinic in the ACT could do so without fear of discrimination or harassment by the establishment of protester exclusion zones. Madam Speaker, there is still work to be done to improve access to abortions in the ACT and to take advantage of improvements in medical technology. If passed, my Health (Improving Abortion Access) Amendment Bill 2018 will make medical abortions available to women across the ACT, thus improving access for Canberrans seeking to exercise their reproductive rights.

Evidence has shown that medical abortion provides a safe, accessible and private means of terminating an early pregnancy with medication. Medical abortions are prescribed in most other states and territories by licensed medical practitioners, including GPs and nurses. People can have a professional consultation by phone without the need to visit a clinic. Medical abortions involve the use of mifepristone and misoprostol, commonly known as RU486. These drugs, prescribed by a licensed medical professional, can be taken at home, as with other prescription drugs.

Medical abortions are as safe as surgical abortions. Medical abortions can have significant advantages for pregnant people. The first is privacy. Many pregnant people will not want to tell their family and friends about their situation. Being able to go to their local GP or have a medical consultation over the phone makes that a lot easier than going to the Marie Stopes clinic.

It also possibly makes it a lot more accessible to someone who, particularly if they unexpectedly find themselves pregnant, can talk to their normal medical practitioner, someone who knows them better, about what the best options are for them in the circumstances they find themselves in, rather than going to a clinic where they are probably not a continuing patient.

The second advantage, of course, is convenience. For the reasons I have already mentioned, it could be a lot more convenient to have a medical abortion. The third advantage is cost. A medical termination is usually a few hundred dollars cheaper than a surgical abortion. Of course, there is the possibility that if medical abortions become available through a wider range of providers, there may be some positive impact on pricing.

I cannot help but be struck time and again by the fact that if a pregnant person is prevented from accessing an abortion due to the cost of the procedure, how can we, as a society, possibly expect them to have the financial capability to raise a child or possibly support the other children they may already have? This is a heartbreaking situation where, for financial reasons, some women are unable to access an abortion that they need and want.

I heard a particular story recently about a young Canberran woman who had to save every dollar she had over the six weeks' time frame she had in which an abortion was possible. She walked many kilometres each day to work to save the bus fare. She lived on instant noodles because she knew that she absolutely had to have that abortion. It was an unplanned pregnancy and she simply could not support the child. I hope that allowing access to medical abortion will be a first step in improving the affordability of abortion in the ACT.

I am confident that the broader Canberra community is in agreement with the rights of all people to control their own bodies and to make their own reproductive decisions in the best interests of their own wellbeing and that of their families. People are basically the experts in their own personal circumstances.

I will go through a bit more of the background to this bill. I want to note that it is very difficult to quantify the need for abortions as there are very limited statistics kept on the number of abortions performed in the ACT and Australia more broadly. Of course, there is very limited scope to understand the number of women who are prevented from accessing an abortion or who would otherwise do so if it were not for barriers such as cost, lack of information or, sadly in some cases, gatekeeping by medical professionals.

Add to this the fact that the data recorded by hospitals and by the Medicare system varies in its accuracy and usefulness. Things that may just be described as “a long consultation” or a surgical abortion could be recorded as a D&C, which is a procedure commonly used following a miscarriage or for removing abnormal tissues from the uterus.

It is often left to community advocates and health services to run surveys and collect anecdotal evidence in support of the need and demand for and the number of abortions occurring in our communities. An excellent example of this is the *ACT women’s health matters!* report released by the Women’s Centre for Health Matters earlier this month to mark International Women’s Day.

In spite of the best intentions of this Assembly, as I noted almost two decades ago, we have not seen an increase in the number of abortion providers in the ACT. In fact, one organisation that used to provide abortions, the long-established health service clinic, Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT, ceased to do so, at least in part on the basis that the newly legal services could meet the needs of the Canberra community, so they could more usefully spend their limited resources to concentrate on other important work in aid of vulnerable groups in the community.

There has been neither a net loss nor a gain in the availability of abortion providers in the ACT in the past two decades, despite increased demand and changed cultural expectations. It is very understandable that some healthcare providers such as GPs may be hesitant to provide abortions. The burdens placed on any particular general practice to become an approved facility under the current legislation are clearly significant, as well as potentially opening them and their clients up to harassment by anti-abortion protesters, as of course has been the case with Marie Stopes. It could unnecessarily cause concern to and loss of business from those clients whose private beliefs preclude abortions.

There clearly is a demand for medical abortions in the ACT. One provider does advertise their services for medical abortions for ACT consumers. But if you actually look at it, you will find they are located in Queanbeyan. People have to go across the border to Queanbeyan to pick up self-administered medication. It is medication that is sanctioned nationwide through the PBS. This is disappointing, to say the least, and it is very surprising to find this in our nation’s capital.

Research shows that, depending on the method of contraception being used, the number of unplanned pregnancies per 100 women ranges from one up to 28 in the first year. For best-practice, long-acting reversible contraception such as IUDs and

hormonal implants, the rate of unplanned pregnancy drops to one per cent or less and remains stable over five to 10 years—as opposed to reaching over that time period up to 38 per cent failure rates for common contraceptives such as the pill.

There are, of course, some free contraceptive methods such as the rhythm and withdrawal methods, but they require practice, discipline and overall trust between the partners and, unfortunately, they have a very high failure rate. The figures I cited came from data from the *New York Times*. However, it demonstrates that despite people's best laid plans, even the most effective contraception does fail and fails often enough for abortion to be something that many women have to consider.

While there is access to the morning-after pill, there is a very short window in which to access this. In general, this circumstance would not be when a person knows that they are pregnant, particularly if the pregnancy came due to failure of their normal contraceptive method. And, of course, we are all human and we all make mistakes at times.

Unfortunately, there is another instance which I have become increasingly familiar with due to consultations on the draft consent legislation, which I plan to bring to the Assembly. It is sexual assault. Without going into detail, with sexual assault a pregnancy can be an unplanned and very deeply distressing pregnancy. Suffice to say, I am convinced of the need for people in this circumstance to have access to abortion services, with minimal further intrusion in their lives.

The bill also ensures that a doctor and nurse must not refuse to carry out or to assist in carrying out an abortion in an emergency—I stress the word “emergency”—where a woman's health is in danger. My understanding is that the professional ethics of most medical professionals—not most; all of them—would mean that that was a requirement anyway, but I want to make that abundantly clear. I will stress again that I am talking about an emergency, when the woman's life is in danger.

The bill also ensures that a doctor or nurse must inform patients if they are exercising their right to conscientiously object. There is no expectation that any medical practitioner who has a conscientious objection would have to have anything to do with an abortion. All they need to do is inform their client that that is the situation and leave it to the client to make whatever decisions they feel are appropriate at that point.

That is important because sometimes people do not realise on what basis they are being refused an abortion and so may make the wrong decision if they feel that the basis is medical when, in fact, it is because of the views of the health practitioner. We have consulted with the Human Rights Commission about how to write this. We have gone backwards and forwards on it and we believe that this properly balances the rights of any medical practitioner with the rights of a patient seeking this particular medical service.

There is a clarification in the Health Act to ensure that those who undertake a medical abortion are not inadvertently criminalised. The bill also provides for gender neutral language, recognising that people who do not identify as women may be capable of being pregnant and thus seeking an abortion. The Greens believe that all women and

all people deserve the right to choose and control their own reproductive rights. No matter where someone lives, they deserve the right to control their own life, including if they live in the ACT.

The legislation I have tabled today does not, of course, resolve all of the issues relating to reproductive rights that I have raised. But I believe that it is an important step in the right direction, one I sincerely hope will lead to more and better action in the future and better health outcomes. In particular, it does not address issues around access to and provision of contraception.

Before ending my speech, I would like to thank very much the range of groups that I spoke to in preparing this bill. I have mentioned the Human Rights Commission. I have also spoken to medical professionals and a wide range of non-government organisations who are involved in this line of work and in advocacy for women, whatever their circumstances are. I thank them all for their support.

It is high time the ACT expanded access to safe and legal termination services, not in order to see them proliferate but to ensure that every child born in the ACT is a wanted child and that women and all people are empowered to make safe, timely and informed decisions about their own bodies, their future wellbeing and that of their families. Madam Speaker, I commend this bill to the Assembly.

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

## **Child sexual abuse**

**MRS KIKKERT** (Ginninderra) (10.20): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) in the ABS's 2006 Personal Safety Survey, nearly 1.3 million Australians reported having experienced sexual abuse before the age of 15 (956 600 women and 337 400 men);
- (b) this amounts to 12 per cent of women and 4.5 per cent of men;
- (c) 9.5 per cent of those reporting sexual abuse before age 15 were under age 5 when abuse first occurred;
- (d) research has demonstrated that child sexual abuse can affect brain development, psychological and social functioning, self-esteem, mental health, personality, sleep, health risk behaviours, including substance use, self-harm and life expectancy; and
- (e) the economic cost of child abuse in Australia has been estimated to run into billions of dollars;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) since at least 1986, numerous experts have emphasised the need to better inform parents and other primary caregivers so that they can more effectively prevent and respond to child sexual abuse, with scholarly

- literature increasingly advocating for parent-focussed child sexual abuse prevention efforts;
- (b) well-informed parents and other primary caregivers are considered necessary in order to supplement school-based and other programs targeted at children because such parents and caregivers can:
    - (i) repeat and reinforce correct information;
    - (ii) aid in prevention by recognising risk factors and warning signs;
    - (iii) react helpfully to disclosure or discovery of abuse; and
    - (iv) relieve some of the burden of prevention currently placed on children;
  - (c) many Australian parents and other primary caregivers report feeling unprepared to teach correct and appropriate information to children, to recognise the signs of child sexual abuse or to respond correctly to suspected abuse;
  - (d) the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse has recommended “prevention education for parents” that aims “to increase knowledge of child sexual abuse and its impacts, and build skills to help reduce the risks of child sexual abuse”;
  - (e) the Protecting Victoria’s Vulnerable Children Inquiry concluded that “more can be done to prevent child sexual abuse, particularly through the provision of information and education to parents and caregivers of children”, and observed that “the range of existing expertise and resources already available through organisations like Child Wise and Bravehearts would enable this action to be implemented without delay”; and
  - (f) the current *National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children* states that “a focus on early intervention and prevention is more cost-effective in the long-term than responding to crises, or treating the impacts of abuse and neglect”; and
- (3) calls on the Government to:
- (a) at an appropriate time, provide all first-time parents and other primary caregivers in the ACT evaluated information packets that address child sexual abuse, including how to recognise offender tactics, potentially risky situations, and warning signs as well as how to helpfully respond to suspected abuse and actual discovery of abuse; and
  - (b) work with nationally recognised and accredited organisations such as Bravehearts and Child Wise to make sure that such information packets contain correct and appropriate information and reflect best practice.

I rise today to speak to the motion I have put forward in my name regarding better equipping parents and other primary caregivers to both prevent and, if necessary, respond to child sexual abuse. This is a most serious topic and I feel a great weight of responsibility as I address it. This is especially the case as we have with us in the chamber today a mother and her child, both of whom have been deeply affected by this issue. These two brave Canberrans are here today not by invitation but rather on their insistence. I wish not only to acknowledge their presence but to honour them for their courage, their resilience and their desire to turn private tragedy into a public matter for public good.

This motion has its genesis in intimate discussions with this mother. She has shared with me her personal story and the heartbreaking story of her child. Like many other Canberrans she is highly educated and enjoys good employment. She is also a loving and devoted mother who has always sought to do what is best for her children. But after unspeakable tragedy struck, this good mother set out to find answers. What had gone wrong? What could she have done differently? As she immersed herself in research she came to find answers to these and other questions.

She now realises that, if she had been better prepared, there were indeed warnings she could have recognised and things she should have done differently. For many people, such a realisation would result in overwhelming despair, but not for this mother and not for this child. Together they have forged an unstoppable commitment to helping protect other children and other families. This motion is designed to aid in doing just that.

Child sexual abuse is a scourge that has the capacity to reach into all families regardless of race, ethnicity or socio-economic status. According to the 2006 personal safety survey prepared by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1,294,000 Australians reported having experienced some form of sexual abuse before the age of 15; 74 per cent of these were women and 26 per cent were men. This means that child sexual abuse has reached at least 12 per cent of women and 4.5 per cent of men.

The impacts of child sexual abuse, often shortened to CSA in the literature, are enormous. I quote Professor Jill Astbury of Victoria University:

A significant body of research has demonstrated that the experience of CSA can exert long-lasting effects on brain development, psychological and social functioning, self-esteem, mental health, personality, sleep, health risk behaviours including substance use, self-harm and life expectancy.

These negative impacts often persist for years, sometimes for life. The economic cost is also enormous. A 2008 study by the Australian Childhood Foundation found that the cost to the Australian community of all child abuse was between \$10.7 billion and \$30.1 billion. Even if sexual abuse forms only a small percentage of these figures, it is still a staggering sum. I am confident that no-one in this chamber needs to be persuaded that for both of these reasons we should do everything in our power to prevent the sexual abuse of children and, when required, respond to it in the most appropriate ways.

Numerous prevention and education initiatives have been designed and implemented over the past several decades. As noted this year by Griffith University researcher Julia Rudolph and her colleagues, these efforts have overwhelmingly focused on enhancing children's knowledge and behavioural skills to recognise, avoid and report sexual victimisation. However, Rudolph et al have also discussed the limitations of educational efforts that target children and strongly recommend a more diversified approach to child sexual abuse prevention with initiatives that target multiple levels of a child's ecology. Of all these, well-informed parents and other primary caregivers were identified as the most promising way forward. She said:

Child sexual abuse prevention researchers and advocates have long promoted the crucial role parents and caregivers can play in keeping children safe from child sexual abuse.

As far back as 1986, Professor David Finkelhor, who has been called probably the most prominent sociologist at work in the field of child sexual abuse, identified three advantages of prevention education for parents: first, the repetition of information from a trusted source can be more effective than the isolated classroom experience; second, if parents learn to recognise the signs, they may more easily identify abuse when it occurs; and, third, parents may learn to react in more helpful ways to discovery of abuse.

These points have been repeated and amplified by other experts, with Nathan Marriage from James Cook University noting last year that parent-focused child abuse prevention efforts have been increasingly advocated in the literature. I offer just a few examples. In 2012 Georgia Babatsikos observed that most prevention programs place the burden of responsibility for prevention on children while overlooking the critical population of parents and concluded that there is a need for more prevention programs targeting parents. The following year Professor Russell Hawkins stated clearly that prevention programs which target parents are needed to supplement school-based programs that leave the onus on the child to prevent and report abuse.

In 2015 Tamar Mendelson and Elizabeth Letourneau from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health advocated for child sexual abuse prevention efforts that specifically target the parents of young children. They wrote that parents have been neglected as a focus of child sexual abuse preventions, noting the success of family focused interventions in reducing other forms of child mistreatment. The aforementioned study by Marriage et al likewise echoes the need for parents and other primary caregivers to be better informed as they “do not automatically develop the ability to identify abuse as a result of their close and regular interaction with their children”.

The call to better inform and equip parents can be found in recent government reports as well. Victoria’s 2012 report of the inquiry into protecting Victoria’s vulnerable children, also called the Cummins inquiry, calls for a wide-ranging education and information campaign for parents and caregivers of all school-aged children on the prevention of child sexual abuse. Recommendation 6.2 from the final report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse includes prevention education for parents and clarifies that the education should aim to increase knowledge of child sexual abuse and its impacts and build skills to help reduce the risk of child sexual abuse.

This unified call to provide better resources for parents acknowledges that many are insufficiently prepared to teach correct and appropriate information to children, to recognise the signs of child sexual abuse and to respond correctly to suspected abuse. Parents interviewed by Babatsikos as part of her PhD research expressed concern about what they should be teaching their children and at what age.

The Australian Childhood Foundation's 2010 survey of community attitudes found that 28 per cent of respondents did not feel confident enough to recognise the signs of child abuse and neglect, and 20 per cent of respondents did not know what to do if they suspected a child was being abused. Fully 90 per cent of respondents believed that the community needs to be better informed.

Rudolph et al have suggested two specific mechanisms for informing the community: sending home information packs at regular intervals in a child's schooling, and including child sexual abuse information in antenatal information packs given to expectant parents. In light of the fact that according to ABS data 9.5 per cent of those who report sexual abuse before the age of 15 were under five years old when abuse first occurred, it seems wise to make sure that age-appropriate resources are provided to all first-time parents as early as possible. This has certainly been the urging of the mother who is with us today.

Inclusion in antenatal information packs may be suitable, but materials could be included with other universal services as appropriate. Regarding the production of suitable information packs for parents and other primary caregivers, the Cummins inquiry notes in recommendation 10 that the range of existing expertise and resources already available through organisations like Child Wise and Bravehearts would enable this action to be implemented without delay. For this reason, I call upon the government to work with nationally recognised and accredited organisations such as Bravehearts and Child Wise to make sure that such information packets contain correct and appropriate information and reflect best practice.

I here wish to acknowledge that sourcing appropriate materials will not come without a cost. I wish to address this matter succinctly. The public cost of child sexual abuse is enormous. Just this week, the ACT government announced it has signed up to a new national redress scheme for survivors of child sexual abuse which will provide those eligible with counselling and psychological services as well as monetary payments of up to \$150,000. A total of 5,152 babies were born in the ACT in 2016. As an illustration rather than a specific recommendation, age-appropriate information packs for parents can be obtained from Bravehearts for \$35 each. This means that if each birth in the territory in 2016 had been to first-time parents, information packs could have been provided to these parents for just over \$180,000.

I submit that if a single child can be kept from harm by the universal distribution of child sexual abuse information packs, the expense will have been well worth it. As the current national framework for the protection of Australia's children states:

A focus on early intervention and prevention is more cost-effective in the long term than responding to crises, or treating the impacts of abuse and neglect.

The case is clear: with one voice, experts in the field have emphasised the need to better inform parents and other primary caregivers so that they can more effectively prevent and respond to child sexual abuse. Many parents have themselves requested access to such information, including the mother who is with us in the chamber today.

To be effective, the distribution of information needs to be universal. The economic case is clear: prevention initiatives are worth every cent spent.

I therefore call upon the ACT government to work with nationally recognised and accredited organisations to identify appropriate materials that reflect best practice, to source such materials through the normal procurement process and to provide these materials to all first-time parents and other primary caregivers in the ACT. This is a wise course of action that will protect both children and parents.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Community Services and Social Inclusion, Minister for Disability, Children and Youth, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations) (10.36): I thank Mrs Kikkert for bringing forward this motion. Child sexual abuse is a very serious issue and one on which governments and the wider community must continue to work together to address.

I wish to thank the survivors and parents for their bravery in telling their stories and their advocacy in seeking to ensure that no other parents or children have to go through what these families have endured. I move the amendment that has been circulated in my name:

Omit all words after “(1) notes that”, substitute:

- “(a) in the ABS 2016 Personal Safety Survey, 1.4 million Australians aged 18 years and over reported having experienced sexual abuse before the age of 15;
- (b) in Australia in 2016-17, 5861 children and young people were the subject of substantiated sexual abuse reports within families or out of home care;
- (c) research has found that child sexual abuse can affect brain development, psychological and social functioning, self-esteem, mental health, personality, sleep, health risk behaviours including substance abuse, self-harm and life expectancy; and
- (d) the economic cost of child abuse in Australia has been estimated by Access Economics to run into billions of dollars;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) since at least 1986, numerous experts have emphasised the need to better inform parents and other primary caregivers so that they can more effectively prevent and respond to child sexual abuse, with scholarly literature increasingly advocating for parent-focused child sexual abuse prevention efforts;
- (b) well-informed parents and other primary caregivers are considered necessary in order to supplement school-based and other programs targeted at children because such parents and caregivers can:
  - (i) repeat and reinforce correct information;
  - (ii) aid in prevention by recognising risk factors and warning signs;
  - (iii) react helpfully to disclosure or discovery of abuse; and
  - (iv) relieve some of the burden of prevention currently placed on children;

- (c) many Australian parents and other primary caregivers report feeling unprepared to teach correct and appropriate information to children, to recognise the signs of child sexual abuse or to respond correctly to suspected abuse;
  - (d) the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* made 409 recommendations, including the development of a national strategy to prevent child sexual abuse which encompasses a range of initiatives including ‘prevention education for parents delivered through day care, preschool, school, sport and recreational settings, and other institutional and community settings’ that aims ‘to increase knowledge of child sexual abuse and its impacts, and build skills to help reduce the risk of child sexual abuse’;
  - (e) other prevention initiatives recommended by the Royal Commission include social media campaigns to raise general community awareness; prevention education through preschool, school and other settings to increase children’s knowledge; online education for children delivered via schools; online safety education for parents and other community members to better support children’s safety online; prevention education for tertiary students before entering child-related occupations; and information and help-seeking services for parents and community members concerned about a possible perpetrator or possible child at risk;
  - (f) the 2012 *Protecting Victoria’s Vulnerable Children Inquiry* made 90 recommendations, one of which was that the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development ‘should develop a wide-ranging education and information campaign for parents and caregivers of all school-aged children on the prevention of child sexual abuse’;
  - (g) the current *National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2009-2020*, to which the ACT Government is a signatory, cites research showing that ‘a focus on early intervention and prevention is more cost-effective in the long-term than responding to crises, or treating the impacts of abuse and neglect’;
  - (h) the ACT Government has committed to issuing a formal response to the final report of the *Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse* by June 2018; and
  - (i) the ACT Government provides information resources such as ParentLink’s *Protecting Children from Sexual Abuse* and the ACT Government’s *Keeping Children and Young People Safe—A Shared Community Responsibility Guide*, to support parents to recognise and respond to concerns of child abuse; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) continue to make information resources available to support parents to recognise and respond to concerns of child abuse; and
  - (b) ensure improved availability, distribution and promotion of the resources to parents and caregivers.”.

In doing so I mean no disrespect to Mrs Kikkert or to advocates such as the mother who is here in the gallery today. I confirm that we will support the further amendment circulated in Mr Coe’s name.

I have moved my amendment because I think it is important that we reflect on up-to-date figures and information, and because I think it is important to acknowledge the depth of work that has occurred through the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse and the commitment of governments around the country, including the ACT government, to take its recommendations seriously and respond to them in a considered and timely way. Also, I think it is important to highlight that evidence-based information is available for parents and carers.

It is certainly valid to have a conversation about where, when and how parents are provided with this information and about whether we need to do more to promote the availability of this information to ensure that parents have better access to it at the times it will be most useful. As per the final part of my amendment, the government is happy to consider improvements that can be made in this regard. We are happy to consider whether the information currently available could be supplemented with resources that make it easier for parents to have these important conversations with their children. But we should not give Canberrans the impression that information is not currently available to parents or that they cannot access support.

As members of this place and of the community, we should use the opportunities we have to promote resources such as ParentLink that provide clear, evidence-based information on a wide range of topics, including protecting children from sexual abuse. The question of whether those resources could be supplemented and could be better linked and better promoted—including through the blue book which is provided to all new parents on the birth of a child—is one that is worth considering.

It is a tragic and shocking fact that more than 5,000 children and young people in Australia are the subject of substantiated sexual abuse reports in their families or out of home care every year. In 2016-17 5,861 Australian children or young people were the subject of substantiated sexual abuse reports in their families or out of home care. The most recent personal safety survey reported by the ABS in 2016 found 1.4 million Australians aged 18 years and over reported having experienced sexual abuse before the age of 15. Sexual abuse, as Mrs Kikkert said, has devastating effects on children and young people, their families and indeed their communities. These effects can last for a lifetime.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was established to enable survivors of sexual abuse as children in institutional contexts to tell their stories, with significant and appropriate support, and to provide a critical and thorough examination of how we as a nation can address the wrongs of the past and prevent these terrible things from happening in the future. Former Prime Minister Julia Gillard announced the royal commission on 12 November 2012. At the time, Ms Gillard said:

These are insidious, evil acts to which no child should be subject. The individuals concerned deserve the most thorough of investigations into the wrongs that have been committed against them. They deserve to have their voices heard and their claims investigated. I believe a Royal Commission is the best way to do this.

The commission held 57 public hearings, heard 8,013 stories in private session and received 1,344 personal written accounts. Of their learnings from speaking with people who have experienced child sexual abuse, the commissioners wrote:

Many spoke of having their innocence stolen, their childhood lost, their education and prospective career taken from them, and their personal relationships damaged. For many, sexual abuse is a trauma they can never escape. It can affect every aspect of their lives.

We also witnessed extraordinary personal determination and resilience among victims and survivors. We saw many survivors who, with professional help and the support of others, have taken significant steps towards recovery.

The ACT government has already addressed some of the recommendations made by the royal commission. Earlier this week the Chief Minister and Attorney-General announced that the ACT would join the national redress scheme for abuse survivors, an important step in acknowledging the harm caused by institutionalised sexual abuse and accepting responsibility.

Eligible survivors from the ACT will now have access to counselling and psychological services—an absolutely critical part of the scheme, as recognised in the quote from the royal commission about the resilience and recovery of survivors. Monetary payments of up to \$150,000 will be available under the scheme and people will also receive a direct personal response from the institution where the abuse occurred—another very important element of healing.

The ACT government has also legislated the reportable conduct scheme, which commenced operation in July 2017. The scheme governs how organisations prevent and respond to allegations of child abuse and misconduct and requires certain employers who work with children to report child abuse or misconduct by an employee or volunteer to the ACT Ombudsman. This is part of a suite of measures aimed at protecting children and other vulnerable Canberrans which also includes the need for those working in particular occupations or working or volunteering with children to have a working with vulnerable people card.

The Attorney-General has also made legislative changes to strengthen child sex abuse offences so that maintaining a sexual relationship with a young person, rather than individual sexual acts, constitutes the offence. The changes strengthened offences related to child grooming by expanding grooming offences to include any communication or conduct with a child undertaken with the intention of grooming the child to be involved in a sexual offence, and to cover grooming of persons other than the child, such as parents or carers.

As the amendment to the motion reflects, the royal commission has made many recommendations related to child safety. The ACT government will continue to develop our formal response to the commission, which we have committed to deliver in June this year.

As noted in the motion and the proposed amendment, the royal commission has reinforced the role of adults in the lives of children to act to keep children safe. We know, as Mrs Kikkert has said, that parents and caregivers are one of the most important protections for children. That is why the ACT government, over a long period of time, has provided specific parenting education resources that recognise and respond to concerns of child abuse.

The ParentLink program is a parenting information program designed to increase confidence and skills in parents and caregivers. It is delivered in the ACT under a licensing agreement with the South Australian government. ParentLink includes more than 70 parenting guides on a wide range of topics. Some examples are childhood development, raising toddlers and family issues.

Importantly, as I noted earlier, ParentLink provides specific guidance on protecting children from sexual abuse. It includes advice for parents and carers about what is child abuse, what parents can do to keep their children safe, identifying possible signs of sexual abuse, and the effects of sexual abuse on a child. ParentLink guides are available online and in printed form.

In 2016-17 there were more than 74,000 visits to the ParentLink website. During the same period more than 22,450 paper-based parenting guides were distributed across the ACT. Information about ParentLink resources is provided to parents of newborn babies in their personal health record, better known as the blue book.

ParentLink information is also provided to all parents of first-time primary students in the ACT in their “On my first day” pack. In addition, ParentLink information is provided at child and family centres located in west Belconnen, Tuggeranong and Gungahlin, and it is provided to new Canberrans through the Suburban Land Agency welcome pack. ParentLink resources online are currently being refreshed to ensure that they include specific local information and to modernise and improve the online presence. I am advised that this work is expected to be completed by May.

Protecting children and young people is also a broader community responsibility. I am therefore pleased to let the Assembly know that the child and youth protection services updated the *Keeping children and young people safe—a shared community responsibility guide* in November last year. This guide to reporting child abuse and neglect in the ACT provides the broader ACT community with information about reporting concerns of child abuse and neglect within a family and advises them about the important roles and responsibilities of mandated reporters and the broader community in responding to child abuse and neglect, including child sexual abuse.

Through this information the government aims to help the community understand how the child protection system works in the ACT and the important roles we all play in identifying and appropriately acting on suspicions of abuse and neglect so that we can best work together for the benefit of Canberra’s children and families.

The ACT government will continue to ensure that this important ParentLink and child and youth protection services information about recognising and responding to child

sexual abuse is made available to parents, carers and community members. As I said earlier, we welcome a further conversation about how we can better promote that information, about whether we are providing information at the right time in the right place to make it the best we can for parents, and whether we need to supplement that information with additional information that will make it easier for parents to have conversations with their children about this very serious issue.

Finally, I would also like to touch quickly on some of the great work that is occurring in ACT schools to promote child safety. Respectful relationships have been a core component of the curriculum in Canberra public schools since 2008. Ongoing social and emotional learning in schools aims to improve the skills of children and young people to engage in respectful relationships, including to prevent violence and sexual assault. ACT schools have accessed programs from a range of providers, including Our Watch and their “the line” campaign, White Ribbon’s breaking the silence schools program, and programs from organisations such as the YWCA and the PCYC.

The ACT government will continue to support evidence-based social and emotional learning and a whole-school approach to respectful relationships, education and cultural change.

In closing, I again want to thank Mrs Kikkert for bringing this motion forward. I emphasise that my amendment is intended only to clarify and strengthen the motion. We are happy to work with the opposition and with any community members who have proposals to improve the information available to families in our community, including on the important, sensitive and extremely complex matter of child sexual abuse.

**MR RATTENBURY** (Kurrajong) (10.48): I thank Mrs Kikkert for raising this very important topic today. I would like to begin by saying that, of course, the Greens want to see a world where children are safe, a world where children can live free from emotional, psychological, physical or sexual abuse. I think this is taken as a given. Unfortunately, we see that children do suffer from these things in our community, and the challenging discussion is about how we prevent this as much as possible. The sad reality is that sexual abuse of children does occur, and it occurs at rates beyond the comprehension of the average citizen. It is underestimated and under-reported, and its impacts are long-lasting and far-reaching.

We have seen an unprecedented focus on child sexual abuse through the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. However, this has not addressed the incidence of child sexual abuse that occurs in non-institutional settings.

We know that most cases of child sexual abuse are perpetrated by family members or caregivers who are known to the child, including other relatives, siblings and friends. It stands to reason, then, that parents can be in a position to notice, and respond protectively to their children if signs of such abuse are noticed. The biggest risk is, of course, when it is a parent doing the abusing.

Therefore, while it makes sense for material to be provided to parents about the prevention of sexual abuse, it makes far more sense for parents to be educated or have access to parenting courses that are appropriate for the age of their children. Such an approach can contribute to a reduction in all types of abuse of children, including emotional, psychological, physical and sexual abuse and neglect and abandonment.

I agree that educating parents about the signs their child may be being abused is helpful, and I note the comments the minister has just made about some of the work that is already happening here in the ACT. Information about protecting children from sexual abuse is provided by ParentLink, a long-time service delivered by the ACT government. This resource provides information about what parents can do to help children recognise when something is wrong, and when to tell others about it. It outlines behaviour to be concerned about and signs to watch out for. The ParentLink resources are promoted to new parents and referred to in the child's health record known as the blue book, which records progress against developmental milestones. They are also promoted to new Canberrans and parents of first-time primary school children through the child and family centres.

Beyond the fact that such resources already exist and are promoted by the ACT government, the challenge becomes how we ensure that all parents are exposed to their existence and remain mindful of the information that has been provided to them. I suspect many people would find immediately after birth perhaps not the most appropriate time, but we need to get this information to parents early in a child's life. Perhaps this is where maternal and child health nurses and/or playgroups can play a role.

Importantly, supports need to be available to children who have been abused, and to their non-offending parents, so that the negative effects can be minimised. With a number of my portfolios, I am really conscious of the support that we can provide to those who find themselves victims of these circumstances.

We have just appointed a new Victims of Crime Commissioner, and I imagine this will be an issue that is prominent on her list of issues she needs to address, particularly through the development of the charter of victims' rights, which we are currently working on. That is a very important area of work, because we find that some people feel that the justice system does not support them adequately. That is why I am committed to developing this charter of victims' rights, to make sure that we improve how we respond to people who have found themselves the victim of these sorts of crimes.

Within the corrections space, similarly, it is about making sure that our victim liaison officer is interacting appropriately with families who want to be updated with information about the perpetrator, about parole timings and those sorts of things. Making sure our system is working appropriately and sensitively is something I am very conscious of. It applies across many offences, but it is obviously particularly sensitive in the case of childhood sexual abuse.

Focusing only on the role of parents will, of course, not prevent child sexual abuse. We need a systematic approach that encompasses all areas of life and all contexts in which children live and play. We need a systematic approach that educates the community more broadly about the prevalence of abuse against children and signs to alert caregivers and others that this may be an issue.

In examining the data provided by the ABS people safety survey, it is worth noting that the most common age for children to experience sexual abuse is between 5 and 9 years old, followed closely by the 10 to 14-year-old age group. This underlines the fact that information needs to be available through all stages of a child's life, including into high school.

Schools have a role to not only provide evidence-based social and emotional learning and a whole-school approach to respectful relationships education, but to respond appropriately to disclosures of such abuse and contribute to attitudinal change. I am pleased that the ACT government is committed to continuing such education in our schools.

Schools, whether they are government or non-government schools, need policies and procedures about responding to allegations and disclosures that are properly implemented and that keep pace with technological advances to keep children safe online as well as in person. The Greens have been pleased to support a range of legislative amendments in this area, including the recent amendments in the Crimes Legislation Amendment Act 2018, to expand child grooming offences so that only evidence of a sexual relationship needs to be proven, and to exclude good character as a mitigating factor in sentencing for child sexual abuse offences where that good character "enabled" the offence.

I note that just this week the ACT signed up to the commonwealth redress scheme, which will contribute to access to justice for survivors of child sexual abuse, which is a pleasing development for this jurisdiction. I know that this is only one response to the work of the royal commission and that the attorney is committed to progressing recommendations applicable to the ACT arising from the royal commission. But I welcome the ACT being one of the jurisdictions to indicate early support for the scheme. I think this is having an impact on how the commonwealth is approaching it; I think this will strengthen the scheme; and I think that the ACT indicating its support is very important in moving this forward and indicating to the institutions our expectation of their significant involvement as well. I welcome the ACT's early indication to support that.

I note also that there has been a consultation process by way of a discussion paper about the reportable conduct scheme in the ACT. That consultation closed just last week. This is designed to extend the scope of the scheme to help organisations become more child safe and more child friendly. The reportable conduct scheme exists in addition to working with vulnerable people checks and mandatory reporting to child protection services by professions including teachers, psychologists, health professionals and social workers.

Out of home care programs and child, youth and family support services must adhere to child safe organisation guidelines as part of their funding agreements. There are a range of industry and professional regulation and registration practices which all contribute to ensuring that organisations and individuals coming into contact with children are aware of the signs of abuse and how to respond. This goes to an important part of Mrs Kikkert's motion today, that adults need to have the skills and awareness so that when a child tries to speak about it or shows signs, adults are capable of recognising that and intervening as early as possible.

Some of the initiatives I have talked about today indicate that the ACT government is committed to addressing the issue of the sexual abuse of children in a comprehensive way. Whilst we continue to learn in this space, I feel that we are making progress in implementing better policies and better reporting schemes than have existed in the past.

We cannot guarantee that children will never fall through the cracks or that children will never be sexually abused, but we can do our best to prevent it or intervene early when it does happen. We must do our best to ensure that parents have access to the right information at the right time. As I said, I think that is the central point of Mrs Kikkert's motion, and I completely agree with her on that point.

Mrs Kikkert has noted the presence in the chamber today of a family who have been affected by these issues. I would like to acknowledge their bravery in coming forward and campaigning on these issues and offer my sincere sympathy and compassion. It feels impossible to find the words to describe how devastating it is to learn that your child has been sexually abused, and how much more devastating that would be in the case where it was someone you trusted who did the abusing. I am very sorry to hear the story that that family has lived through and experienced, and I acknowledge their pain. Please know that I and my colleagues are committed to ensuring that information about child sexual abuse and how it occurs, what the warning signs are and how to respond are made available to parents and in the public domain.

I conclude by simply noting that the Greens will be supporting both the amendments, the one put forward by Ms Stephen-Smith and the one to be put forward by Mr Coe. With those combined efforts, I think we have a powerful way forward and some very important work to do to continue the progress that we are making in relation to these matters.

**MR COE** (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (10.59): Over the last few years, many people have come forward and spoken publicly about the sexual abuse that they suffered as children. These stories are always horrific, and there is clear evidence that these experiences have far-reaching effects on the survivors, their families and the wider community.

The stats in the motion are pretty shocking. Twelve per cent of women and 4.5 per cent of men have suffered sexual abuse before the age of 15. And whilst Ms Stephen-Smith rightly spoke about substantiated offences, of course there are many that have not been formally substantiated, because often there are no witnesses;

there is a victim and a perpetrator, and because of that, justice by way of the criminal justice system is very rarely served.

While there are school-based programs which provide advice on identifying warning signs, there is a need to supplement these programs beyond what is currently taking place. Of course, in some cases, by the time these programs are delivered in schools, it is already too late. There is a need to bolster existing programs and to put in place new programs that are tailored for parents and caregivers outside schools to minimise the risk that children may fall victim to predatory behaviour.

Proactively giving parents information about this is, unfortunately, required. Whilst the information on many of the ParentLink brochures is good, the ParentLink stands can be somewhat overwhelming. There is so much information on those stands. And we need to be offering this as prevention, not as a form of healing. To that end, we need to make sure that this is proactive; we need to make sure that every single child is in an environment where the parents understand what the warning signs are and what the risks are. The opposition will take up the government's invitation to work with them on this very important matter.

The reason this matter is on the agenda today is that about four or five weeks ago I met the person who is with us today in the chamber and I was told the pretty horrific story that that family went through. It is really a story beyond my imagination, and I think it is probably a story beyond most people's imagination. However, through their trauma and their bravery, those people were able to convey their story, and then we were able to put it on the agenda today.

The trauma that the family went through, and continues to go through, is something that I hope fewer and fewer people will have to experience. It is incumbent upon all of us in this place to make sure that we are doing absolutely everything possible to get this scourge down to zero. That has to be our aspiration. We cannot get to a point where it is somehow inevitable. We cannot get to a point whereby we think it is just going to happen. We have to work towards eliminating this scourge. That is going to be hard, and we have to work in the reality that we are nowhere near there yet. That is why we have to make sure that there are programs and processes in place to help people who have had these traumatic experiences. But better still would be to prevent them from happening in the first place.

Something that I have learnt in recent weeks, when researching and preparing for this matter, is the extreme length that perpetrators will go to to put themselves in a position of power. These people are not rational; they are not logical. They are predators, and they will go to extreme lengths to put the odds in their favour. We have to make sure that we shift that balance and that the odds are in favour of parents and children.

It is because of the bravery and strength of this family that they were able to recover—they are still recovering—that they were able to report this matter to the police and that they were able to go through the gruelling interview stage. They were then able to go through the court stage. And against all the odds, they were able to get a conviction. There are very few convictions recorded in this space.

The humility, the nobility and the strength of this family are on display with this passage from the *Canberra Times* today:

No other mother should have to go through what we went through, no other little girl should have to sit in a courtroom, be cross-examined.

My daughter did it all because she doesn't want this happen to any other kid ... and now I want to show her one person can make a difference.

By the passing of this motion today, one person is making a difference. This family is making an extraordinary difference. And if momentum is created as a result of putting it on the agenda today, if more packs are proactively sent out, if we can bolster the information in these packs and if the government can work with additional organisations to make sure we are calling upon all of the resources possible to make the packs in the ACT best practice, then there are going to be dozens, or hundreds or thousands, of families that are going to be better off as a result of the bravery shown by this family.

There are many families that would not have the strength to do this. There are many families that do not even have the strength to report it to the police, let alone go through all those subsequent steps. But this family did. And then they have gone a step further. I remember that on the few occasions that I have chatted with this family, the mother has said, "In years to come, when my daughter understands the gravity of the situation, we will be able to say that some good came of it." It is a pretty powerful statement, and it is a pretty selfless statement for that mother to make.

There are lots of lessons that can be learnt from this particular case and from all cases. There are also some important lessons for the ACT police with regard to this matter. Whilst it did not happen in the ACT, there were interviews that took place here, and we are keen to make sure that information that was passed on from the WA justice system has been incorporated in ACT Policing's techniques. We have to make sure that that initial step of reporting is as easy as possible and that the interview process for a young person is as conducive as possible to getting the results that are required. No child should have to go through that interview process numerous times and have to present in court numerous times as a result of this hardship.

There are so many victims, so many people, who in effect have a life sentence as a result of these crimes. Often it seems that the only person that does not get a life sentence is the perpetrator. The victim, the child, has a life sentence; the immediate family has a life sentence; the wider community carries the burden. And, so often, the perpetrator does not. There is an apparent injustice there.

In closing, I want to thank members of the Assembly for their support and thank this family for the enormous contribution they are making to future families through their bravery. I move:

Add new (3)(c):

"(c) work with nationally recognised and accredited organisations, such as Bravehearts and Child Wise, to make sure that such information packets contain correct and appropriate information and reflect best practice."

**MR RAMSAY** (Ginninderra—Attorney-General, Minister for Regulatory Services, Minister for the Arts and Community Events and Minister for Veterans and Seniors) (11.09): I also want to acknowledge again the pain and the long-term trauma that have occurred to far too many people through child sexual abuse, and I want to acknowledge especially that that includes the families who are present in the chamber today. My commitment, not only through my work here but in the government's work altogether, is to a safer Canberra for all children. I also want to thank Mrs Kikkert for bringing the motion before the chamber today.

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse was comprehensive and it looked at ways that our legislation, our practices and our culture need to change. A clear lesson from the royal commission's report is that prevention, reporting and responding to abuse require systemic change. Systemic change requires that all our efforts will inform and change laws and change practices and that they will be considered together in context.

Mrs Kikkert's motion focuses on the statistics and on ensuring that there is the provision of information to parents and carers about the signs of abuse. Clearly, informing parents and carers so that they are prepared to recognise and report abuse is absolutely vital and it is also absolutely vital that the institutions, government agencies and the police who receive those reports are ready to respond and to offer support. These two things must go together.

This government's work to respond to the royal commission recognises that protecting children and responding to abuse take a whole-of-society and a whole-of-government approach. And that is why, in supporting the motion as amended by Minister Stephen-Smith and as amended by Mr Coe, I will briefly provide some details about the extensive work being done in my portfolio and across the government to respond. And, importantly, I will be drawing the Assembly's attention to how this work requires a detailed understanding of our legal, institutional and community framework for protecting children.

In addition to the preventative work that has been outlined by Minister Stephen-Smith, we are also working to ensure that when parents, carers, survivors or anyone reports abuse they are able to rely on the best possible support in response. As Minister Stephen-Smith has highlighted, this government will be responding to the royal commission's recommendations by June this year. That response will demonstrate our resolve as a community to take responsibility for the widespread institutional failures that have allowed abuse to occur far too often.

To date, this government has demonstrated that engaging with the royal commission's work and responding with action is a top priority. Prior to the commission's final report, which was released in December last year, the ACT had already begun law reform work to respond. In August 2016 this Assembly passed legislation brought forward by my predecessor to remove all time limitations for survivor lawsuits against institutions. And this was a direct response to the royal commission's civil law recommendations. In May 2017 that change was expanded to include all lawsuits against individuals or institutions brought by survivors of sexual abuse. These

changes recognised that to have an accessible justice system our legislation needed to account for what we know about the length of time that it takes, on average, for survivors to report abuse.

Ensuring that our justice system and our support services are ready to help survivors who come forward is absolutely critical. And that is why this government has been vocal and active in joining the commonwealth, the states and the Northern Territory to create a national redress scheme. As has been noted, the Chief Minister and I announced on Monday this week the government's decision to join that scheme. I have been working with my counterparts across Australia over the past year to deliver a scheme that lives up to the recommendations of the royal commission, and I will continue to do so as the scheme is implemented. As I did earlier this week, I encourage all institutions across Australia, not just the non-government institutions, to opt in, to sign up to that scheme as well.

Access to justice and providing redress are just two examples of how we are improving the way that we support survivors. In the 2017-18 budget review the government provided funding of \$293,000 to support ongoing work within government, including \$120,000 to support the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre. The funding to the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre is absolutely critical because we know that, as this work progresses and as more people are informed and encouraged, there will be more survivors who come forward.

Providing access to compensation through the courts and redress through a national scheme are important ways of supporting survivors, but it is also important to think about how we hold institutions and individuals accountable for their actions. The royal commission has delivered a strong evidence base for reforming our criminal laws to respond to abuse, and this government is already taking action.

In the last sitting period, as has been outlined, this Assembly passed amendments that bring the ACT's criminal laws that cover ongoing abuse and grooming offences into line with the royal commission's recommendations. These amendments ensure that survivor testimony about repeated abuse can be used to prove the very serious charge of maintaining a sexual relationship with a child. They also ensure that grooming behaviour is broadly captured and includes grooming of adults to gain access to children.

More law reform work, more consultation across portfolios and more engagement with the community are already underway. The government will be opening up the royal commission's report to community consultation, and we will be listening to ways to implement those recommendations. And the ACT will keep working hard to ensure that the court process stays oriented around supporting survivors and securing a just outcome for them.

The royal commission's recommendations cross private institutions, government services, the criminal law and the courts. They are comprehensive, and this government is committed to a whole-of-government, comprehensive plan of action. This government's response recognises that efforts to protect children cannot be focused on any single aspect of change. Improving awareness of abuse means our

support services must be ready to respond. And responding means thinking about redress, support for survivors and holding people and institutions accountable.

I support the motion as amended and as amended again, and I join Minister Stephen-Smith in emphasising that improving the ways that we prevent and respond to abuse requires a broad, systemic change. Changes to the justice system to prevent and respond to abuse are critical, and they are a single part of a comprehensive response. I will continue to join my ministerial colleagues in developing a comprehensive response to the royal commission that makes Canberra safer for children and provides a holistic and comprehensive network of support for survivors.

**MRS KIKKERT** (Ginninderra) (11.18): I will be brief. I thank Minister Stephen-Smith, Minister Rattenbury and Minister Gordon Ramsay for their willingness to support Mr Coe's amendment, and I wholeheartedly accept the minister's offer to supplement the already available information and resources and especially to include these resources in the information packs that are already being provided to all new parents.

On this last point, the literature is clear. Information should be provided universally to all parents and other primary caregivers. As an analogy, if a known infectious disease afflicted 12 per cent of girls and 4.5 per cent of boys in Australia, I cannot believe that we would accept anything less than a robust education campaign that reached all parents.

This is important because, as the current inquiry found, many of the common-sense precautions taken by parents to protect children may be based on misconceptions. This means that, in addition to the caregivers who already sense that they do not know enough, a good number more think they do but are wrong. I wish to quote from a verbal submission to the Cummins inquiry from a Bendigo mother that sums up the problem:

I had no knowledge, skills or resources to help me protect children against a paedophile. Nobody had ever given me any clue about the indicators of a paedophile. Nobody had ever told me that it would most likely be a close friend that would be my children's abuser. Nobody taught me how to talk to my young children about their bodies and sex in a way that was appropriate for their young age or how to talk to them about appropriate adult behaviour.

We must do all we can to guarantee that no ACT parent or caregiver can make this claim ever again. I look forward to working with the government to make this happen and may I add that we have two champions and two heroes in this room. I thank them for being so courageous and strong in reaching out to make a difference here in Canberra. You have made a difference by coming forward and being strong enough to speak up about the ordeals that you have gone through. I commend this amended motion to the Assembly.

**Mr Coe's** amendment to **Ms Stephen-Smith's** proposed amendment agreed to.

**Ms Stephen-Smith's** amendment, as amended, agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## Women's support services

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra) (11.21): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes the strength, determination and talent of Canberra women, who support and lead our community across all fields of industry, public administration, health, education, the arts, sport, and the community sector;
- (2) celebrates:
  - (a) progress being made in addressing gender inequality, while noting that women still face social and economic barriers to their full and free participation in society, including workplace inequality, domestic, family and intimate partner violence, and unequal distribution of family and household responsibilities; and
  - (b) the diversity of the ACT community, including all gay, lesbian, bisexual, transsexual, intersex and questioning individuals;
- (3) acknowledges the work of community organisations in the ACT in supporting women and advocating for their rights;
- (4) further notes the ongoing work of the ACT Government to promote true gender equality and to support women and girls to reach their full potential, including by:
  - (a) providing access to specialist health services;
  - (b) expanding women's health infrastructure and improving accessibility, through the expansion of the Centenary Hospital and new nurse-led Walk-in Centres;
  - (c) promoting women's participation in sports through grants and high profile sporting events and improving access to appropriate sporting facilities; and
  - (d) recognising the barriers to women in the workplace by improving Government board and public sector representation;
- (5) supporting people's reproductive health by having clear and defined policies on reproductive health, providing support for accessing termination services, and continuing to work to identify and address barriers to accessing termination services for Canberrans, including affordability;
- (6) encourages all Members of the Legislative Assembly to:
  - (a) make personal and professional pledges to promote gender equality in their lives; and
  - (b) call out instances of gender inequality and gender-based harassment that they see to support victims and promote a culture of respect; and
- (7) calls on the Government to:
  - (a) continue to drive outcomes in the Women's Action Plan 2017-2019 with adequate resources and the Safer Families package and report on the progress being made against those commitments;
  - (b) commit to reviewing and amending part 6 of the Health Act 1993;

- (c) commit to reviewing and improving access to reproductive health services including contraception, abortion and termination services; and
- (d) continue to deliver health services that meet the specific needs of women.

We celebrated International Women's Day two weeks ago, one day which is a reminder to celebrate women and to continue to make genuine steps towards equality every day. The celebrations reminded me of a TED talk I watched recently which emphasised to me just how far we have come on the path towards gender equality since my school years. The talk was presented by American sociologist and gender studies specialist Michael Kimmel. Michael was talking about a riddle he heard when he was younger, and I remember this one travelling around my schoolyard too. It goes something like this: a man and his son are driving on a freeway. They are in a terrible accident and the father is killed. The son is brought to the ER, and as the paramedics are bringing him in the attending physician sees the boy and says, "I can't treat him. That's my son."

How is this possible? It is cringe-worthy now, but it was a real stumper back then. His father is dead. How can he also be the doctor in the ER? The idea that the doctor could be his mother—that was tricky. When the presenter Michael recounted this same riddle to his 16-year-old son and his son's male friends today it was a no-brainer. The 16-year-olds instantly said, "It's his mum." Or, as one kid said, "Maybe he has two dads." Anecdotes like this are hardly conclusive, but they are illustrative of a changing tide.

Every time we speak out, question assumptions and live according to our own ambitions rather than someone else's expectations of us we influence attitudes towards gender equality and we are succeeding. Women are working across every industry, from the front line to corporate Australia, to engineering and IT. They can have kids and have a career. They can make their own choices about who they love and whether they want a family. But they will still find it tougher than their male counterparts to get a job in some industries even if their resumes are exactly the same.

Once they do get the job they will probably be paid less and be unrepresented in leadership positions. They are more likely to have to contend with misogyny and harassment in the workplace. Despite their career successes they will probably still be the engines keeping their homes running, bearing the burden of most household responsibilities. And, sadly, they will be extremely overrepresented in statistics about domestic, family and intimate partner violence.

Despite all of this we continue. We know that we are capable. We are competent. We are strong. The fight for equality is far from over, and this government is committed to supporting women and girls every step of the way so that they can reach their full potential. We are challenging barriers to success for women in the corporate and sporting spheres because these are women's domains just as much as they are men's. We are providing specialist healthcare services and improving infrastructure so that Canberra women can be confident that they can access world-class facilities that meet their needs. And we have established clear and defined policies on reproductive health

so that Canberrans can have a real choice in deciding whether and when they want to have kids. We are also committed to reviewing those to improve them.

We are conscious that you cannot be what you cannot see. Having women in leadership positions has so many benefits: overall performance of institutions improves with the benefit of diversified experience and skills; institutions become more female-friendly; and, importantly, women find themselves aiming for the top because they can see someone like themselves sitting up there. In both sport and business we are encouraging Canberra organisations to aim for better female representation on boards. We have set targets of 50 per cent female representation on government-appointed boards and sporting bodies funded through our triennial agreements, as you heard yesterday, will be required to meet 40 per cent female board membership by 2020.

We recognise that meeting women's specific health needs is a precursor for their full participation in our community, and so we are delivering on women's health care and will carry out a \$70 million expansion of the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children over the next four years. The centenary hospital is a purpose-built facility located on the Canberra Hospital campus. It brings together several important women's health services, including neonatology, gynaecology, maternity, paediatric, nutrition services and multidisciplinary teams focusing on women's health such as physiotherapists, dieticians and social workers.

As well as collocating to better serve the women of Canberra and fostering networks between disciplines, the hospital seeks to support women's and children's emotional wellbeing with a large playground and therapeutic garden available for their use. The hospital has been a great success, and in the 2017 budget we announced \$70 million for its expansion. The hospital will grow to include more maternity beds and more paediatric high-dependency unit beds. New services will also be introduced, including a new paediatric intensive care treatment space, an adolescent gynaecology service and child and adolescent sleep labs. The hospital will continue to help women and girls to be mentally and physically healthy so that they can continue to participate freely in our community.

The government also recently announced a \$2.6 million refurbishment of the maternity unit at Calvary Public Hospital in Bruce, and I was delighted to attend the announcement of this with the minister. These funds will increase maternity beds by 20 per cent and provide new look maternity suites and extra rooms for clinical assessments and breakout areas. We are also opening new nurse-led walk-in centres in Gungahlin and Weston Creek as well as a healthcare centre in the inner north. These centres will provide accessible, professional care for the women and girls of our city so that they are able to get their health needs met.

Of course, Madam Assistant Speaker, as you would well know, one of the most important health and life choices a woman will ever make is whether and when she would like to have children. Having a child or additional children can impact a person's health, education and career outcomes. Having a family can be an immensely fulfilling choice, but it is not the only choice. We have established over previous decades that women are fully autonomous and competent individuals. Honestly, the

fact that this even needs to be said is ridiculous, but for the benefit of some of those in the chamber—namely, those opposite—for the state to deny any person the decision to have an abortion is condescending, it is denigrating and it is damaging. It is entirely unacceptable. There are a myriad reasons why a person may choose to terminate a pregnancy and it is never our place to judge. The government's policy is clear: it is your body; it is your choice.

I want to take this moment to acknowledge my colleague Ms Le Couteur's bill presented this morning to improve access to reproductive health services and also acknowledge the government's review already underway. Both ACT Labor and the ACT Greens not only are committed to giving women a choice but are conscientiously monitoring and reviewing our current framework to identify improvements. In particular, we are committed to identifying and addressing barriers to accessing termination services in Canberra, including affordability, and my motion emphasises this strongly today.

Our approach, I sadly have to say yet again, stands in stark contrast to that taken by the opposition. Somehow—and in 2018 I continue to find this baffling—some of those opposite, including the opposition leader and spokesperson for health, openly stand against a woman's right to choose. That position reeks of arrogance and narrow-mindedness—hardly the qualities of a leader. Of course, the position for women under a Liberal government still remains a total mystery. It is the epitome of cowardice: "I have an opinion that I know is not fair so I will just avoid answering the question."

The question, of course, is and was as we put many, many months ago: "What is your policy on abortion, Canberra Liberals? The people of Canberra deserve to know." It has now been 232 days since the Leader of the Opposition let us know that they have no policy on this critical issue. I suggest the Canberra Liberals need to make up their minds. If they want to send us back to the dark ages and restrict abortion, own up to it and let the people of Canberra judge you accordingly. If you would see reason and give each woman her own choice, if your policy position is that you believe in choice and it is up to each person to decide that choice, just commit to it. That should be your position, but the indecision continues to be a disgrace—232 days.

We have made a lot of progress, even just in my lifetime, towards gender equality. However, there is still work to do. These are not just women's issues. We know for a fact that everyone benefits when there is true equality, so we are all being held back until we are recognised and respected as equals. And so today I am calling on everyone in this parliament to make personal and professional pledges to promote gender equality in their workplaces and in their personal lives. By simply articulating how they will support gender equality they are more likely to identify situations where inequality exists and assure the men and women around them that they are respected equally. Similarly, by calling out instances of gender inequality and gender-based harassment we are able to provide invaluable support for individuals who are being sidelined or harassed and send a clear message that inequality will not be tolerated.

I am proud of this government's unwavering commitment to building a better, brighter future for all of us by supporting women and girls to reach their potential and

edge ever closer to true equality. I have no doubt that the ACT government will continue its efforts to improve the health, education and social outcomes for women and girls in our community, and I commend the motion to the Assembly.

**MS LAWDER** (Brindabella) (11.33): The Canberra Liberals note the strength, determination and talent of women across the ACT. There are, of course, many great women in the ACT who support and lead our community in a range of fields, whether it is public administration, health care, education, sport, business, emergency services, disability advocacy, academia—the list goes on. Of course, we all recently enjoyed the celebrations for International Women’s Day on 8 March. While we celebrated the universal achievements and successes of women, we also had the chance to reflect on the barriers that remain. There has, as Ms Cheyne has said, been plenty done and achieved, but there remains plenty to do to truly allow all women to achieve equality.

I attended a number of wonderful events to celebrate International Women’s Day that were held throughout that week. They included a breakfast by the National Association of Women in Construction, a YWCA event, a UN Women lunch and the Jasiri self-defence class which was attended by my colleagues Elizabeth Lee, who taught the class, Candice Burch and Ms Le Couteur.

In the portfolio of women there is so much to celebrate and so much to acknowledge, and there is still deep concern amongst Canberra’s women to achieve their aspirations and for the elimination of hurdles to the achievement of those aspirations. I thank Ms Cheyne for bringing forward the motion today noting the strength of Canberra women, celebrating the success of women, acknowledging the work of organisations supporting women’s issues and promoting work to support women and girls to reach their full potential.

No doubt there are many, many matters that still need to be addressed. Ms Le Couteur raised just this morning her preference for the local availability of home pregnancy termination drugs, and obviously for some people that is the next frontier. These are matters that many in this place would like to see addressed. But also there is no doubt that some Canberra women would like to see other changes that we do not know about here. I encourage Ms Cheyne, the Minister for Women and all here to listen to all women, not just those who join or apply to join ministerial advisory councils and other bodies.

Ms Cheyne’s motion starts out by celebrating women and their successes but then separately calls on the Assembly to commit to a position on abortion and termination services, a topic upon which we had a bill presented just this morning. This is not the way we should be dealing with this important issue. As is well known, this is a conscience issue for us on this side of the chamber. We think this is an issue important enough to warrant a motion on its own rather than using a broader motion purportedly celebrating the achievements of women as a means to score some short-term political points against those with diverse cultural or religious views. We would hope that members in this place were above that, but clearly not.

With that being said, and in the spirit of cooperation and the importance of women’s aspirations, which we do share, I will speak on what this motion should be seeking to

address—that is, women’s equality and the important role that all women play in the ACT. The Canberra Liberals celebrate diversity. We celebrate diversity of opinion as well, something rarely seen on the other side of the chamber. We also celebrate the diversity among our own team. We are diverse team and we welcome and celebrate women from all sorts of backgrounds.

We are proud to be the first Liberal Party room in Australia to have majority female representation and that the women in our team also come from very diverse backgrounds. For example, in our team we have Elizabeth Kikkert, born in Tonga, a mother of five children who, before entering politics, was busy raising her family and undertaking hands-on community advocacy. We have Elizabeth Lee, a former lawyer, whose parents migrated from Korea. Elizabeth was also a university lecturer and loved teaching young adults and helping them further their aspirations. And, of course, we have Giulia Jones, soon to be a mother of six, with her Italian heritage. Giulia has come from working in women’s advocacy and the union movement. My background is in community advocacy and I have worked in public, private and third sector organisations. Miss Burch comes from a private sector background.

The Liberal Party room is a very diverse party room. It is a very diverse representation not just of women but of people from a variety of occupations and cultural and linguistic backgrounds. We do not just talk about diversity; we live it, breathe it and put it into practice. We just do not expect that all women have the same opinions or aspirations, like those opposite. All opinions are welcome on our side.

The Canberra Liberals will continue to fight for the right for women to aspire to and achieve great successes in whatever role they choose, whether it is family life, work life, community life or a combination of any or all of the above. Women should and do have a right to choose what is success for them, and we should celebrate their choices. It is not right that any member here in this place chooses what is success for women out there, how they should think, act or speak, because every woman is different, and that is the way it should be.

We can help this by removing barriers for women to achieve their aspirations, particularly barriers in the workforce. My colleague the shadow minister for women, Mrs Jones, has long advocated, for example, for portaloos for women firms as well as proper facilities for breastfeeding mothers in the workplace. I am happy to see that after that lobbying the ACT government has audited all directorate buildings and installed locks on breastfeeding room doors so that mothers can feed and breast pump without fear of someone accidentally walking in on them. I know this is something that Mrs Jones has been working on with the federal government as well, and I look forward to seeing more action across Australian parliaments and departments.

In conclusion, we support the best intent of this motion to celebrate women, to see women succeed and to celebrate the successes of women in and from the ACT. I hope we will go on to be leaders in the field of supporting women’s aspirations and welcome diversity of opinion as well as aspiration. I thank Ms Cheyne for the opportunity to promote the common goals of all members in this place and promote the successes of women in the ACT.

**MS LE COUTEUR** (Murrumbidgee) (11.41): I am pleased to stand in support of the motion today, as part of the first female majority parliament in Australia's history. I have been told that Tasmania has also joined us in the esteemed ranks of parliaments with a female majority. It is good to see that we are spreading throughout Australia.

The Greens also recognise the significant contribution of women and girls in the cultural, social, political and economic fabric of the ACT. We know that women make up 52 per cent of our community and are the majority of this assembly, but we also know that women are unfortunately still vastly underrepresented in many areas of civil society. This is, of course, a phenomenon that is not unique to Canberra or Australia.

A recent report by Oxfam suggested that eight men own the same wealth as the 3.6 billion people who make up the poorest half of humanity. That is horrible. In Australia, research suggests that fewer large Australian companies are run by women than by men named John, Peter or David. Straight, white, able-bodied men between the ages of 40 and 69 represent the majority of Australian leadership, yet they are only 8.4 per cent of the population.

The number of women in key leadership positions has fallen in recent times, with only nine women CEOs and 10 women chairing boards of the top 200 ASX companies. Overall, only 24.7 per cent of board directors are women, with only 12.7 per cent of boards having a gender target at all. Such disproportionate representation of men in key positions does a disservice to organisations, shareholders, the business community and Australia overall.

We are missing out on the benefits that the majority of the population, 52 per cent of us, can provide. Having more women at the decision table makes sense because women can bring a different point of view. As Albert Einstein said, we cannot solve problems by using the same kind of thinking that we used when we created them. So it makes sense to ensure that we are capturing the voices of women, that we are capturing their observations, analysis, understanding and world view, and that their views are influencing and changing outcomes. There is a pool of talent which is not really being fully tapped into. Diversity and gender balance are the engines of innovation and the key to ensuring that the status quo shifts and effects meaningful change.

The business case for gender balance is rock solid. Research by Catalyst found that Fortune 500 companies in the US with the highest percentage of female corporate officers reported, on average, a 35.1 per cent higher return on equity and a 34 per cent higher return to shareholders than companies with the lowest percentages of female corporate officers. So it is about generating better results as much as anything. Striving for gender balance and diversity, for that matter, is the right thing to do.

It is very unfortunate that the gender pay gap is increasing rather than decreasing. We need to ensure that there are deliberate initiatives, approaches and tactics to reduce it. Australia's pay gap sits at 23 per cent, with men earning, on average, over \$26,000 a year more than women. Sixty-nine per cent of men are employed full time, compared

to women at 40.7 per cent. Only 16.3 per cent of CEOs are women and 28.5 per cent of key management personnel are women.

This highlights the inequities faced by women in Australia, and across the globe for that matter, who are often employed in low-pay sectors, face high levels of discrimination in the workplace, take on a disproportionate amount of unpaid care work and often find themselves at the bottom of the economic pile. On current trends, it will take 170 years for women to be paid the same as men. All of this results in women having less retirement savings and an increased risk of insecure housing tenure as they age. The current debate on cuts to penalty rates also disproportionately disadvantages women, because we are the majority of part-time workers in hospitality and retail. I note that the retail industry is the largest employer of women under 25. This subtle but persistent treatment of women results in many levels of disadvantage, both socially and economically.

Reproductive rights are another issue for women. I am pleased that Ms Cheyne also touched on this. This morning I tabled a bill to improve access to abortions in the ACT. I hope that in due course this will be passed by the Assembly and that it will be a step forward for women. Equally, or possibly even more important, I think, is affordable access to contraception. I was told that there is an 18-month wait to obtain long-lasting reversible contraception through the public health system, which is why I asked the question I did of the minister for health yesterday. Regardless of what the wait may be, it is essential that women have access to safe and affordable contraception. Women should be able to control their own bodies, and every child should be a wanted child.

We also all know, unfortunately, of the disproportionate numbers of women who experience sexual assault and domestic violence. I commend the ACT government for its efforts to address this. The ACT prevention of violence against women and children second implementation plan and the ACT women's action plan are clear indications that these issues are being taken seriously. These plans outline the government's commitment to work in partnership with non-government organisations, business and the broader community towards gender equality.

The role of the Office for Women is invaluable in providing a central policy, strategic and coordination point for gender issues across government. Its support will be invaluable in assisting the government to cast a gender lens across its policy, legislation and initiatives. That is another thing that we managed to secure in the parliamentary agreement: to undertake disability and gender impact analysis as part of the triple bottom line assessment framework. This is an item in the parliamentary agreement about which I am particularly proud, because a gender perspective is important for the very simple reason that all policies impact on men and women's lives in one way or another.

Because of economic and social differences between men and women, policy and legislative consequences, intended and unintended, often vary across gender lines. It is often only through gender analysis of policy that these differences become apparent and solutions are devised. The risk in failing to do so is that public policy responses will not only perpetuate existing forms of oppression against women and women's

and men's autonomy but also create new forms of gender oppression and undermine broader efforts towards equality.

We know that addressing issues of violence against women is intrinsically connected to society's attitudes towards women and girls and intrinsically linked to the role of women in society. The World Health Organisation suggests that promoting gender equity is a critical part of violence prevention. Domestic and family violence and sexual assaults are gendered crimes. Gender stereotyping, sex discrimination and unequal power relations between men and women are significant factors contributing to the prevalence of violence against men and women. Traditional gender roles and attitudes, whether held by women or by men, are associated with greater acceptance of violence against women, while attitudes that support gender equality are associated with less acceptance of violence.

What is trickier is changing how work often performed by women—nursing, elderly care, disability support care and child care—is valued by society. That is a big attitudinal difference that we would like to resolve. We must remain resolved to hang on to our wings, to ensure that we do not go backwards. We must remain resolved to draw out and understand the links between gender equity and the reduction of violence against women.

In the spirit of the International Women's Day theme this year, we must be bold for change and we must work collectively across all political divides to ensure that gender equity gains are achieved and maintained. I support this motion.

**MS BERRY** (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Women and Minister for Sport and Recreation) (11.51): I am happy to support this motion, which acknowledges the work that we are doing and the need to keep doing it to make sure that we are making progress on gender equality and supporting women to access the services that they need to participate in life in the way they want to.

I have stood in this place many times and talked about the great achievements that have been made and the ways the ACT government seeks to support them, and also about the work that we need to keep doing so that we can continue to make real change for our city. Just yesterday I gave a ministerial statement on the status of women in the ACT. It included a long list of achievements and work being done already. Our community is doing really well. But, importantly, we cannot stop there; we have to do more.

I would like to touch on a few other things that it is timely to talk about here today. I am pleased that the motion notes the importance of supporting people's reproductive health by having a clear and defined policy on reproductive health, providing support for accessing termination services, and continuing to work to identify and address barriers to accessing termination services for Canberrans. I agree that this is extremely important. The government's policy, I believe, is clear and well defined. This is an area that will from time to time need to be reviewed and refined, to make sure that

those who need access to reproductive health services can access them on their own terms.

The recent decision to dismiss charges against three men charged with protesting outside Canberra's abortion clinic was disappointing to many. The key to this decision was that their silent prayers did not constitute a protest. However, we all know that this does not mean that women accessing the clinic were not distressed to be watched and judged by their actions. The government sought to apply exclusionary zoning to protect women who are attending the clinic for medical appointments.

Decisions such as this, to procure an abortion, are no doubt emotional for women to make. None of us could ever expect that they are easy decisions. But ultimately it is a woman's decision and we have established laws to allow women to make choices about their bodies, which is the way it should be. As I said, the government has made a commitment to review the existing provisions for women to make decisions about their reproductive health, because it has been more than a decade since we decriminalised the act and enacted provisions in the Health Act to allow for safe and legal abortion.

I note that the Women's Centre for Health Matters is undertaking research into women's sexual health, including access to abortion services. The government will then draw from the findings of this research to conduct a more focused review of abortion and its accessibility for Canberra women. This review is an action in the ACT women's action plan. I will be reporting on its progress and a range of other actions contained in the plan in the near future.

I do not think that it is far-fetched to consider that perhaps these services may be at risk under a different government. I hope that with a new generation this might never be the case. Unfortunately, the Tasmanian government has continually blocked access to safe abortion services, following the closure of the only dedicated Hobart clinic, meaning that women now have to travel to the mainland to have the procedure.

Last week a federal National Party MP made the statement that he was filled with shame about the federal money committed to this cause. When I think about things that fill me with shame, I think about women like Ann, who in the early 1960s had a backstreet abortion for a fiver and, after three botched attempts, ended up haemorrhaging and was taken to hospital. Terrified, sick and distressed, and referred to as a "silly girl", she was then required to face the police, who were led in by the treating doctor. Or I think about Diane, who paid £90 in 1961 for her abortion. Thankfully, it was not a backstreet abortion; she was able to find a doctor who accepted that she was mentally and physically unfit, so as to perform the procedure without the risk of imprisonment. Diane recounted how thankful she was that she did not have to go to "knitting needle Nora" and have a backstreet abortion like her dressmaker, who had died during the procedure.

It was women like Ann and Diane who, after their experiences, started lobbying for safe and legal abortion. They were punished and harassed every step of the way. They were refused service in the village shop. They had phone messages left on their answering machines of crying babies, and red paint poured on their cars.

I believe that the vast majority of the Canberra community supports a woman's right to access these services legally and safely. I accept that it is a moral issue for many people, but we have had this debate; we settled it 15 years ago in the ACT when abortion was criminalised. Our community is better off with these services available. Canberra women can feel assured that I and other committed Labor members will always fight for the right to safe, legal, appropriate and accessible reproductive health, abortion and termination services in the ACT.

I support Ms Cheyne's motion and I thank her for bringing up this important matter, celebrating the strength, determination and talent of Canberra women and further promoting gender equity in our lives.

**MS FITZHARRIS** (Yerrabi—Minister for Health and Wellbeing, Minister for Transport and City Services and Minister for Higher Education, Training and Research) (11.57): I thank Ms Cheyne very much for bringing this motion forward today and for raising such important matters for our community. I welcome the opportunity to speak with my colleagues on this motion today, the week after International Women's Day. As Minister for Health and Wellbeing I am proud of the quality of women's health services, in particular, that we provide to our community. These services take into account the fact that women still face a number of social and economic barriers to their full and free participation in society.

I would like to recognise that these issues affect not only those who identify as women but also non-binary individuals. I am proud of the local women across our community who have taken on leadership roles to advocate for and promote women's health issues. Organisations such as the Women's Centre for Health Matters are working to ensure that Canberrans are aware of and can contribute to the health choices available to them.

The ACT Labor government has a strong track record of delivering health services that are responsive to the needs of women, like other Labor governments around the country. We are proud to have a world-class women's hospital, the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children, initiated under Chief Minister and Health Minister Katy Gallagher.

There has been a significant increase in the number of births in the ACT as the population of the ACT and surrounding New South Wales region is growing. As a result, we are experiencing a high demand for birthing services and, correspondingly, hospital and community-based services for women, babies and children. In response to this, the government has committed to expand the Centenary hospital, as Ms Cheyne also acknowledged. This investment in the order of almost \$70 million over four years will provide for the development, design and construction of new services at the Centenary hospital, which means even better care for the women of Canberra and its surrounding region. This project will provide a planned, comprehensive and structured response to having more babies.

The Centenary hospital is the tertiary centre for specialist maternity services in the ACT, and the growing demand for maternity services will be met with the provision

of more postnatal beds, birthing capacity and specialist diagnostic and outpatient services. As part of the expansion, the Centenary hospital will also provide a dedicated adolescent gynaecology service that will reduce the need for young women and girls to travel to Sydney for treatment as assessment and treatment will be provided locally, thereby improving access for ACT residents. This initiative demonstrates the government's commitment to providing the best possible facilities to help meet the specialist healthcare needs of women, children and families in Canberra and the ACT region well into the future.

The government recognises that women's health is a specialised area of service delivery, with women needing specific support to manage their health conditions in the best ways possible. Often this requires a multidisciplinary response with a range of interventions to help women stay healthy.

I would like to take this time to outline just some of the specialised women's health services that are available through our public health system here in the ACT. Through gynaecology and women's health services at the Centenary hospital, in addition to paediatric and maternity services, ACT Health provide care to women who have had gynaecological surgery, conditions or early pregnancy complications that may require hospitalisation for a pregnancy-related issue; postnatal care in the first two to three days post birth; specialist services for conditions such as endometriosis and continence and oncology treatment services. The ACT government has also invested in providing greater choice for birthing options in the ACT, including ACT Health's three-year homebirth trial, which commenced in October 2016 and has seen safe and successful homebirths take place in the ACT.

Last month we also announced a \$2.6 million upgrade to maternity services at Calvary Public Hospital in Bruce to give women in Canberra's north better access to high quality, modern birthing facilities to match the very high quality service provided at Calvary Public Hospital in Bruce. Of course, Calvary also provides specialised gynaecological services and breast surgery services for women in the ACT. The ACT government are also proud supporters of organisations like PANDSI, who do amazing work supporting women with post and antenatal depression, matching their fundraising efforts dollar for dollar at their annual cake-off fundraiser.

As a government we also recognise the need to ensure that all women are able to access the health services they need. ACT Health has a free women's health service, which celebrated its 30th anniversary in September last year. The service is available, in particular, to vulnerable women who have significant difficulty accessing health services due to the impact of violence, abuse or neglect; language or cultural barriers; homelessness or risk of homelessness; mental health; substance abuse; disability; sexual identity; and financial hardship.

The women's health service provides a safe and accessible service that supports physical, psychological and emotional health and wellbeing for women of all ages, including counselling; women's health clinics, with a focus on health promotion and lifestyle advice, cervical screening and sexual and reproductive health, advice and referral; and specialised medical services. The women's health service also provides health care for people who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

ACT Health also facilitates a range of specialised screening programs for women, including breast cancer screening services, aimed at reducing deaths from breast cancer through early detection of the disease. The service invites women 50 to 74 years of age for a free screening mammogram every two years. Women aged 40 to 49 years and 75 years or older are also eligible to have a free screening mammogram with the service.

The government has also committed to providing better access to health care in community settings, with new walk-in centres to be established, taking us to a total of five walk-in centres across the ACT.

I also pay tribute to our many NGO partners delivering services to women in our community: primary healthcare providers, the important work of Winnunga Nimmityjah, the Women's Centre for Health Matters, alcohol and drug services, community services and others. I would like to highlight, as has been mentioned, the recent research into and report on Canberra women's health needs, including younger women—"younger" being under the age of 50, a wonderful definition of younger women—and particularly their lives living with chronic disease.

I would also like to acknowledge the Women's Centre for Health Matters work with partners, public, private and community sector right across Canberra, in the wonderful website [havingababyincanberra](http://havingababyincanberra). This provides a fantastic resource to women in our local community, and their partners, who are undergoing that exciting journey of having a baby.

Madam Speaker, as you know, the ACT is historically a leader in abortion law reform. The government is committed to continued support of the health and wellbeing of all Canberrans, including enabling them to be able to make informed decisions about whether or not to terminate a pregnancy. Ensuring access to services that assist Canberrans before, during and after making this important decision about termination of pregnancy is vital.

I welcome the tabling of Ms Le Couteur's bill this morning and welcome the broader discussion on improving access to services in the ACT. The government has already made a commitment to review the barriers people may face when accessing abortion services in Canberra, and this review is expected to be completed in mid-2018. We also look forward to the Women's Centre for Health Matters survey and research currently underway on women's sexual and reproductive health in the ACT.

Abortion is the subject, sadly, of criminal law in all states and territories except the ACT. In the ACT it is considered a health issue, not a criminal matter, and as such is listed in part 6 of the ACT's Health Act 1993. I am proud to continue in this place the work of many before me and reiterate that the ACT is progressive and does not and will not criminalise health issues.

Any amendments to current legislation require thorough consultation and analysis and I am pleased to acknowledge that this work is already underway. Currently, Canberra women can access both medical and surgical pregnancy termination services from

private providers. Private services are available through the Marie Stopes clinic located in Civic and Gynaecology Centres Australia at the Abortion Clinic Canberra in Queanbeyan. Both offer surgical and medical terminations, while the Tabbot Foundation offers only medical terminations.

As we know, the decision to have an abortion is not an easy one, and women who have made this decision have the right to access the medical services they need without being forced to endure the judgement of others. This was why in 2016 the government introduced an exclusion zone to protect patient privacy and access around the health facility at Moore Street in Civic.

The government is committed to advancing the place of women in the workplace. This commitment is reflected in the ACT women's plan, which has at its root the advancement of gender equality which will have important implications for the success and prosperity of our community. While we remain an affluent community with a high proportion of women in the public sector, there still are groups of women who face a range of barriers to full participation in our community. In the workplace the ACT has the second lowest gender pay gap. It is still a gender pay gap. In the public service women comprise 65 per cent of our workforce and in senior executive positions 41.5 per cent are held by women.

We are doing well, but we look forward to continuing this important work for Health and the other directorates in my portfolio to get on with the important action underneath the women's action plan over the next two years. I would like to thank Ms Cheyne for bringing this motion forward today.

**MS ORR** (Yerrabi) (12.07): I thank Ms Cheyne for moving this motion today. Last Saturday I had the pleasure of attending the Gungahlin Jets season launch. At the event the division 1 men's and women's football, the men's reserve football and the senior and cadets women's netball teams were presented to the club and its sponsors.

Having long established Aussie Rules in the Gungahlin region, the Gungahlin Jets added the netball teams in 2017, becoming the first to offer a traditional football-netball club feel. As an aside, I know that my colleague Mr Steel's team down in Woden are claiming they were the first to offer football and netball here in Canberra, but I am afraid it was my humble club in the electorate of Yerrabi who were first.

The Jets, and the Blues for that matter, are examples of clubs in Canberra who understand the transition that has taken place in sport and the wider community. Realising the potential of women's participation in sport, both of these clubs have expanded to offer both women's football and netball. I am proud to say that my electorate is home to the best women's Aussie Rules team in Canberra and is a breeding ground for AFL women's superstars like Britt Tully and Maddie Shevlin.

Just like the Jets and the Blues, the ACT government is also investing in increased participation in women's sport, and this support is already having an impact. Women's Australian Rules football participation increased by 34 per cent in the

ACT in 2017. The 2017-18 ACT budget provides additional funding to encourage increased women's participation in sport.

It is not just sport, though, where women's participation has undergone transformation. The proportion of women in the ACT participating in the workforce is 69 per cent. At this level it is higher than the overall national participation rate and only slightly lower than the national male participation rate. This means the ACT is at the forefront of the transition taking place across the developed world, where men's and women's participation rates are beginning to converge.

At the same time, this transition represents somewhat of a glass ceiling. Around the world, a 70 per cent participation rate seems to be a threshold proving difficult to exceed. There are clearly structural changes needed to completely close the gap between men and women in workforce participation. We could think long and hard about how we go about that, or we could actually ask women what they want, which is precisely what my union, the Community and Public Sector Union, has done this year and in many previous years.

On International Women's Day, the CPSU released the results of the ninth "what women want" survey. The survey is largely focused on the Australian, ACT and Northern Territory public services and on some private sector workers from companies such as Telstra. Overall the survey found that long hours are impacting on personal relationships and that work, including being contacted outside work hours, was increasingly encroaching on personal lives. At the same time, one-quarter of women care for others on a regular basis. Of those who had dependent children, almost all said they were the primary carer.

It is important to acknowledge the impact this has on female employees. Here is an example of a challenge we must overcome if women are to make a larger contribution to our economy. How are women expected to do more in the workplace while still maintaining their responsibilities in the home? According to women, we can offer more flexibility in the hours worked, ensure access to leave as needed, allow the negotiation of part-time hours, offer opportunities for job sharing and allow working from home. However, there is also a cultural shift required within workplaces, as many respondents were concerned that their career aspirations would be curtailed should they take one of these options. Of course, everyone will start to benefit from us all asking the question about how we can free up more time for the people we love.

This is a great report and gives an insight into some of the challenges women face when participating in our wider society. Women's participation is such a critical thing. It can help women to become fit and healthy, it can help women to realise their potential and it can help to build a future well into retirement. Most importantly, though, it can help to build lasting relationships and strengthen communities.

The need for these links is particularly apparent when a women enters a new community. I was very fortunate last week to attend the Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services of the ACT International Women's Day celebration. There were a number of dance performances from migrants from places as diverse as Sierra Leone, Mongolia, China and Fiji, as well as some inspirational speeches given by women

who had migrated to Australia, speaking of their experience of finding their way in a new country. The groups came together to socialise, share experiences and have fun dancing.

Participation is such a critical act in our life, and it is through participation that we learn and that we teach. So many lives have been enriched by encouraging the increased participation of women in our society, and a day like International Women's Day is a day to celebrate this and to reflect on how we can better achieve this.

**MS CHEYNE** (Ginninderra) (12.12), in reply: I thank the many members who spoke for their contributions today. I note that for a time Mr Hanson was the only male member here, and I felt the need to point that out. But I expect he coped with it and supported the excellent company around him.

Every person here today has spoken of the value of women and the gender equality imperative. Sadly, there is a disconnect between that goal and the policy position of the Canberra Liberals. At the heart of it, the availability of abortion and termination services is crucial to giving women a genuine chance to reach their potential. Denying this basic health service is tantamount to sentencing some Canberra women to social isolation, financial hardship and missed opportunities in education and the workplace.

It is getting tiring, but I need to stress to the Canberra Liberals yet again that a policy position of pro-choice is about choice. The Liberals stress how important it is that it is a conscience issue for them, but that is exactly what being pro-choice is—exercising your conscience, exercising your choice. There is no forcing of one thing or another. Being pro-choice simply does not force anyone to do anything. Having a pro-choice policy empowers women to make the choice that is right for them. That is their decision to make. It is up to them. It is not our position to judge or influence.

While ever the Canberra Liberals do not have a policy as a party, we can only assume that their policy will be decided by whomever might be their health minister, if that day ever comes—God forbid. I will put on the record that I never, ever want what should be my reproductive decisions to be decided by the personal views or the conscience of Mrs Dunne. I cannot overstate the importance of this issue. I will continue to call out the opposition on their lack of a clear policy and their circular arguments on women's reproductive health until they show some conviction, an ounce of conviction, and let the people of Canberra, the women of Canberra, who they say they so well represent, know where the Canberra Liberals stand.

On a lighter note, I am proud to be part of a government that is standing up for women and girls in practical and meaningful ways. The ACT government has made significant improvements in women's participation. Our female workforce participation rate, pay gap and representation of women in leadership positions far exceed the national average and we have the opportunity to be leaders on the world stage.

Last month the ACT reported the largest percentage of women holding positions on government boards and committees, with 48 per cent. This excellent result is a product of tangible measures taken by the ACT government mandating that all ACT boards and committees consult with the ACT office for women to ensure gender

balance when appointing members. The Minister for Sport and Recreation has also set the requirement on peak sporting organisations funded by the ACT government to reach at least 40 per cent women's representation over the next three years.

Despite this focus and the significant improvements to the status of women, gender inequality still persists. That is why the ACT government is being bold for change, with its ambitious 10-year plan to support women and girls in our community through the ACT women's plan 2016-26. I touched on some of the initiatives under the women's plan in my main speech, but there is still so much that we are doing. We know experiences and opportunities for women vary greatly. This is often impacted by factors such as socio-economic status, cultural background and disability. The women's plan highlights the importance of acknowledging the diverse experiences and needs of women and developing appropriate policies, programs and services.

In order to better support the health needs of women from a range of cultural backgrounds, under this plan ACT Health has completed 12 community cultural profiles. These profiles will assist healthcare workers to better understand and appreciate possible cultural impacts on health in culturally and linguistically diverse communities. We have also been working on, and will continue to strive to improve, opportunities for women and girls to participate in sport and active lifestyles, the importance of which we spoke about yesterday in the MPI.

The ACT government recognises and values our diverse community. It is important that this diversity is reflected in appointments to boards and committees and in leadership roles to ensure that the voices of women and people with diverse experiences are heard. That is why the ACT government is working to develop an ACT diversity register. The register will connect people interested in being on boards and committees with opportunities that arise in the ACT. It will be open to all people but with a focus on women, people with disability, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people that identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer.

The register will supersede the ACT women's register and is anticipated to be finished in late April 2018. We have also committed to holding biannual forums between government and the community to support collaboration and improved engagement. The first forum, "The case for change", was held on 30 October 2017 and was co-hosted by YWCA Canberra. It brought together 52 leaders from government, the women's sector and business to identify barriers and opportunities.

For us to achieve true gender equality we all need to change and question all aspects of our lives and the community we are creating. If left unchecked, gender inequality can breed in the social and economic structures we build, the language we use and the assumptions we make in our private, public and professional lives. The ACT government is taking decisive action to support women and girls. I constantly see the strength of women and girls in the Canberra community, as I know you do too, Madam Speaker, and I know they will take these opportunities and make change happen in their homes, workplaces and social circles. It is with great confidence that I look forward to a future Canberra where equality is the status quo.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## Paper

**Madam Speaker** presented the following paper:

Privilege—Alleged breach—Events at Standing Committee on Economic Development and Tourism Hearing of 6 November 2017—Procedural advice from the Acting Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, dated 21 March 2018.

**Sitting suspended from 12.19 to 2.30 pm.**

## Questions without notice

### Land—Dickson purchase

**MR COE:** I have a question for the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, the Auditor-General found that significant concessions, worth up to \$2 million, were given to the Dickson Tradies in negotiations to purchase the car park near the club on block 30 section 34. These concessions were substantially different from the original request for tender. Chief Minister, why were these concessions significantly different from the terms that were advertised to all potential tenderers in the advertisement for that block of land?

**MR BARR:** I refer the member to the Auditor-General's report that outlines in some detail the process post the tender evaluation panel's conclusion of the assessment of the tenders.

**MR COE:** Chief Minister, again I ask: when is it that you were first informed of the deal being offered to the Tradies; and were you or anyone in your office advised of the concessions being offered to the Tradies club prior to the conclusion of that deal?

**MR BARR:** I will take that date, and that question, on notice.

**MR PARTON:** Chief Minister, why was the termination clause removed from the final contract?

**MR BARR:** The Auditor-General's report goes to that question.

### Waste—recycling

**MS LE COUTEUR:** My question is to the Minister for Transport and City Services. It relates to the reports that Australia exports about 30 per cent of its recyclable materials to China, which has recently banned the import of some of these materials. How will China's ban on importing recyclable materials affect the ACT?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I thank Ms Le Couteur for her question. Certainly I am aware that ACT NoWaste are thinking very carefully about this. The latest advice to me is that it is having no current impact and not expected to have an impact in the immediate future. I know that a number of jurisdictions around the country are having ongoing meetings and discussions about the impact, in particular with the

commonwealth department, the New South Wales and Victorian governments and a number of local councils. We will continue to monitor that situation and I will provide any additional information to Ms Le Couteur.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** What is the ACT doing to reduce the amount of recyclable material that we produce in the first place so that we do not have to worry about these issues?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I thank Ms Le Couteur for that question. It is an important one. Indeed, as many members will be aware, the waste feasibility study has been underway for a couple of years now. It has concluded and I look forward to presenting the findings of that in the very near future. It certainly is the aim of that study to minimise the amount of waste and recyclable material that we generate in the first place. Members will be familiar with the waste pyramid, which shows that our main intention is to decrease the amount of waste and recyclable material that we need either to recycle or have as waste, particularly waste going to landfill.

**MR WALL:** Minister, what currently happens to recyclable plastics collected through the various recycling streams in the territory? If that needs to be taken on notice; that is fine.

**MS FITZHARRIS:** There is a range of ways that recycled plastics are dealt with, including looking at some new and more innovative ways of dealing with recyclable plastic, but I will also take that question on notice.

### **Land—Dickson purchase**

**MS LAWDER:** My question is to the Chief Minister. Chief Minister, your government was investigated by the Auditor General for the purchase of a Tradies Club property that was leased back to the club for a dollar a year. Chief Minister, how do you justify billing the Tradies a dollar a year in rent while charging community organisations tens of thousands of dollars a year?

**MR BARR:** The government does not charge community organisations tens of thousands of dollars a year. There are many community organisations that have peppercorn rent arrangements. The first part of Ms Lawder's question relates to a commercial transaction that was undertaken by the directorate in accordance with the various procurement laws, regulations and guidelines.

**MS LAWDER:** Chief Minister, was it the government's idea or the Tradies' idea to set the rent at a dollar a year?

**MR BARR:** That is not a matter that involves me. I was not involved in any commercial negotiations because, quite rightly, there is a separation between members of the Assembly and ministers and procurement.

**MR COE:** Chief Minister, under the lease with the Tradies Club, are there any restrictions on their subleasing the property at amounts significantly more than \$1 per year?

**MR BARR:** I am not across the detail of that lease. I will take that question on notice.

### **Women—government support**

**MS ORR:** My question is to the Minister for Women. How has the ACT celebrated the valuable contributions that women have made across Canberra which have contributed to improving the status of women in the ACT?

**MS BERRY:** International Women's Day is an important opportunity to honour and acknowledge the work of many people in our community who go above and beyond the norm to make real change. This year we celebrated through the presentation of women's day awards to three outstanding women who have done some pretty cool things in promoting better outcomes for girls and women.

The ACT woman of the year award was awarded to Ashleigh Streeter-Jones, who has already in her relatively few inspiring years done some amazing things for women and girls in our community. Ashleigh has been a director of Future 21: Young Australians in International Affairs, which aspires to get more young people involved in international affairs. She was part of the task force behind the recognition of trans inclusion and co-organised the girls takeover parliament program to inspire and equip the next generation of female leaders.

Young woman of the year was Ashleigh's comrade-in-arms, Ms Caitlin Figueiredo. Caitlin, again a young achiever doing great things, is an international champion for gender equality. Along with Ashleigh, Ms Figueiredo co-founded the world's largest political takeover, which reached 10 million people and trained Canberra women in leadership, public speaking and Indigenous rights.

Our senior woman of the year was awarded to Ms Cathi Moore. Ms Moore has contributed to leadership positions in key community organisations and on government boards for 30 years, including serving as the President of YWCA Canberra and board member and Treasurer of YWCA Australia where she successfully campaigned for the introduction of the 30 per cent quota for young women under 30 in governance positions in the YWCA both nationally and locally.

**MS ORR:** Minister, why is it important for the ACT government to acknowledge these women and the work they do, and to keep working on strategies to support women to meet their full potential?

**MS BERRY:** I thank Ms Orr for her supplementary question. Since 1911, we have formally celebrated International Women's Day, with so much great progress in advancing rights for women and girls. We have achieved so much since that time. As I said, our celebrations for the week of International Women's Day allow us to spend more time honouring and acknowledging great women in our community.

I note that there are some members in the opposition who are not listening to the response to this important question. I hope that they will pay attention and will continue to champion the work that great women in our community do.

The ACT government has launched the ACT women's honour roll. The honour roll will digitally record the names of Canberra women who have received significant local honours since local government began in 1988. It will include recipients of the ACT Women's Award, Canberra Citizen of the Year Award, ACT Honour Walk, ACT Sports Hall of Fame and ACT Scientist of the Year Award. This year we added nine new inductees to the women's honour roll, including our winners for this year, Ashleigh, Caitlin and Cathi, and a group of notable Canberra achievers, including Ms Virginia Haussegger AM for her service to the community and always advocating for women's rights and gender equity; Elizabeth Chatham for her work in advocating and developing health programs for women and girls; Rhonda Parkin for her outstanding work in the promotion of women's sport; and Jayanti Gupta, Caroline Hughes and Julie Tongs for their outstanding contribution to the community.

More than 300 women are represented on the honour roll, which will be added to every second year to mark International Women's Day celebrations for the ACT. Importantly, these women now stand as role models, as leaders and as change makers in our community for other girls and women to look to for inspiration and encouragement.

**MS CHEYNE:** Minister, what else is the government doing to drive gender equality outcomes across the ACT?

**MS BERRY:** Yesterday I spoke about this in my ministerial statement. I outlined a long list of achievements and programs that have been rolled out over the past 12 months. It is important that governments remain focused and keep their eye on the ball with regards to driving real change in our community.

Our women's plan contains around 200 actions to keep this work going, things like better promoting vocational education training opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women; better engaging women's organisations to make sure that active travel and maintenance programs are taking their views and needs into consideration; ensuring that women's perspectives are included in planning and design processes that the government undertakes; and developing training modules on gender impact statements and unconscious bias.

These are just a few of the actions out of a long list that we have identified for the first action plan. I look forward to continuing that work with the community.

### **Land—Winslade purchase**

**MRS JONES:** My question is to the Chief Minister and Treasurer. I refer to your decision to authorise the purchase of the Winslade property near Mount Stromlo under the policies of the old land development agency for \$7.5 million. Chief Minister, why did you agree to purchase this property under the old land development agency rules given that these arrangements had been criticised by the Auditor-General?

**MR BARR:** A business case for that acquisition was prepared. It went through a process of assessment and the recommendation from the Under Treasurer to me was to support the acquisition.

**MRS JONES:** Minister, why did you agree to pay \$7.5 million of taxpayers' money based on one valuation that was a year old?

**MR BARR:** I refer the member to my previous answer.

**MR COE:** Chief Minister, in 2016-17 did the ACT government exceed the overall cap for expenditure on land acquisitions? And what are the government's plans for the Winslade site?

**MR BARR:** I will take that question on notice.

### **Suburban Land Agency—rural subleases**

**MR WALL:** My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. Minister, the former Land Development Agency issued four subleases on rural land for a peppercorn fee of \$1. However, the LDA had no policy for these subleases, with an answer to a question on notice stating that subleases were:

... considered on a case by case basis dependent on land management requirements, the size and nature of the property, the future purpose and timing of development.

Minister, has the Suburban Land Agency developed policies regarding these subleases?

**MS BERRY:** I will take that question on notice.

**MR WALL:** Minister, what actions have you taken to satisfy yourself that these subleases are being managed appropriately and that the peppercorn rental arrangement is appropriate for each property?

**MS BERRY:** I have taken on notice the first question, which is directly connected to the second question the member asked. But I will direct the member to my statement of expectation to the Suburban Land Agency regarding accountability and transparency, which is online and available to everybody for their consumption. In establishing the agency, we have ensured that they promote and publicise in a timely way the information, consistent with the ACT government digital strategy; consider the regular public release of board papers; enable clear and timely reporting on performance across financial and non-financial indicators and objectives; and satisfy the records management—

**Mr Wall:** I raise a point of order, Madam Speaker. The question was directly relevant to the four subleases. I ask that the minister either be directly relevant to that or take that portion on notice.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** To the subleases and what actions the minister had taken.

**Mr Wall:** No, not as an overarching directorate reference but specifically with regard to those—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr Wall.

**MS BERRY:** On the point of order, Madam Speaker, I said that I would take the question on notice and then I went on to talk about the work that the Suburban Land Agency is expected to do as part of my statement of expectation from them around transparency.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, what changes, if any, has the Suburban Land Agency made to the administration of rural subleases?

**MS BERRY:** That is also directly related to the first two questions on that matter, which I have said that I will take on notice. Part of the reasons for those leases that have been provided are around the management of the environment, as well as rural management. I have said that I will take the question on notice, and I will provide an answer to the Assembly.

### **Land—rural property acquisition**

**MR MILLIGAN:** My question is to the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. I refer to a request by the planning and urban renewal committee in its report tabled on 20 March 2018 that the ACT government cease buying rural properties for “strategic purposes” until the Auditor-General hands down her report. Minister, will the government commit to following the recommendation of the planning and urban renewal committee?

**MS BERRY:** The government has a few months to go before we need to respond formally to that report, and we will do so.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, why is the government claiming that it is buying rural properties for strategic purposes when in many cases it does not have plans for the properties it is buying?

**MS BERRY:** I think it is a bit of a question to me about why I think that should have been happening or why that had occurred. It is asking for a bit of an opinion, I think, and I seek your ruling on whether that question is in order, Madam Speaker.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Can you repeat the question, please, Mr Milligan?

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, why is the government claiming that it is buying rural properties for strategic purposes when in many cases it does not have any plans for the properties it is buying?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I think it is reasonable to answer, minister.

**MS BERRY:** I thought I would check so I could just check on the question again as well. Those properties can be used for residential or other purposes.

**MR COE:** Minister, are you confident that the Suburban Land Agency does not have any of the potential corruption that the Land Development Agency had?

**MS BERRY:** Yes, I am very confident that the Suburban Land Agency will do the work that the government has asked it to do and will meet the requirements under my statement of expectations laid out very clearly and publicly available on the website for those opposite. I have every confidence in the Chair of the Suburban Land Agency, John Fitzgerald, and I have every confidence in the Chief Executive Officer, John Dietz, that they will ensure that the Suburban Land Agency meets the statement of expectations.

### **Women—health services**

**MS CHEYNE:** My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. Can you please outline what initiatives the ACT government is currently undertaking that focus on women's health?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I thank Ms Cheyne very much for the question and the opportunity to speak about the important matter of women's health services. The ACT government is delivering health services right across our community that meet its needs and also specifically the needs of Canberra women. The Centenary Hospital for Women and Children is a highly esteemed, modern hospital that provides health services for women, including specialist gynaecological, pregnancy and post-natal care. It is led by Ms Elizabeth Chatham, whom Ms Berry mentioned in her previous answer as being the recipient of an ACT women's award this year.

For 30 years the ACT has also provided the free women's health service to support vulnerable women in particular, including women who have significant difficulty accessing health services due to the impact of violence, abuse, homelessness, mental health issues, substance abuse, disability, sexual identity or financial hardship. It also provides health services to women who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. It provides a safe and accessible service that supports physical, psychological and emotional health and wellbeing for women of all ages.

I am also pleased to say that the ACT continues to be a leader in regulating pregnancy termination as it is regulated as a health matter and not under criminal law. The ACT government also provides free screening services, including breast screening services for women from the age of 40, which women are clearly appreciating as shown by our higher than national rates of screening. We look forward to continuing to improve and expand on women's health services in the ACT.

**MS CHEYNE:** Minister, what are the ACT government's plans to improve women's health in the ACT over coming years?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** It was a pleasure last year in the budget to announce that we are expanding the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children to cater for the growing need for maternity services, including expanding the number of maternity beds as birth numbers grow. The expansion will also include a new adolescent mental health unit and an adolescent gynaecology service to support younger women.

To further show our commitment to maternity care, I was delighted recently to announce a \$2.6 million upgrade to maternity services at Calvary hospital, which also provides specialised gynaecological and breast surgery services for women in the ACT. The ACT government has also invested in providing greater choice for birthing options in the ACT, with a three-year home birth trial underway now for 18 months. The government is also currently reviewing the barriers women may face when accessing abortion services in Canberra.

I regularly receive positive feedback from women about our walk-in centres. Just last month we started a trial of the provision of additional sexual health outreach clinics for people at higher risk of sexually transmissible infections and blood-borne viruses in Tuggeranong and Belconnen walk-in centres. We look forward to continuing this service when the new Gungahlin walk-in centre opens later this year.

**MS CODY:** Minister, why is the commitment to improving women's health so important?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I thank Ms Cody for the supplementary question. Women are obviously a vital part of our community and women have diverse health needs. ACT Health continues to design new ways to meet women's needs so that they can continue to lead fulfilling lives and access health care when they need it.

Through our territory-wide health planning, we are using an individualised approach to drive new ways to deliver health care. This patient-centred approach is a more holistic one that will deliver better overall health outcomes including for women so that they can return to a fuller life after accessing healthcare services.

We know that women have specific health needs and place great value on the needs of their families and their community. Women are often their families' lead decision-makers in health-related matters. The ACT government knows that we need to provide a range of ways to access services, including care in the hospital, care in the community and care in the home.

This is why we have made more care more accessible through the Centenary hospital and its expansion, why we are upgrading maternity facilities at Calvary, why we have community-based walk-in centres and why we have promised to expand the successful hospital-in-the-home program. Individuals, including women, can leave hospital sooner and get back home to heal with their families more quickly.

### **ACT Health—SPIRE project**

**MR HANSON:** My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. Minister, following numerous statements in 2016 that the Labor Party would not rebuild the

Canberra Hospital, your government made a last-minute election commitment to open the surgical procedures, interventional radiology and emergency centre, commonly known as the SPIRE, in 2022. The documents associated with the tender for the design of the SPIRE indicate that it will not open until late 2024. Other than the obvious fact that this was policy on the run that had inadequate detail at the time, why is the government not delivering SPIRE according to its election promise?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I thank Mr Hanson for the question and welcome his return to asking health questions. It was the case that the government made previous decisions to not proceed with a particular expansion of Canberra Hospital. But I recall that it was on the first day of the election campaign that ACT Labor committed to a significant investment in the Canberra Hospital campus, on the northern end of the Canberra Hospital campus, known as the SPIRE centre. We have backed up day one of the 2016 election campaign commitment with a \$236 million investment in last year's budget. The first down payment for the very significant SPIRE centre—

**Mr Hanson:** Madam Speaker, I raise a point of order on relevance. The question is very much about why the SPIRE is not going to be completed by the promised date, which was 2022. I ask the minister to address that issue rather than talk about other commitments that have been made.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr Hanson. Minister, you have 45 seconds remaining. Can you please—

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Madam Speaker, I was in fact responding to a number of inaccurate claims that Mr Hanson made in the preamble to his question. Since the government's \$236 million investment in last year's budget, detailed planning work has been undertaken. The SPIRE centre is now scheduled to be delivered in the 2023-4 financial year.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, why didn't you do the necessary planning for this proposal before you made the 2016 election commitment to deliver SPIRE in 2022, given that you can no longer do that?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** We are doing exactly what we committed to do in 2016, which was undertaking the detailed planning. A half billion dollar investment in a major, new hospital wing and building requires careful planning and consideration that will continue to evolve. The community can expect to see this Labor government continue to invest in health infrastructure across our community, including adding to the \$236 million down payment we have already made on the SPIRE Centre.

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Hanson, you asked the question. Allow the minister to answer. Do you have anything further to add?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** No.

**MISS C BURCH:** Minister, could this project be delivered on time if it were not for stage 2 of light rail?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Both projects will be delivered.

### **Canberra Hospital—infrastructure**

**MISS C BURCH:** My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. Minister, on delays to development of the SPIRE centre, the head of the ACT AMA, Dr Stephen Robson, said:

I think at the moment with all the information we have about demand it is critical there are as few delays as possible ...

I've said many, many times that Canberra Hospital is a creaking bit of ancient infrastructure.

Dr Robson went on to say:

Canberra is a growing place and demand for health services is not going to get any better and the population is not getting any healthier.

All the delays just make things worse.

Minister, why has the government delayed upgrading our hospital infrastructure to cater for growing demand?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I thank Miss Burch for the question. The government continues to invest in hospital infrastructure. Indeed we very much look forward to the opening of the University of Canberra hospital in the middle of this year. That will certainly take the pressure off Canberra Hospital. As I have just outlined in my previous answer to Ms Cheyne's question, we have invested \$2.6 million in upgrading maternity facilities at Calvary hospital. We will build the SPIRE centre. We will open the University of Canberra hospital. We will expand the Centenary hospital. We are building the Gungahlin walk-in centre. We will build two further walk-in centres. Earlier this year we opened a completely refreshed acute aged-care ward at the Canberra Hospital. We have work underway to significantly upgrade the oncology ward at the Canberra Hospital. This government will continue to invest in expanding, upgrading and building new health infrastructure right across the territory, unlike those opposite.

**MISS C BURCH:** Minister, how long does the ACT government intend to keep using the ancient infrastructure at the Canberra Hospital?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I invite members to visit the Canberra Hospital and see, for example, the brand new acute aged-care ward, the new centenary hospital, the adult mental health unit and the updated emergency department. I know some of them were also invited to attend the University of Canberra hospital when that building was handed over to ACT Health earlier this year.

We will continue to invest in health infrastructure, as we have done every year. We will also continue to plan for the building of significant new health infrastructure, notably the SPIRE centre at Canberra Hospital.

**MR WALL:** Minister, what impact has the ancient infrastructure at the Canberra Hospital had on the performance of the health system, particularly in emergency treatment and elective surgeries?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Madam Speaker, I do wish that those opposite would listen to previous questions and also appreciate—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MS FITZHARRIS:** In relation to Mr Wall's question about the emergency department, we have a new and expanded emergency department. Calvary Public Hospital at Bruce is just about to complete an upgrade to its public theatre facilities.

*Mr Coe interjecting—*

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Madam Speaker, I just indicated that Calvary are about to open upgraded theatre suites at the Calvary Public Hospital. In this year's budget review we have also invested an additional \$6.4 million—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Madam Speaker, if those opposite—

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

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Minister, resume your seat.

**Mr Hanson:** The question and the supplementaries are directly about the Canberra Hospital, its ageing infrastructure and its replacement in relation to the SPIRE proposal. The minister is talking about anything but the ageing infrastructure of the Canberra Hospital, including Calvary and other places.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I heard many a comment.

**Mr Hanson:** I ask her to address—

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Hanson, there is no point of order. The minister has been referring to the Canberra Hospital. She has mentioned Calvary, but she has mentioned Canberra Hospital. Minister.

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I correct Mr Hanson and invite him to read *Hansard* when it comes out. Mr Wall asked me about the impact on elective surgery and the emergency department wait times. Our emergency and elective surgery wait times are relevant to both our public hospitals.

### **Canberra Hospital—accreditation**

**MRS KIKKERT:** My question is to the Minister for Health and Wellbeing. Minister, the Canberra Hospital is going through its yearly accreditation process where experts visit the hospital and talk to staff about their roles. We have received advice that staff at the hospital are being coached as to what to say to the people conducting the accreditation. Minister, is the Canberra Hospital or ACT Health taking staff away from their normal duties to coach them on what to say to the experts undertaking the accreditation process?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** I would appreciate some further information from Mrs Kikkert about this claim. It is vitally important that hospital accreditation take place. It is essential, in order to provide high-quality, safe hospital facilities, that once every five years hospitals undergo an accreditation process with the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards.

It is a vital process that staff must go through. Planning has been underway for 12 months to undertake this accreditation. It is important for ACT Health and Canberra Hospital to go through this accreditation process. If staff are preparing for and have been training for the accreditation process because—

**Mr Wall:** Do you train for accreditation?

**Mr Coe:** Wouldn't it be better to train for health care?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Yes, indeed, Madam Speaker. Healthcare professionals need to make sure that their own professional development and clinical practice keep up with contemporary standards, as they also do with the accreditation of Canberra Hospital which—Mrs Kikkert is correct—is being undertaken this week.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Minister, is it normal practice in the Health Directorate to coach staff on what to say in the accreditation process?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** It is unclear to me what Mrs Kikkert means by coaching. Certainly ACT Health staff have been planning for a year, which I understand is what happens at each accreditation process, making sure that the Canberra Hospital, in this instance, is able to meet the accreditation standards of the Australian Council on Healthcare Standards. It is an important task and something that ACT Health staff have rightly been planning for for a year.

**MS LEE:** Minister, is the purpose of the accreditation process interviews to get honest answers from staff on how the hospital works?

**MS FITZHARRIS:** Yes.

### **Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders—cultural activity support**

**MS CODY:** My question is to the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. How does the ACT government support the celebration and sharing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in the ACT?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Ms Cody for her question. Earlier today I was pleased to announce the outcomes of the latest round of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander grants. The grants support activities that promote and celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in the ACT. In this round, cultural grants totalling \$37,000 were awarded to nine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander initiatives in Canberra.

Among the successful applicants were the Sisters in Spirit Aboriginal corporation, who received \$5,000 for an Aboriginal women's reconciliation forum called "A voice to be heard". This is a project to compile, document and publish short stories by Ngunnawal women, which will also incorporate artwork by individual storytellers. Another of the successful applicants will receive \$2,500 for a website for artwork and written pieces and a writing course workshop. And a grant will support a film project documenting the 30-year history of Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal health service. These grants are part of our ongoing commitment to the aims of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agreement 2015-2018, aligning with a key focus in the agreement: that of cultural identity.

On 28 May this year, the Reconciliation Day public holiday, the first such public holiday in Australia, will be another opportunity for the Canberra community to come together to promote and celebrate the important place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history in our city and our nation. As part of the ACT government's commitment to Reconciliation Day, \$50,000 in grants is being provided to support activities in the lead-up to Reconciliation Day, enabling grassroots organisations to participate fully in the celebrations, to ensure that Reconciliation Day in Canberra has a strong community focus. The Reconciliation Day grants closed last Friday. I look forward to announcing the successful applicants in the coming weeks.

**MS CODY:** Minister, how does the government support new leaders within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and champion opportunities for them to develop new skills?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Ms Cody for the supplementary. Earlier today I also announced more than \$50,000 in leadership and scholarship grants for 12 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and one organisation during the most recent grant round. I am proud that the ACT government is able to assist Canberra's community to pursue further study, build leadership skills and keep Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures strong in our city.

For the leadership grants, five applications were received. One of the successful applicants will receive \$5,000 for a world challenge where students trek to a remote village in Borneo to undertake a community development program. I wish her well in this incredible endeavour.

For the scholarship grants, 12 applications were received. Successful applicants will use the grant to undertake study in a range of educational endeavours, including a Bachelor of Commerce, a certificate IV in photo imaging, a Bachelor of Accounting

and IT Equipment, a Master of Visual Arts, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander foundation program, to name just a few. This is an investment in our community, and I hope these grants will encourage others in the community to undertake study knowing that there is support from the ACT government to overcome some of the financial barriers.

A second round of scholarship and leadership grants will open shortly, and I encourage all eligible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans to check the Community Services Directorate website, or indeed the stronger families website, for information on how to apply for a scholarship and leadership grant.

**MR STEEL:** Minister, can you provide some examples of the other projects the government has funded to support local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, training and development opportunities?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Mr Steel for his supplementary. In recognition of the important role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander controlled organisations in delivering positive outcomes for our community, funding of \$100,000 over four years will provide support for new and emerging ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander controlled organisations. This program, delivering on an election commitment, will support organisations to provide effective community-managed programs and businesses to embed culture and employ local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. Applications to the program will open later this month, and I encourage all eligible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to check again the Community Services Directorate website or the stronger families portal for information on how to apply.

We are also investing in vocational education and training programs that include measures to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to overcome barriers to learning. The ACT Australian apprenticeships program is a significant contributor to employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT. Skills Canberra provides subsidies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans undertaking an Australian apprenticeship qualification with up to \$16,500 per apprentice or trainee. This investment is paying off. The latest figures show an 88 per cent increase in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans employed through an Australian apprenticeship. The latest figures from the Productivity Commission report, *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2016*, indicates the ACT is on track towards halving the gap in employment outcomes this year.

### **Education—NAPLAN results**

**MS LEE:** My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development. Minister, the 2017 ACT Auditor General's report *Performance Information in ACT Public Schools* noted that in 2015 and in 2016 ACT public school NAPLAN results were worse than for similar schools across Australia. The Education Directorate-commissioned report from the Centre for International Research on Education Systems reached similar conclusions. Today you wrote an article in the *Canberra Times* in which you stated that NAPLAN may be doing more harm than

good. Minister, on what information or evidence do you say that NAPLAN is doing more harm than good?

**MS BERRY:** Members of this place will know that I have been conducting a conversation with the community around the future of education in the ACT, with already over 5,000 individuals having contributed to that conversation. The paper that I released on the themes identified some of the issues that students particularly but also teachers and parents were talking with me about: how that standardised testing, the theatre around NAPLAN and the competition amongst schools around NAPLAN testing was making them feel about their education. I have had quite a bit of evidence straight from the people whom it affects.

**MS LEE:** Minister, what information or evidence is your government relying on to look to abolishing NAPLAN rather than improving educational outcomes?

**MS BERRY:** If you read the article, I am not suggesting that we get rid of NAPLAN. I am suggesting that we improve it.

**MR WALL:** Minister, what is the status of the implementation of recommendations from the Auditor-General's report?

**MS BERRY:** They will be responded to.

### **Taxation—impact of reform**

**MR PARTON:** My question is to the Chief Minister and Treasurer. Chief Minister, in March this year the *Canberra Times* published an opinion piece by some old friends of yours, Jon Stanhope and Khalid Ahmed. They said:

A family buying a house today will: pay more for the house and land package, more in stamp duty, and much more in rates—a triple whammy. This is not what the people of Canberra were promised when they were asked to accept the taxation reform proposal.

They continued:

... its land supply and taxation policies are having the greatest negative impact on first homebuyers, young Canberra families and residents who fall within the bottom three income quintiles.

Chief Minister, why are Canberrans facing a triple whammy of a more expensive house and land package, stamp duty and much higher rates?

**MR BARR:** The government is, of course, cutting stamp duty. We are the only state or territory government in the country that is phasing out that inefficient tax. That has been a policy that we have been delivering budget after budget since 2012.

I think the more interesting recent bit of academic work into the question of housing affordability was that conducted by the Reserve Bank of Australia. Its work in fact

indicated that it was zoning policies and planning policies that were the greatest contributor to housing unaffordability. That is why we are having a conversation now, led by the minister for planning, on housing choices.

**MR PARTON:** Chief Minister, why are your government's policies having a negative impact on first homebuyers: young Canberra families and residents who fall within the bottom three income quintiles?

**MR BARR:** The recent data actually shows that first homebuyers now constitute more than 20 per cent of the market, which is significantly above the 10-year average for first homebuyer share of the ACT housing market. Stamp duty, particularly for the bottom third of the housing market in terms of price, has been cut very significantly. So our approach of concentrating the first five years of stamp duty cuts on the most affordable properties is making a difference.

The government, through the variety of policy work that is underway in both Minister Gentleman's planning portfolio and the Deputy Chief Minister's work in housing affordability, together with continued tax reform and land release, is focusing on directing further policy initiatives to improve housing affordability. The ACT is performing much better than New South Wales, particularly, and Victoria in relation to housing affordability. Canberra is more affordable than Sydney or Melbourne.

**MR COE:** Chief Minister, why has your government gouged people with land prices, squeezed them with rates and failed to abolish stamp duty as you promised?

**MR BARR:** We have not, and we have cut stamp duty in every budget when I have been Treasurer. That is five stamp duty cuts more than the Leader of the Opposition would ever deliver because he does not believe in the policy. He does not support it. You cannot come in here and criticise—

*Mr Coe interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Coe, let the Chief Minister answer the question.

**MR BARR:** You cannot come in here and criticise the government's stamp duty cuts when you have opposed them all the way through. You opposed cutting stamp duty, and you have on two occasions.

**Mr Wall:** On a point of order, Madam Speaker, will you remind the Chief Minister to address his remarks through the chair, please?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** I will and I will also remind Mr Coe not to—

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Hanson, we do not need that, thank you, at all. Do you have anything to add, Chief Minister?

**MR BARR:** No. I think they have said enough, Madam Speaker.

**Emergency services—employment of women**

**MR STEEL:** My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services.

*Members interjecting—*

**MR STEEL:** What strategies does the government have in place to improve the number of women—

*Members interjecting—*

**MR STEEL:** in the emergency services?

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Minister, did you hear the question?

**Mr Gentleman:** I missed half the question, Madam Speaker.

**Mr Hanson:** Sorry, Madam Speaker, Mr Rattenbury was interjecting, and I just ask that the minister respond.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Next time I have to talk to you I might have to warn you, Mr Hanson. Please do not push it today. Mr Steel, your question for the minister, thank you.

**MR STEEL:** Thank you, Madam Speaker; I could not even hear myself speak. My question is to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. What strategies does the government have in place to improve the number of women in the emergency services?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Mr Steel for this very important and, of course, timely question. Last week we celebrated International Women's Day, an important event that reminds us of the significant contribution women make to our society. It is also a reminder of how much more we all need to do to lift women's participation and achieve equality in a range of areas. I believe there is no job a woman cannot do. I also believe women should be paid the same as their male counterparts.

If we are to build a more equal city we need to lift the number of women in our emergency services. While women make up around 65 per cent of our public service, their representation is not to this figure in emergency services. My advice is that women make up around 18 per cent of employees and around 26 per cent of volunteers in our emergency services.

To lift the number of women in this area the government in 2015 launched the women in emergency services strategy. The strategy was developed in consultation with ESA embers and is helping to concentrate the actions of the ESA in improving and building a more diverse and inclusive workforce.

**MR STEEL:** Minister, why is it important to increase the number of women who work in emergency services?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Mr Steel for his commitment to equality and for his supplementary question. I mentioned some of the reasons in my earlier answer. To put it another way, it is because this is 2018 and it is way beyond time for equality, in both representation and pay. It is important that government lead the way. It is also important for building a more responsive and effective service. As the ESA Commissioner said:

Embracing and harnessing the strengths that diversity and inclusion provide is fundamental to transitioning our emergency services into the future.

We have started, and I am pleased that there are role models amongst our emergency services. There is, of course, the Chief Police Officer, Justine Saunders, and also Georgina Whelan, the first women to head our SES. But we know there is more to do.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Minister, how is the government performing against the strategy the minister has previously outlined?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. As I have noted, we have some way to go to improve the number of women in emergency services but we have made a start. My advice is that prior to 2016 there were only six women in the ACT Fire & Rescue ranks. Last year saw four female recruits come through, and the aim for the next recruitment round is for females to make up 50 per cent of recruits. And we are aiming to support more women into leadership roles. This work will continue, and I look forward to continuing progress in this area.

### **Government—Seniors Week**

**MR PETTERSSON:** My question is to the Minister for Veterans and Seniors. Can the Minister please update the Assembly on how Canberra celebrated Seniors Week last week?

**MR RAMSAY:** I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. I am very pleased to update the Assembly on the events of Seniors Week last week. There was certainly a packed program funded by the ACT government and run by COTA ACT. We saw events each day of the week, including the two Chief Minister's concerts on Tuesday, the Chief Minister's gold awards on Wednesday, the seniors expo at EPIC on Thursday, positive ageing awards on Friday, and many more events as well. It was a week full of celebrations and events for our older Canberrans, with some of our best educated, longest lived, healthiest and most engaged people in the country.

As part of the week, the government also continued its work to develop Canberra as an age-friendly city. As part of this, we launched the age-friendly seniors survey to gather the views of our senior Canberrans on how we can best achieve this. Surveys were handed out at the concert and at the expo. They were also available in hard copy from my office or online through the your say website. The information that we gather from the survey will help my Ministerial Advisory Council on the Ageing and the ACT government on the future work in this space.

Madam Speaker, it was a packed week, with the theme of the week being “Love later life”. It was fantastic to see so many of our older Canberrans doing just that and continuing to be the active and engaged citizens that bring such diversity to this city.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Can the minister update the Assembly on the Chief Minister’s concert that occurred during Seniors Week?

**MR RAMSAY:** I thank Mr Pettersson for the supplementary question. The Chief Minister’s concert is a definite highlight of Seniors Week. It has become such a popular event that we had to have two concerts last Tuesday, and we still could not quite meet the demand. Both concerts were packed out, with around 350 in attendance for each show. In fact we still had a few people ringing on the day to see if any new seats had opened up.

The entertainment was provided by the band of the Royal Military College, the Australian Army’s premier military ceremonial band. With such a talented group of musicians, it is not hard to see why it was such a popular event, having regard to the breadth of skill and the depth of talent that was on display as they did everything from Shostakovich to Bette Midler, and even a fanfare composed by the conductor for his sister’s wedding. They provided a stirring performance, and on both occasions they were met with standing ovations.

It is not often that so many of my portfolios interact, with this one event including seniors, arts and veterans, but it shows how integrated the work that we do is. I certainly would like to extend my thanks to the band of the Royal Military College for their continued support of events such as the Chief Minister’s concert and the popular *Music at Midday* series, and I thoroughly look forward to the next time that I hear them play.

**MS ORR:** Can the minister update the Assembly on the seniors expo that occurred during Seniors Week?

**MR RAMSAY:** I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary question. The seniors expo is another of the very popular events during Seniors Week. We saw over 130 community groups, service providers and businesses showcase what they have on offer for seniors in the ACT. The expo was packed with a huge number of things to see and to do, and ways to find out more about how our seniors can remain integral, connected contributors to our community. People were able to find out information on the community, on government and on allied health services. They could see tips on the kind of caravan that might suit their next trip across our wide brown land, or inquire about various clubs or interest groups, all gathered under one roof.

I had a great time on the day, getting out and speaking to a number of different stallholders. I managed to get my balance checked to ensure that I am in the top shape I am in, at least for my age. There were demonstrations by St John Ambulance and entertainment by the Seasoned Voices Choir.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MR RAMSAY:** I would like to assure the members opposite that my balance was very good.

The ACT government wants to maximise opportunities for our senior Canberrans to enhance good health, participation and inclusion in our community whilst feeling safe and secure. The expo allowed them to explore ways to remain connected and vital members of the Canberra community and to live out the theme of Seniors Week: “Love later life”.

**Mr Barr:** I ask that all further questions be placed on the notice paper.

### **Leave of absence**

**MR WALL** (Brindabella) (3.26): I move:

That leave of absence be granted to Mrs Jones from 22 March to 17 September 2018 for maternity leave.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Besides wishing her well, do we support that motion?

**Mrs Jones:** Yes, I do.

**Mr Wall:** Hear, hear!

Question resolved in the affirmative.

### **Justice and Community Safety—Standing Committee Membership**

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

That Mrs Jones be discharged from the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety and Ms Lawder be appointed in her place.

### **Paper**

**Madam Speaker** presented the following paper:

Government Agencies (Campaign Advertising) Act, pursuant to subsection 20(1)—Independent Reviewer—Report for the period 1 July to 31 December 2017, dated 15 March 2018, prepared by Professor Dennis Pearce.

### **Waramanga playground facilities**

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (3.27): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

(a) playgrounds provide an important amenity for communities and families;

- (b) Waramanga shops has no playground;
  - (c) the lack of adequate playground infrastructure across Weston Creek;
  - (d) the benefit to Waramanga and the broader Weston Creek community that would come from a new playground at the Waramanga shops;
  - (e) the Waramanga community has put forward a comprehensive proposal for a playground at Waramanga shops;
  - (f) the significant community consultation and petition conducted by the Waramanga community;
  - (g) the mixed signals about the proposal from the ACT Government; and
  - (h) the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Waramanga in 2018; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to work with the Waramanga community to progress the establishment of a new Waramanga playground in the 2018-19 budget.

I must be spending too much time with Mrs Jones. I know that she has been passionate about playgrounds for a long time, particularly in Murrumbidgee. I must have caught the bug. But this one is not just any playground. This is something that gives me great delight to talk about in the Assembly today, because it is not actually Mrs Jones's idea; it is not my idea; this is a genuine proposal that has come from the community.

The Waramanga community has got together some very keen advocates. Two of them are here in the Assembly today. I recognise Elizabeth and Dan. It is great to see them here. They have done the work. They have come here to the Assembly. They have worked through the parliamentary processes through to the minister to put forward a proposal. They have done the hard work and I commend them for it.

As my motion says, playgrounds provide a very important facility in communities for families. Currently, Waramanga has no adequate playground. There are playgrounds within Waramanga. I have been out and visited them, as I know Mrs Jones has. They are small, they are old and they are not servicing the community. At the shops, where people congregate, there is also no playground.

Waramanga is not on its own. I am sure those opposite will mention the fact that there are other suburbs and other shops that need playgrounds. I could not agree more. Just because we are saying that we should do this in Waramanga does not exclude other good proposals coming forward from Torrens, Farrer and other places.

There is a great benefit that will come from this. I will quote from the submission, because it is an excellent one. It also comes with a design for the playground. I will go to that later. There has also been a lot of consultation and a petition. However, sadly, what we have had is mixed signals from the government and from the Greens about what this proposal means.

What I am trying to do today is get some clarity, move this proposal forward, get it done. That is why we have said that we should work with the community, get this in the budget and get it built to coincide with what is, this year, the 50th anniversary of

Waramanga. It would be quite special to do that. I hope to get agreement for this today so that this proposal can come to fruition.

As I have said, we have heard some mixed messages from those opposite. It is important to put that on the table at the beginning of this debate so that when we are listening to what has been said by Ms Le Couteur and by the Labor Party we can really try to get to the nub of what is going to be agreed to today.

I will read from the submission. There have been lots of encouraging words from Ms Cody, Mr Steel and Ms Le Couteur as this has played out, which is sad. It is sad because I was actually hoping that we would get this done today. We have had Ms Le Couteur saying that she supports this and that she wants to see it done, but what we have seen is her step away from that.

As recently as yesterday Ms Le Couteur was circulating an amendment to me and to members of the community saying that the action in her amendment would be to work with the Waramanga community to progress the establishment of a new playground at Waramanga shops by the end of 2018. That is what she was saying as recently as yesterday—in writing. Again, she has stepped away from that.

That is disappointing but what we are hearing from the community is that Ms Le Couteur is two-faced. We have seen that this week in the debate about Mr Barr's behaviour. We saw it with Ms Le Couteur in the debate about public housing in Weston Creek and Woden. We are seeing it again here today. I fear that what we are going to get out of this is just platitudes, just weasel words and a very long amendment from Ms Le Couteur—much ado about nothing. Fundamentally, what we are calling for here today is a new playground at Waramanga. Let us get it done. All we are getting in response is weasel words trying to create an illusion that we are moving this forward. We will see how this debate turns out.

I turn to the submission, Mr Assistant Speaker, which I hope you have read. I am sure you have; you are quoted in it. The submission talks about some key principles and I agree with those. I will quote extensively from the submission because, as I said, it is a good submission.

Why is this proposal coming forward? It is about:

1. Tackling childhood obesity by getting kids active
2. Backing local small businesses located at the Waramanga Shops
3. Building community cohesion and a community hub for people to connect
4. Supporting cognitive and social development
5. Confronting post-natal depression
6. Supporting inclusivity and family wellbeing

They are very noble objectives. They are ones that we support. Based on the words that I have heard from Ms Cody, Mr Steel, Ms Le Couteur and others, they are ones that they support. The community has put forward a great submission. There is a great desire to get this done. When it comes into this place, it all turns to water because, sadly, the words that you are prepared to say to the community are very different from the actions you are prepared to take in here.

I hope I am proved wrong. I would welcome being proved wrong. I will get up in this place and I will apologise. I will commend you for seeing the light on this. As Ms Le Couteur is laughing, I doubt that that is going to happen. I will quote from the submission, which has been made available certainly to the members for Murrumbidgee and to the minister. It states:

... Waramanga Shops has no playground or barbecue facilities for residents and users of the shops to enjoy.

That is indeed the case. I have been there many times, as has Mrs Jones, as have, I am sure, all of the members for Murrumbidgee. The submission continues:

Studies show playgrounds increase health, social connection, aid the environment and have positive impacts on the local economy.

According to the 2016 census data, there are 697 families that live in Waramanga, and the median age of the population is 40. This highlights the increasing number of young couples and families living in the area. What we are seeing across all of Weston Creek is a rejuvenation of those suburbs with the older original residents moving and younger families coming in, but not having the facilities that they need for their young families. That point is made in the submission:

Waramanga has received limited investment over the past decade. Given the changing demographic of Waramanga, it is important the ACT Government maintains the appropriate levels and quality of playgrounds and social green spaces to keep up with the growth in the area.

It is abundantly clear, if you go not just to Waramanga but across Weston Creek and Woden, that that is not happening. I know from having spoken with people who are behind this proposal that they would love to see not just this proposal happen but also other proposals happen across Weston Creek and Woden as well. The submission notes:

Various studies indicate many benefits that playgrounds and community play spaces provide. Four major benefits are that they increase health, social connection, aid the environment and have significant positive impacts on the local economy.

Historically—this is a point made in the submission—you could go to the shops and you could use the playgrounds in surrounding schools. But what you see—this has happened in Mrs Jones's home suburb of Duffy as well—is that the local schools now have fences around them and you cannot access them. Certainly, I used to go to the playground with my kids at Duffy. It was excellent but it is the school's playground and it cannot be used anymore.

Basically, we are not just saying that we do not have adequate facilities in Weston Creek. The action of placing fencing around local schools has actually taken facilities that we used to enjoy away from the community. There are far fewer there than there used to be.

**Mrs Jones:** We have gone backwards.

**MR HANSON:** Yes, indeed, as Mrs Jones says, we have gone backwards. There is a range of shops there at Waramanga. They are good shops and they would benefit as a hub. We would uplift the economic activity and get the shops renewed, because the more people who go there and the more people who use them, the better business will be, and that is good for the community as well.

You certainly can see an example of this in Chifley. They have an excellent playground in Chifley. They have a good one there and people drive out of their way to go there—I have been there many times—then you use the shops that are there. But that is not possible for a lot of people. A lot of people cannot get in their car and drive across to that single playground that you will often find is overused.

**Mrs Jones:** Families with one car.

**MR HANSON:** Indeed, families with one car or often grandparents who are looking after children are unable to go six suburbs across town to use the adequate facilities. The submission goes on to state:

Waramanga residents need a place that children of all abilities and cultures can enjoy—a community space to enjoy birthdays, weekend barbecues and special events. The proposed playground will contain a mix of all-accessible and all ages play equipment including exercise infrastructure so it is inclusive and provides a space that anyone can enjoy.

It also makes the point that the playground be fenced. This is a point that Mrs Jones has made publicly, and privately to me, many times. That makes a big difference for parents, particularly if they have special needs kids, if they have more than one child or if they have babies. They may be breastfeeding one child and trying to look after two others. It is very difficult if that facility is not fenced. So that is a good proposal.

A reference group was established. I have already identified that Elizabeth and Dan are here. There are also many other members from the local community and people supporting them. We have seen this with the petition.

There has been a design put forward by Indesco architects. They have provided a full concept design for the Waramanga nature play space for consideration by the minister and the government. That has been made available to the minister and certainly to all members for Murrumbidgee. It looks great. I confess that I am not an expert in playground design, but it looks good. I am not necessarily calling on the government to implement that exactly but certainly to work with the community to make sure that a playground of that nature, all that work that has gone into it, is actually put forward.

This proposal has broad support, including from yourself, Mr Assistant Speaker. Let me quote what you have said about this proposal:

Prior to entering politics, I was an education advocate, at peak body Early Childhood Australia and know how important playgrounds are for development. There couldn't be a more important task—

Hear this:

for any incoming Member of the ACT Legislative Assembly than ensuring more young children have access to play based early learning

I look forward to your support. I look forward to your support for this important motion today, Mr Steel. I know you have said there could not be a more important task. I know that you will be supporting my motion. I look forward to your doing that because you will not support some weasel words coming forward from the Greens that would water it down. You have said in writing to the community that there could not be a more important task for an MLA.

You have said that you look forward to continuing to work with Elizabeth Hoyt who has done all this hard work on the project. Mr Assistant Speaker, I think it is fantastic that you support this proposal and that you will be supporting it today, as will Ms Cody. Sadly, she is not here for this debate, but she has said a lot. She has said:

Playgrounds are an important part of family life in Canberra. They encourage outdoor recreational leisure time and social connection for children ...

I ask members to note that she has said:

There is widespread support for this community led-initiative and I fully endorse the effort the community has gone to in presenting their need for new playground infrastructure to government.

We will see whether she fully endorses it today. We will see whether she fully endorses it or does not quite fully endorse it. We will see whether there is a difference between what is being said to the community by members and what then is put forward in this place. I have a quote from Ms Le Couteur as well:

The community and local shops would really benefit from a playground and improved local facilities and I would really love to see kids playing at the shops all the time.

I applaud the Waramanga community's push for a playground at the Waramanga shops and congratulate them on their outstanding effort.

As we know, Ms Le Couteur, as late as yesterday, was saying that this should be progressed at the Waramanga shops by the end of 2018. I assume that you will be supporting my motion as well, Ms Le Couteur, and that we will not have a watering down of that motion.

Mr Assistant Speaker, forgive my cynicism but what has been happening here, sadly, is that three members have been saying one thing to the community. They have been promising the world. They have been saying that they fully endorse it; that there can be no greater job for an MLA; that it needs to be completed by 2018.

But when we come here today and put a concrete proposal on the table, something that can actually bring their words to fruition, sadly, what I think is going to eventuate is a very long amendment from Ms Le Couteur that says very little in terms of actually delivering what needs to be delivered for the Waramanga community. I commend this proposal that comes from the community to the Assembly.

**MS LE COUTEUR** (Murrumbidgee) (3.42): I move:

Omit all words after “That this Assembly”, substitute:

“(1) notes that:

- (a) playgrounds provide an important amenity for communities and families;
- (b) investment in public infrastructure like playgrounds provides social and economic benefits to the wider community;
- (c) playgrounds provide an accessible play environment for children to exercise both their bodies and their creativity, leading to tangible and provable developmental outcomes for children through dexterity, cognitive growth, and socialisation;
- (d) research suggests that access to playspaces with installations to guide physicality can result in a 25% increase in children’s physical activity;
- (e) playgrounds serve an important role for all community members, acting as a space of social connectivity and giving people tools to socialise naturally—a space for jogging, a regular meeting place for parents, or for holding events such as birthday parties; and
- (f) the ACT Government maintains 507 playgrounds across Canberra, playgrounds are prioritised for upgrade utilising recommendations from annual audits along with current demographic, spatial and social information, and that this process ensures that safety standards are maintained and public investments are suitably targeted;

(2) congratulates the Waramanga community on preparing a comprehensive submission for their proposed playground and their dedication to local community activism;

(3) acknowledges how hard the Waramanga community has been working together to support this initiative, and how uplifting and inspiring to local residents this grassroots campaign has been;

(4) acknowledges that:

- (a) Waramanga shops does not have a playground or kid-friendly playspace;
- (b) Waramanga has four existing playgrounds and another four are located close by in the neighbouring suburbs of Stirling and Fisher;
- (c) the Waramanga community has been running a campaign for two years to have a new playground built at the Waramanga shops in the lead-up to this year’s Waramanga and Weston Creek 50th anniversary on 4 June 2018;
- (d) like many other Canberra suburbs built in the 1960s and 1970s, Waramanga’s local infrastructure, including playgrounds, is getting older;

- (e) the Waramanga community has conducted extensive consultation and campaigning on the importance of a playground at the local shops, including a local Block Party;
  - (f) the Waramanga community brought a petition of 377 residents to the Assembly on 8 June 2017, sponsored by Mr Steel MLA who noted that the 'Government will continue to engage with [the Waramanga community] on the project as [they] continue to build community support';
  - (g) in their 2018-19 budget submission, Weston Creek Community Council noted as one of their priorities for the next budget the need for a new playground in Waramanga as a result of the community's 'changing demographic' and noting that the local playground at Arawang School is 'behind the new fences at the school' and inaccessible to the local community; and
  - (h) the Waramanga community has collaborated with an award-winning playground designer to propose a number of high quality possible designs for the playground, with built-in multi-phase implementation plans for each design;
- (5) further notes:
- (a) on average, the ACT Government has built five new playgrounds each year for the past six years;
  - (b) the ACT Government contributes a sizable portion of the City Services budget to playgrounds each budget including:
    - (i) \$1 812 000 in 2017-18;
    - (ii) \$3 217 000 in 2016-17;
    - (iii) \$1 354 000 in 2015-16; and
    - (iv) \$1 459 000 in 2014-15;
  - (c) this budget excludes the substantial other investments made in playgrounds across Canberra by the Suburban Land Agency and the City Renewal Authority in new suburbs and city precinct;
  - (d) a number of other local communities have likewise campaigned for improvements to their local playgrounds over the last two years, including:
    - (i) the Greenway community bringing a petition of 185 residents to the Assembly on 20 February 2018;
    - (ii) the Torrens community bringing a petition of 713 residents to the Assembly on 30 November 2017;
    - (iii) the Higgins community bringing a petition of 203 residents to the Assembly on 17 August 2017;
    - (iv) the Farrer community bringing a petition of 540 residents to the Assembly on 1 August 2017; and
    - (v) the Giralang community bringing a petition of 107 residents to the Assembly on 11 May 2017; and

- (e) the budget process for playgrounds needs to balance the need for new playgrounds with major upgrades and ongoing minor maintenance of over 500 existing playgrounds in the ACT; and
- (6) calls on the ACT Government to:
  - (a) continue to investigate community engagement strategies to connect communities with the future of their local infrastructure and guide local priorities, through deliberative democracy mechanisms including the Better Suburbs project and conducting a participatory budgeting pilot no later than the 2019-20 Budget cycle;
  - (b) investigate co-funding options to allow local communities and businesses to support infrastructure projects like playgrounds and parks;
  - (c) continue to ensure that playgrounds are provided equitably across Canberra and allow all Canberrans to access green—and play—spaces within walking distance of where people live, work and shop;
  - (d) investigate expanding ‘adopt a park’ programs to support, with both finance and services, communities to improve and maintain local infrastructure; and
  - (e) continue to work with the Waramanga community to develop a way forward for a new playground at Waramanga shops.”.

I should start by addressing Mr Hanson’s comments in describing me as two-faced. Politics is a lot more complicated, and government is a lot more complicated, than being one-faced or two-faced. About 400,000 people live in the ACT, and it is our responsibility to look after all of their interests. That is the oath that I signed up to when I was sworn in, to look after the interests of the people of the ACT. That is not being two-faced; that is looking after all of the people of the ACT.

This is why I think we have an issue here. I should not speak for other members, but I take my responsibilities as a member for Murrumbidgee and as a member of this Assembly very seriously, and I feel that I have to look at the interests of Murrumbidgee, the interests of Waramanga and the interests of all of the ACT. With that as a preamble to talking on my admittedly, and quite proudly, long amendment, I will talk a bit about my amendment. It was circulated earlier today, so I know that all members have had a chance to look at it.

The first part of (1) notes a number of things which I am sure Mr Hanson would agree with: that playgrounds provide an important amenity for communities and families and that investment in public infrastructure like playgrounds provides social and economic benefits to the wider community.

We then talk a bit about how playgrounds are important as accessible play environments for children to exercise their bodies and their creativity. Research, which is probably research that Mr Assistant Speaker is well aware of, shows that access to play spaces with installations can result in a 25 per cent increase in children’s physical activity. We know in these days of increasing obesity among children that this stuff is important.

I think it would be fair to say that there is universal agreement in this chamber that playgrounds are generally a good thing and that we would like to see more of them, and in better condition, in the ACT. I do not think that is a matter of disputation at all amongst those in this Assembly. Those are the words that I said, and I would say they would be a fair interpretation of my fellow Murrumbidgee MLAs' statements. We all think playgrounds help kids. And it is older people as well; we should not totally forget older people.

*Mr Hanson interjecting—*

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Mr Hanson, please stop interjecting. I would point out also that the ACT government maintains 507 playgrounds across Canberra. I believe that does not include the playgrounds maintained by the Department of Education, which I believe are in the order of another 200. This gets to the nub of the issue. We have a lot of playgrounds. We have to work out how to prioritise what we are going to do.

I sincerely congratulate the community of Waramanga for the efforts they have put into advancing the proposition that there should be a better playground at Waramanga shops. I think there is fairly universal agreement that this has been great work they have done, and it is something which I have been very pleased to lend my voice to. I have been talking about this with Minister Fitzharris, as the minister for this, amongst many other things. She has been the relevant minister since last year. I think we are all aware that this is an issue and it would be a positive thing to have happen. That really is not the question. Clearly, Waramanga shops do not actually have a playground next to them.

I noted Mr Hanson's comments, which I might otherwise have made, about a number of issues on playground provision. One of them is that when our suburbs were planned, our schools were not fenced. The playgrounds in schools were open to the community. This is one of the real issues with playground provision in older suburbs. I do not know what the best solution to that is. It is an issue that deserves consideration, and not just as part of this motion. But as Mr Hanson noted, this is an issue, especially for Waramanga. If you stand at the site that is being proposed, you can see two playgrounds which are currently enclosed in fencing.

Another issue which Mr Hanson talked about, and I agree it is an issue, is whether or not we drive to playgrounds. Our older suburbs were laid out with the concept that we would not drive to playgrounds. They were laid out with the concept that mums would push the pram and take the baby, the toddler or whatever; we would walk to playgrounds. So the older suburbs all have a fairly large number of less exciting playgrounds, to put it that way. Waramanga is one of those. Those playgrounds are not in particularly good condition. We are all in agreement with that.

*Mrs Jones interjecting—*

**MS LE COUTEUR:** Yes, it is a real issue. We have changed, it seems, how we want to use our playgrounds. There seems to be much more support for the concept that people would like to drive to fewer but better playgrounds.

Mr Hanson and other people have talked about the playground in Chifley. From the point of view of the electorate of Murrumbidgee, with the exception of the absolutely wonderful adventure playground down in Kambah, which I used to drive my daughter to because it was so great, Chifley is seen as the gold standard in Woden and Weston for playgrounds.

What can I say? I do not think we are in a position to fund a Chifley playground where all the existing playgrounds are. I note that that is not what the Waramanga people are looking for. But the issue is: where do we put our money? Where do we put our priorities? This is a really important community issue. Waramanga have worked on it, but they are not the only community.

As is noted in my amendment, there have been a number of other petitions go to this Assembly in this term. We are not even halfway through this term, but we have had petitions from Greenway, Torrens, Higgins, Farrer and Giralang, as well as the Waramanga petition, which was an out-of-order petition. There may be some other out-of-order petitions which I have missed because they were out of order, and thus not on the Assembly's website, so I would have to look through *Hansard* for them.

I would also note that on average the ACT government has built five new playgrounds each year for the past six years. We have not given up on it. What we are talking about here really is a question of determining budget priorities. It is not a question of whether or not the Assembly thinks that playgrounds are a good idea. If we voted on that, we would, I am confident, have 25 of us voting. More playgrounds are a good thing. That is the motherhood statement which we are all in favour of. The issue before the Assembly right now is whether it is appropriate for the Assembly to say that we have enough information and it is our position to say to TCCS that this is the most important playground—

**Mrs Jones:** Absolutely, 100 per cent. Our electorate needs these.

**MS LE COUTEUR:** I am afraid that I do not agree with Mrs Jones. She may have that information, but I do not have that information. I do not have the information about other possible playgrounds in Canberra and the needs. I have a fair idea about my own electorate. I have very little idea, I am afraid—I do not have a commensurate idea—about the other electorates.

This is why, when we get to the “calls on” part of my motion, we are talking about much better community engagement strategies and so on. The amendment calls on the government:

... to investigate community engagement strategies to connect communities with the future of their local infrastructure and guide local priorities, through deliberative democracy mechanisms including the Better Subjects project and conducting a participatory budgeting pilot no later than the 2019-20 Budget cycle

...

Last year we passed a motion for a participatory budgeting trial for part of the TCCS budget. This sort of issue is the reason that we as the Greens feel so strongly that we need to explore new ways of getting community consensus as to where we

should put our limited resources in terms of building playgrounds, building safe bike paths or building wetlands. You name it: there is a huge list of things that the ACT government usefully should do, and it is not possible for us to fund them all on the current ACT budget. I am not confident that we would find great agreement, particularly from the Liberal Party, for raising rates so that we could fund all of these great ideas.

That is why our first call is for better processes to try to work on these issues. I do not feel that it is appropriate to decide all the budget on the basis of motions in the Assembly; we just do not have the information to do a good job for this. There is a reason why budget cabinet meets so many times. There is a reason why government departments put forward submissions. We are not privy to those, fortunately or unfortunately. I would like to see more, but we are not privy to those.

My second call is to investigate co-funding options to allow local communities and businesses to support infrastructure projects like playgrounds and parks. This is important where a community is in a position to do part of the heavy lifting, to work in cooperation with the government. The Boundless playground has been a wonderful thing, and that was established as a co-funding venture. There was a lot of work done in raising funds from the public for that.

My third call, (c), is to:

... continue to ensure that playgrounds are provided equitably across Canberra and allow all Canberrans to access green- and play-spaces within walking distance of where people live, work and shop ...

That goes with what I was saying before: we need an equitable process for distributing our scarce government resources to these wonderful assets of great playgrounds.

My fourth call, (d), is to:

... investigate expanding “adopt a park” programs to support, with both finance and services, communities to improve and maintain local infrastructure ...

We have done this quite a bit in terms of our nature parks. I have been part of many groups which have been weeding and planting trees in the nature parks which are adjacent to our residential areas. It would be great to see more of this within our residential areas. I have done rubbish collection in Eddison Park, which is near me in Woden, but there is probably more that we can do in this.

The last call is an important one. I would like to see the ACT government continue to work with the Waramanga community to develop a way forward for a new playground at Waramanga shops. This is not as clear as Mr Hanson would like it, and I appreciate that it is not as clear as some of the community of Waramanga would like it. But this is simply not a process which makes sense for me as a member of the ACT Legislative Assembly tasked with looking at the best for the whole of the ACT, not simply making decisions on the basis of considerable community input from one small part of the community—a small but important part.

I very much commend the Waramanga community, and Elizabeth Hoyt in particular, for their hard work on this. They have got it to the stage where the Assembly is considering it. As I said, it would be great to have a playground there. I commend my amendments to the Assembly.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee) (3.57): I welcome any opportunity to talk about early childhood infrastructure in my electorate. As members know, and as is reflected in the amendment, I have been engaging with the Weston Creek Community Council and Ms Elizabeth Hoyt on the proposal for a playground in Waramanga. I would like to note that it was actually Minister Gentleman who, with my support, moved in the Assembly during executive members' business the petition on behalf of almost 400 signatories in support of the Waramanga playground in June last year.

I am very glad to see that Jeremy Hanson is taking an interest in this matter in the Assembly today. He was using some quotes from, I think, my maiden speech which referred to early learning, which is a much broader concept than just playgrounds. It actually refers to early childhood education and care. I am not sure what point he was trying to make there, but Ms Hoyt has certainly worked hard in the community to build support, in Waramanga particularly, for the playground project, including developing and bringing a detailed design proposal to government. We acknowledge the extensive work that has been undertaken.

My current survey of Weston Creek residents has been met with an overwhelming response from local residents, some of whom are raising the issue of playgrounds as well as a range of other priorities for the Weston Creek area. I understand that senior officials from the Directorate of Transport and City Services met with Ms Hoyt and members of the Weston Creek Community Council at the site in question to discuss the proposal. So they have engaged. I also understand that Waramanga playground is on the government's playground priority list.

I am sure that Ms Hoyt has made a submission to the budget process for this year's 2018-19 budget and to the better suburbs community consultation that has been occurring. While I am not privy to cabinet deliberations, I am confident that both submissions will be seriously considered by the government, as are all submissions in the budget process in the context of delivering our election commitments and the range of priorities that need to be considered by government. The government will continue to engage with Ms Hoyt and relevant stakeholders on the proposals, and I look forward to continuing to work with her in my capacity as her local member and member for the area.

As I have raised on previous occasions, prior to my time in the Assembly, I worked as an early childhood advocate, focusing on particularly the nexus between early childhood research and policy. Because of that work, I know that active play in particular has an impact on the development of young children, particularly their physical health and wellbeing; on their fine and gross motor skill development; and in setting lifelong habits in terms of physical activity and the link to later health outcomes.

The vast majority of brain development occurs in the first five years of life. The most fundamental driver of that is the interactions children have with their primary caregiver, either their parent or an early childhood professional. That is referred to as early learning, for Mr Hanson's benefit. But there is no doubt that a child's environment, the environment that they are subject to, also has an impact on their development, so developmentally appropriate community infrastructure is certainly beneficial for children's development in the long term.

I am very confident that the government is making progress on this issue—Minister Fitzharris's amendment makes that clear—by looking to establish an ongoing mechanism for the maintenance, upgrade and establishment of playgrounds across Canberra as part of the better suburbs consultation.

One of the messages that I have heard clearly from the community in suburbs across the south side is that they like to have playgrounds close to their local shops—much like at the Chifley shops, which is held up as a bit of a gold standard, as Ms Le Couteur mentioned. I am sure that the government, through the better suburbs project, will be hearing those messages from the community as well.

I will be supporting Ms Le Couteur's amendment, which acknowledges both the extensive work undertaken to date on this proposal and also that, in assessing such proposals, the government has a range of competing priorities and proposals from the community which it needs to consider and work on with communities in a range of ways to be able to deliver improved community infrastructure. I will also be supporting Ms Fitzharris's amendment, which further progresses the policy direction with regard to playgrounds in the ACT.

Notwithstanding my support for discussing this issue here today, I want to raise a matter of process. In the motion that Mr Hanson placed on the notice paper, there seems to be an inconsistency with standing order 200, which reflects section 65 of the Australian Capital Territory (Self-Government) Act 1988. It is a long-established practice that an enactment, vote or resolution, proposal, for the appropriation of public money of the territory must not be proposed in the Assembly except by a minister. Mr Hanson is not a minister. I am sure he would like to be. The terms of the motion oblige the government to undertake certain activities and binds future appropriations. This is the clear intent of the second part of the motion, evidenced by the express reference to the 2018-19 budget. I flag this as an example of an issue that may be considered by the administration and procedure committee in its review of the standing orders.

**MS CODY** (Murrumbidgee) (4.03): I rise today to talk briefly about the Waramanga playground and the Waramanga community's efforts in getting together and working together to put in a submission for rebuilding their community and adding more to it. I have met with members of the Waramanga residents association, and particularly those involved with the proposal for the new playground, and they are very passionate about ensuring that this playground goes ahead, as Mr Hanson has raised today.

On the topic of Mr Hanson, I thank him for being concerned about my whereabouts while he was speaking. Unfortunately, unlike him, I have had children and I cannot always sit in this chamber without escaping to the toilet in between speeches. So I am terribly sorry I missed your moving speech, Mr Hanson.

**Mr Hanson:** It was a good one.

**MS CODY:** I am sure it was. It is very good to stand here today and support our community. Ms Hoyt has been working very hard, as Mr Steel said, to encourage the residents of Waramanga to get together and work for a single cause. That is sometimes lacking in today's society. We all work very long hours, we all have our own lives and our own interests, and we tend to forget about the common interests of our community.

Ms Le Couteur's amendment has some wonderful points in it. I thank Ms Le Couteur for her tireless work on this. It is very long and it did take me a little while to get through but it has some fantastic points. I thank Ms Le Couteur very much for developing this amendment and I am looking forward to supporting it. If there are any other amendments being moved today, I look forward to seeing what they may be.

The comprehensive submission that Ms Le Couteur talks about in her amendment is certainly one that I have been included in. Ms Hoyt has provided me with copies of all the submissions she has made to government and to other members of this Assembly on the Waramanga playground. I have always been heartened and excited by the work and the encouragement that the Waramanga community have been involved in.

I thank Ms Hoyt and the Waramanga residents for all of their work and, again, I highlight the fact that it is wonderful to see communities working together for a single cause that is going to encourage the community to get together and support each other. With Waramanga's 50th birthday this year, it is a timely reminder for all residents of all of our communities to work together for the greater good of our community.

**MS FITZHARRIS** (Yerrabi—Minister for Health and Wellbeing, Minister for Transport and City Services and Minister for Higher Education, Training and Research) (4.06): I move:

Add new (6)(f):

“(f) consider an ongoing mechanism for maintenance, upgrade and establishment of playgrounds across Canberra as part of the Better Suburbs project.”.

Like all our colleagues in the chamber today, I thank Mr Hanson for bringing forward this motion and Ms Le Couteur for her amendment, and acknowledge Ms Hoyt and the incredible efforts that she has put into the proposal for a playground at the Waramanga shops.

As the minister responsible for playgrounds, I am also a keen user of playgrounds and I know how important they are in our community to parents, to kids and to

grandparents. I receive a significant amount of correspondence around playgrounds, often in recognition of the many play spaces that we have available to our community right across the territory. All of this correspondence recognises their vital role in providing for an active lifestyle for all people in the ACT, starting with young people—but people of all ages.

The benefits of outdoor play for children are well documented, as you noted and know well, Mr Assistant Speaker. This includes developing motor skills, the many health benefits found through exercise, developing social skills and connecting with the natural environment. Importantly, play spaces also provide a social connection for parents and carers. In many locations play spaces form an important community hub.

The government's policy position on play spaces identifies some important principles for play spaces, including that they are accessible, diverse, stimulating, and manageable. Playground infrastructure in the ACT provides a broad range of social and economic benefits to our community and inherently complements community activities and social connection.

On behalf of the government, Transport Canberra and City Services maintains over 500 playgrounds across the ACT, with additional playgrounds built each year in new suburbs. This has continued to grow, as has been noted, with an average of five additional new playgrounds being gifted to the government to manage each year over the past six years. Major and minor upgrades to existing playgrounds also continue to occur, with natural play places now providing play opportunities at targeted destination parks that service wider catchment areas, such as the ones recently completed at Tuggeranong Town Park and at Telopea Park in Barton.

Like many other Canberra suburbs built in the 1960s and 1970s, Waramanga's local infrastructure, including playgrounds, is getting older and presents challenges. It may not meet the needs of communities today, and it does present some challenges in ongoing maintenance. The ongoing maintenance of existing playgrounds is very important. Across the ACT more than 26,000 safety inspections are undertaken to the Australian playground standards. This includes undertaking an annual independent playground compliance and safety audit to assist in identifying future upgrade priorities.

Again, I congratulate the Waramanga community as a whole on their proposal and appreciate the significant consultation and campaigning on the importance of a playground at their local shops. I also thank the Weston Creek Community Council for their recent budget submission identifying the need for a new playground in Waramanga as a result of something I know the community council is celebrating: the community's changing demographic make-up. I recognise that they have been working hard together to support the proposal for a new playground, and in their work recently in the lead-up to this year's Waramanga and Weston Creek 50th anniversary.

As has been noted, a number of local communities have older playgrounds and have likewise campaigned for improvements to these playgrounds over the past two years, including through petitions for Greenway, Torrens, Higgins, Farrer and Giralang. The community campaigns across the ACT that have been mentioned highlight the

importance of playgrounds to the ACT community. They also highlight the changing needs of the community resulting from changing demographics, social trends and transport options, and other profound changes to the way we live. We must strike the right balance between the community's satisfaction about existing and new playgrounds and other important city services.

In 2013 there was a \$1 million investment in the Waramanga shopping precinct, an example of an important community upgrade in the region. Features of this upgrade included landscaping, upgrades to paving, new street furniture and other improvements to amenities. The government's investment in the Waramanga shopping precinct involved an extensive consultation process, allowing the community and key stakeholders an opportunity at that stage to provide input into what features to include in the upgrade. The government continues to work with the community through a robust framework where co-funding opportunities are identified and where submissions are received to ensure that funded proposals align with the government's priorities.

I am very proud to be the minister for city services. These services are used and appreciated by every Canberran, every day of the year. They are the foundations of a safe, accessible, healthy, fun, sustainable and liveable city.

In September last year I was pleased to launch the better suburbs initiative. This important initiative seeks community views from across all sectors of the community to determine the relative priorities with regard to the delivery of city services, including playgrounds. I remain absolutely committed to working with the broader community, and I encourage the Waramanga community to be actively involved through the better suburbs initiative. The initiative has completed an initial round of community consultation to inform a more detailed deliberative democracy process. Suggestions about improvements to playgrounds to enhance safety and encourage more use have been identified as the most popular.

The better suburbs statement, which will be the final end product of this work, is under development. It includes consideration of the need to balance flexibility to respond to emerging priorities within a city-state framework with the need for longer term planned commitments. I expect that the wider city services priorities will have measures to monitor and identify in the better suburbs statement. This includes important community assets such as play spaces. The better suburbs statement will provide a robust justification for resource allocation, notably through the annual budget process, without being prescriptive, and allow us the flexibility to respond to future changes. The statement is intended to improve the delivery of city services and balance the delivery of services between newer and older parts of our community.

Over the next couple of months I will be announcing a number of forums and workshops that the community can be engaged in for this process. This will include kitchen table conversations with a variety of stakeholders and groups, including the general public, community and business associations, community councils, residents associations, representative groups, universities and schools, and government directorates, leading up to a forum on better suburbs.

I would love to meet every request for service delivery when it comes, particularly those that are based on such extensive community consultation. The government does listen and it takes community views seriously. We continue to do our best to balance community perspectives and requests with the need to ensure the best possible use of public funds in a responsible and measured way. We have significantly invested in playgrounds, particularly in my time as minister, including upgrades to existing playgrounds, the installation of shade sails at important town and regional parks, and the establishment of a number of nature playgrounds.

I will be supporting Ms Le Couteur and have moved the amendment circulated in my name. My amendment calls upon the government to consider an ongoing way for the maintenance, upgrading and establishment of playgrounds across Canberra, which will be part of the better suburbs project. This is an important addition as, in my experience as both a local member and the minister responsible, these issues raised by the Waramanga community are not unique.

As Ms Le Couteur's amendment outlines, a number of other communities have also petitioned and lobbied government for new or upgraded playgrounds in their local suburb. It is also worth noting that during the recent community consultation process on the 2018-19 budget the ACT government received 95 submissions from community organisations, stakeholders and business groups. All of these called on the government to fund multiple individual projects and initiatives across our city. The Weston Creek Community Council's own budget submission included requests for funding for 14 other initiatives in their local community, including the submission for a playground at the Waramanga shops.

It is important to me, as the minister responsible, that the government take a fair and equitable approach to assessing all of these requests. There was significant hard work and consultation done by many of these organisations that have made the 95 submissions to our budget process. This is also part of what our better suburbs project is seeking to deliver. I will continue to encourage all local communities to engage directly in this process and help us better understand their priorities and meet the changing demands of our growing city.

**MRS JONES** (Murrumbidgee) (4.15): I rise to speak in support of this important motion moved by Mr Hanson today. I note, sadly, the attempts from the Greens to water down the motion. I note the attempt by the minister to pretend that she is listening. Well, talking about community consultation, 400 members of a community have already said, "We want this project." And to say, "Oh, there are projects all over the city that need funding," well, I'm sorry but I have lived in this area for some time and all across Weston and Woden are falling down playgrounds. I am not saying they are unsafe, but they are way past their use by date. Where is the government's plan for rejuvenation of these suburbs? They do not have one. They have spent all their effort on supposed rejuvenation of one strip of road between Gungahlin and Civic. Nothing else seems to matter, nothing else seems to take priority. Unless, of course, it has a rainbow painted on it, because then it can be done within five minutes, and Ms Fitzharris knows very well that that is the case.

So many words from Ms Le Couteur—the longest amendment I have ever seen her move in the Assembly—but so little action, so little meaning. This is the bible according to Ms Le Couteur here. Mr Hanson’s motion was very simple and very to the point, not particularly political—“You’ve heard from these people, you know what they want. They’ve done all the hard work.” They have taken a lot of design requirements away from the department. They have put in thousands of dollars’ worth of effort, not to mention pretty substantive community consultation, but that is not good enough. Apparently you can only be heard by this government if you engage in processes that have been developed by this government for this government to manipulate and to say what they think you should have in your suburb.

So despite approaching its 50th birthday, Waramanga continues to be neglected and ignored by this government. It is actually worse than that; Waramanga has put up with a hell of a lot in just the past year alone. There have been numerous break-ins at the shops. We have had a bikie shooting on the street that landed a man bleeding on his front lawn and a toddler trying to put a car fire out with a garden hose. This community is suffering. And if we backtrack to the last period of government when Mr Rattenbury had the portfolio that was then referred to as TAMS, I tried to convince him that the people of Waramanga wanted the post box moved back up next to the newsagency. Another tin ear. This government listen through a tin ear. They are not interested in what the community wants; they are interested in policies and procedures that they have developed for their own outcomes.

The community knows best what the community needs, and they are paying through the nose for the services of this government. And if you spent even five minutes walking around the nearest playground to the shops, which is five minutes up the road, and had a little look at the paint peeling off the backboard of the basketball ring and the faded colouring on the absolute rubbish play equipment there, you would feel that an injustice is being done to this community. But I would be very surprised if Ms Fitzharris has made the effort.

While there are a number of dodgy old parks already in Waramanga, there is no dedicated nature play space or adequate public realm immediately servicing the shops. Anyone who has lived in Waramanga knows that the existing playgrounds are old, small and well past the end of their life cycle. They offer hardly any play activities. There is little to no parking or accessibility to the playgrounds that exist. They are dilapidated, they are in disrepair. They do not provide for a wide range of people or activities, and they certainly do not capture anything unique about Waramanga.

The people of Waramanga feel neglected. They feel like the government does not care about them, and they are probably right. Residents do not feel like they are listened to; they feel like they are patronised. They are asked for plenty of money in rates and in stamp duty when people buy into this suburb. When young families scrape together everything they have to buy into the suburb like this which has got pretty good access to the city and so on, it is embarrassing.

This proposal would unify Waramanga by improving the connections between existing play spaces such as sports ovals and parkland corridors. The urban streets and

nearby apartments and other community epicentres such as the schools that are directly opposite the proposed play space would continue to foster a strong sense of community for Waramanga residents. Playgrounds and play spaces are absolutely vital to the development of children and to the wellbeing of parents and carers. The proposal incorporates the nature play space principles that have been designed by world-renowned experts in the field whom we spoke about earlier.

The increase in pedestrians that the play space would bring would also be great for small businesses which, as I mentioned, have been suffering for some time from the inability of this government to either keep law and order or listen to the community. The increase in pedestrian numbers in the play space would be good for those businesses. The proposal will also have beneficial impacts on the mental health of mothers, fathers, children, grandparents, carers. That is a huge proportion of the community. This play space would give children the opportunity to run around, exercise, be active, meet each other, mix with other children and make friends. It would also be a chance for parents and carers to decompress, to socialise with like-minded community members and have quality time with their children.

For some time I have been promoting in this place the idea that there is not only one path to the delivery of these types of facilities. There is not only one path; it is also possible that communities could have a system for buying into their own local playgrounds. I understand that that is not always the preference of local communities who are already paying through the nose for their rates, but it is vital that we consider all options in the delivery of playgrounds. If government has a limited bucket of money, there is no reason to limit us only to government money. Government needs to maintain facilities but does not necessarily have to pay for them all up-front.

Mr Hanson's motion respectfully asks for this to be funded in the budget, but I am sure the community would be able to cope if the minister were able to find a way for the community to seek donations and to get the playground built. It is another example of the government's tin ear and inflexibility and non-responsiveness and lack of genuine interest that there has never even been a suggestion of how communities could buy in to their local parks.

Mr Steel spoke in his presentation about the needs of Weston Creek; and I agree, there are a number. But this government is hopeless at delivering. Has anybody here actually seen the new park at Trenerry Square? The community put up with fencing all around the main section on the main road of the shopping district for months at a time. There was a high expectation that that square was going to include children's play equipment but there is none. There is also nothing particular to draw people to that spot. It is actually a failed project.

**Ms Cody:** It is beautiful.

**MRS JONES:** It is not beautiful; it is a failed project.

**Ms Cody:** It is lovely. I spend many an afternoon there meeting up with friends. It's beautiful. Coffee in the mornings, great.

**MRS JONES:** Well, I think you should talk to some of the shopkeepers who are mopping up people after their disappointment at the opening of that square. The whole community was led to believe it would be a park. There is no grass, there is no play equipment. Businesses had to suffer from the building works going on for months and months on end and there was less access to car parks. That would all be acceptable if there were a good outcome, however, it has all been for some metal chairs and an uninviting concrete maze.

Minister Fitzharris spoke about deliberative democracy. There is no more direct communication with the government than a petition of 400 residents of one suburb saying they want something done in their suburb. There is not even the hint of hope in what the government is doing that this will ever actually be delivered. It is most disappointing for the residents of Waramanga who have put up with enough in the past 12 months. I urge the government to act and actually deliver this playground before it becomes another project where the community made the effort and the government's tin ear dictated that they would not act.

I commend Mr Hanson's motion to the Assembly, and I hope that whatever the outcome of today the government will wake up and realise how important this is and deliver it for the people of the ACT and the people of Waramanga.

**MR HANSON** (Murrumbidgee) (4.25): I thank members for their contributions. It has played out a little bit the way I thought it would, that is, we have a watering down by Ms Le Couteur of what was originally proposed and some words by the minister. But I am hoping that with an amendment I will move shortly that we may get to a position where we achieve what we want. We will see what gets circulated.

I will just go to a number of the points. Mr Steel raised concerns about whether what had been proposed was in accordance with standing orders. I sought advice on that and the advice from the Clerk's office is that that is in order. I just make the broader point, because it is important, that we call on the government to do things all the time, and most of the things we call on the government to do have a financial implication. So to suggest that, just because it has a financial implication, this Assembly cannot wish or suggest that the government do something is a nonsense. Yes, I am not a minister and I cannot bring in an appropriation bill, but what I can do is call on the government to do something. And we all do it Ms Le Couteur has done it many times and I am sure Mr Steel will do it in the future.

In terms of Ms Le Couteur's amendment to my motion, I make the point that what we have here is a lot of motherhood words. This is a very clear intent in my motion. We are not talking in the general about playgrounds and whether we like playgrounds or not: that is a bit like asking whether you like kittens. I am sure we all like playgrounds, too. So to come in here and have a speech for 10 minutes on we all like playgrounds is pretty meaningless stuff to be frank. Yes, there is a lot of benefit to playgrounds and we have gone through that, all of us, but what we are focused on here is the playground proposal at Waramanga. That is the nub.

Ms Le Couteur said in her speech—and I paraphrase her—that 25 members support more playgrounds. If you came in here and asked, “Members, do we all support more playgrounds,” yes, we all would. She then said, “This is a great proposal. This has got a lot of merit.” We all agree with that. She then said, “But I’m not sure what the answer is.” Well, the answer is before her. Her point is that all 25 of us support playgrounds and more resources for them and that this is a great proposal at Waramanga. But then she asks: what should we do? Well, let’s support the playground at Waramanga. That would make sense.

In terms of Ms Fitzharris’s amendment, I am ambivalent about that. But I just make the point that it says “consider” an ongoing mechanism for maintenance. I think “implement” an ongoing mechanism would be better. I see her nodding in the affirmative. I hope that that is what we mean by that rather than just considering it, because consideration could equally be a rejection. I am a bit of a cynic, having seen some of the words put forward, as to whether we are just putting words forward that will have no consequence. But I am sure that Ms Fitzharris would never do something as sneaky as that.

I have circulated an amendment that was then amended based on a conversation I had with the minister, so I apologise for its scrappy nature. I had put forward an amendment essentially to what Ms Le Couteur and Ms Fitzharris had put forward, which is clearly going to be agreed to. I circulated an amendment basically saying to commit to the establishment of a new playground at Waramanga shops and work with the Waramanga community on its design and implementation to commence by the end of 2018 and report back to the Assembly on that progress by the last sitting in 2018. That was, in essence, to see whether the Labor Party and the Greens would actually vote against a concrete proposal to establish this.

Ms Fitzharris has since suggested an amendment to that amendment that she would agree to, so what has been agreed, as I understand it, between me and Ms Fitzharris is that the Assembly commit to the establishment of a new playground at Waramanga shops and report back to the Assembly on progress by July 2018. That is the intent of the amendment. If that is what is being agreed to today, then that is good. I and the community are going to have to take it a little bit on trust that something will happen, but by agreeing to this amendment today this government is committing to a new playground at Waramanga shops definitively.

I would like to have a time line in there for when that will be completed, but you do not always get everything you want—I understand that—but what we might be getting here is what we need, to paraphrase an old Rolling Stones song. I will shortly move this amendment, and what this will do, with the government’s support, and I hope with Ms Le Couteur’s support today as well, is that we all agree today that the government will commit to the establishment of a playground at Waramanga shops and will report back to the Assembly on progress by July of this year.

Having said that, I ask this Assembly, and the minister, in particular, to get on with it. Just saying, “Well, we’re going to commit to it and I am reporting back to you that this may happen in 2022”—a little bit like the new Canberra Hospital—is not going to

cut it. It is the 50th anniversary of Waramanga this year. It would be good to have the ball rolling this year. We can all then pat each other on the back and particularly pat Elizabeth and Dan and the rest of the team on the back and say well done to Waramanga community for putting forward this proposal.

It has been a bit of a messy process in the chamber today to get to this point, but I think we have got to a point where we all agree that we are going to build a playground at the Waramanga shops. I am urging the government to get on with it, and I look forward to their progress report in July that tells me how much work they have done on progressing the new playground at Waramanga shops. I hope we can get on with this before the end of the year. I accept that there are time frames in construction and sometimes things take a bit longer, but if we could see a first sod turned or something in writing or money appropriated by the end of this year so that we can say that this was done in 2018, then that will be a win for the Waramanga community. If that is what happens, which I hope it is, then I can say well done to the Waramanga community for what is going to be a win for your community.

I think it is fantastic to see a community proposal coming into this place. Yes, there has been argy-bargy amongst politicians, but if we can get this done in a tripartisan way then that is the win I am looking for. I am never afraid of a political fight, and members know that, but that is not what I want today and it is not what the community wants. We want a win for the Waramanga community, and if the government holds its word on this and does not play any sneaky games, then that is what we have got. I move my amendment as circulated:

Add new (6)(g) and 6(h):

“(g) commit to the establishment of a new playground at Waramanga shops;  
and

(h) report back to the Assembly on progress by July 2018.”.

**MS FITZHARRIS** (Yerrabi—Minister for Health and Wellbeing, Minister for Transport and City Services and Minister for Higher Education, Training and Research) (4.35): Thank you, and welcome to some of the sausage-making of the democratic process! I thank members for their participation and again acknowledge the hard work from the Waramanga community. I think we have reached a good conclusion. I note that the Assembly is not sitting in July, but I will seek to update members at the earliest possible opportunity in July through other means.

One note I omitted to mention when I previously spoke was the issue of access to playgrounds in schools. Certainly the move to build fencing around schools was not taken lightly. But I am advised by the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development that those playgrounds should be accessible on weekends. Gates are not locked but they are closed to prevent vandalism, so in the meantime the playground at the local school is accessible.

I look forward to continuing to work with the community on playgrounds right across our city and, in particular, working with communities that are rejuvenating and changing their demographic in many of our more established suburbs.

**Mr Hanson's** amendment to **Ms Fitzharris's** proposed amendment to **Ms Le Couteur's** proposed amendment agreed to.

**Ms Fitzharris's** amendment, as amended, to **Ms Le Couteur's** proposed amendment agreed to.

**Ms Le Couteur's** amendment, as amended, agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **Construction industry regulation**

**MR PARTON** (Brindabella) (4.37): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) the government has an obligation to provide a proper and effective regulatory framework to ensure the building industry delivers high quality property construction outcomes;
- (b) failure to ensure construction quality across the building industry not only endangers the safety of those involved in construction activity but potentially the safety of building occupants;
- (c) poor quality construction can have severe financial impacts on those who, in good faith, have purchased a defective structure;
- (d) media reports on defective constructions are damaging Canberra's reputation as a jurisdiction of high quality building standards;
- (e) major industry bodies agree that substantial and fundamental improvements in design and construction regulatory disciplines are urgently needed; and
- (f) industry bodies have expressed strong support for strengthening the regulatory framework governing construction standards and also support clamping down on shoddy builders;

(2) further notes that:

- (a) in June 2016, the Minister for Planning and Land Management announced major reforms for the building regulatory system;
- (b) these reforms consisted of 43 separate proposals that make a major contribution to strengthening regulation of Canberra's building industry and hence its reputation and desirability of this industry as a preferred vendor;
- (c) the minister promised to have these completed by the end of 2017 with the exception of reforming alternative dispute resolution standards to be completed by the end of 2017-18;
- (d) despite the pressing need for these reforms, the minister has missed his deadlines by a wide margin; and

- (e) as a result, the Canberra community and the building industry itself are suffering considerable reputational and financial damage; and
- (3) calls on the government to implement all remaining reforms from the *Improving the ACT Building Regulatory System Summary of Proposed Reforms* no later than 31 December 2018.

When you buy a home to live in or when you secure an investment property it is a massive purchase. For most of us it will be the biggest purchase we make so you want it to be perfect. As the housing affordability screws are clamped down heavily on all of those who are not already in the housing market, as the prices keep on going up and up, this is being reflected in our conversations every day of the week out on the street.

A constituent said to me the other day in Wanniassa, “You guys have been saying there is no affordable housing left in the ACT under ACT Labor and that, Mr Parton, is a blatant lie.” I was a little taken aback because we do not often get that sort of response in Tuggeranong. But she finished her statement. She said, “There is some affordable rental accommodation in the ACT. It is being offered to the CFMEU at \$1 a year.” And we both smiled at that but you can see that you can still get affordable accommodation in the ACT if you know the right people, if you get in with the right crowd.

But I digress. The purchase of a house or an apartment is a big thing and when you are forking out so much money you expect it to be absolutely perfect. Consumers have a right to believe that they will be moving into a place of residence that has been constructed in a way which will enable them to live in without serious problems arising for a long period of time.

I think we would all agree with that. Interestingly, I guess as is the case with a lot of motions here, I think this is a motion that most of us will agree on. For a number of years now there has been much disquiet and concern over the quality of construction in the ACT. You do not have to delve too far into media archives for stark examples and it is not good enough.

This motion brings to the Assembly’s attention some extremely important matters that could make or break the reputation of our building industry and that of the territory itself. And I think this is the other big thing that we are talking about here. You know, it is about consumers and the community but we are blessed with some of the best builders and construction firms in the whole of the country.

Those who are completing exceptional work are dismayed, absolutely dismayed, by the mistakes and sloppiness from those who are not doing the right thing. The great builders of Canberra should not have their reputation smeared by those who are not doing the right thing. The government has failed our building industry by failing to provide the right sort of regulatory framework, and even when they do provide the appropriate regulatory framework, they do not provide enough grunt to enforce the rules.

The impacts of poor construction are profound, and they have many negative impacts. First we have members of the public buying a house or an apartment in good faith and,

despite all the checks and certifications, they discover that they have a substandard structure. That destroys their confidence, their hopes and, sometimes, their financial viability. Worse still, buyers or their body corporate become enmeshed in frustrating, protracted and costly legal proceedings. Those who struggle to save for a deposit are then saddled with unaffordable legal costs, and probably some or all of the costs of remediation. And we just cannot condone this sort of callous victimisation. Poor design and construction practices also threaten the safety of occupants and, possibly, those in the proximity of a faulty structure.

We all know that the ABC here in Canberra did an extensive feature story on this, which led to journalists questioning Mr Ramsay, as regulatory services minister, as to what he would do, and I know that his first response to the media was that the government would conduct a review into building regulations. I note that that first response has since been edited somewhat, but the suggestion of another inquiry is absurd, because this review has already been undertaken, and it was undertaken a couple of years ago. The minister in question, Mr Gentleman, released a discussion paper as a conclusion to that process, and I applaud the minister for the way that that process was conducted.

The metrics quoted by the minister's discussion paper were most alarming. Now, for example, building rectification and re-work was costing a staggering \$150 million per year, and worse still, this excluded litigation expenses and impacts on maintenance costs. Complaints on building defects had doubled between 2009 and 2015, with those regarding apartment buildings representing more than 1,500 dwellings, and complaints regarding building work and defects had reached a whopping 350 a year. If, in the unfortunate event that buyers had no option but to bear rectification costs themselves, these government failures could potentially wreck people's lives forever.

This government has been admiring the problem for a long time. At long last, to his credit, the minister got cracking, announced quite a few reforms that go a long way to fixing their failures. There were 43 measures in total. 29 of these were to be implemented by the end of 2016, with a further 13 to be in place by the end of 2017. One last measure, concerning an alternative dispute resolution model for residential buildings, is scheduled for implementation by the end of the 2017-18 financial year.

These measures could put a significant dent in the difficulties being expressed by Canberra's building industry and arrest the trauma imposed on buyers, residents and occupants and workplaces. But we are now approaching the end of the first quarter of 2018 and, again, we see this government talking the talk but failing to walk the walk. We have seen very little indication that the minister's targets are on track, and in fact it is unclear exactly which reforms have been completed or implemented, but recent media coverage of defective construction allegations provides stark reminders that the problem has not abated.

I am sure that Mr Gentleman will tell us that the reforms are being implemented. I am yet to actually see amendments: I note that they are down on my table here, but I am yet to actually see amendments. And, you know, we were anticipating that there would be amendments and that it would all be watered down. Mr Gentleman will tell

us that the reforms are being implemented. He is dreaming. He knows that it is clearly not the case. It is abundantly clear that, despite the best of intentions from the minister and his directorate, the vast majority of these reforms have not been implemented.

And I do not know exactly why. It is not good enough to just say, “The wheels of bureaucracy turn slowly.” If the wheels are turning slowly, then speed them up. My message to the Labor/Greens government is this: you have very clearly identified what the problems are and how to fix them. Let us stop talking about it and just do it. I cannot believe the inaction from the government in this hotly contested space in an area which is giving enormous grief to so many people.

These reforms are worthy of our support and positive benefits for the community and the building industry. This motion is a simple one. It is, I think, very uncontroversial. It is basically an appeal to the government to do its job, to implement the reforms that it has said it would make. We are not asking for anything more than this; and when we say “implement the reforms”, we mean show some backbone and actually enforce them.

We appreciate that building regulation reform can be complex, so we are not insisting that everything be completed in the next week or the next month even, but rather this motion calls on the government to have everything in place by the end of this calendar year, and I do not think that that is too much to ask for.

Now, again, I am sure that things have been watered somewhat down in these amendments but, at the end of the day, I think that what we were attempting to do was to create some noise in this space to move in the direction of having these reforms implemented, and I think that is what we have achieved here. I certainly hope that that is the case. I look forward to hearing comments from my colleagues, including those on the crossbench from Ms Le Couteur, and I look forward to hearing from Mr Gentleman.

**MR GENTLEMAN** (Brindabella—Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Minister for the Environment and Heritage, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Urban Renewal) (4.45): I thank Mr Parton for the motion today. I have circulated, as Mr Parton mentioned, an amendment that I believe addresses the key issues raised by Mr Parton. It also calls on the government to report on the implementation of the 43 actions that are taking place and publish updates every six months, which I think Mr Parton was calling for in his speech earlier.

This government is aware of the effects on the community and industry of poorly designed and constructed buildings. That is why the government initiated a review of the territory’s building regulatory system. It is why we persisted with the review, even when some said there were not really any problems and that there was no need for major reforms, just a bit of waterproofing in apartment buildings and dealing with one or two cowboys. It is why we put together a comprehensive reform program, and it is why we have introduced, and continue to put in place, reforms arising from that review.

I am happy to provide updates on the reforms to the Assembly later, as outlined in the proposed amendment to the motion, and I can provide a summary now of what we have already done. Reforms in three bills introduced across 2013 and 2014 included: new grounds for the Construction Occupations Registrar to make conditions on or refuse a licence; powers to require licence applicants and existing licensees to undertake skills assessments; the legislative framework for the registrar to direct licensees to undertake training where there is an identified need; new offences and increased penalties for major breaches of the Building Act and for failing to comply with rectification orders; creation of a public register of information about licensees; improved information gathering and sharing powers for investigations; and more options for the registrar to take action against a licensee to protect the public.

During that time checks on references for builders licence applicants were also increased. In 2015 and 2016 we consulted on further reforms. In June 2016 I announced the current improving the ACT building regulatory system reforms. These reforms are wide reaching and target things that cause substandard building. The changes we are making are quite fundamental and extensive. As the motion notes, they cover pre-construction issues such as design, training and licensing, and supervision and verification during construction works, right through to post-occupancy dispute resolution.

The first reforms were implemented through the Building and Construction Legislation Amendment Act 2016 and changes to the mandatory qualifications for construction licences. The act expanded the existing statutory warranties to all private residential buildings or parts of buildings, including those above three storeys. It clarified the roles of building certifiers and the obligations of corporate and partnership licensees and provided new grounds for occupational discipline. It also included a range of amendments to allow for further reforms, such as making codes of practice.

To further assist in reducing phoenixing, the act also expanded the capacity for the registrar to consider an applicant or licensee's history, including the history of directors, partners and nominees, under other licences; introduced the ability for the registrar and ACAT to consider whether a breach is relevant to multiple associated licences and take appropriate action in relation to those licences; and increased reporting requirements for automatic suspension grounds, including insolvency, and introduced an offence for failing to report. Those are items 11, 12, 17, 18, 19, 20, 24 and 25 in the reform package.

The licensing reforms outlined in items 6, 7, 8 and 10 have also been implemented. These reforms complement the licensing exam introduced for class C licensees and mean that applicants: cannot rely on architectural or engineering qualifications that do not include building and construction work or supervision of building works; are restricted to work on only those types of building that they have direct experience with; and may need to be interviewed as part of the application process. The registrar can also disregard references from builders with poor compliance history or in relation to defective work.

Minister Ramsay has previously outlined the work that Access Canberra has undertaken on improving compliance and resolving problems. Work currently underway for completion this year is: to develop guidelines for minimum design documentation for building approval applications; a code of practice for builders covering supervision and critical hold points during construction; a code of practice and regulation for building certifiers covering, amongst other things, stage inspection requirements; a risk-based auditing and inspection system for regulated building certification and building work; and an online course on the ACT building regulatory system.

We will also expand licence exams to all building classifications and to licence renewals. We will introduce a pre-application assessment for building surveyors, licensed applicants and for licensees who have transferred from other jurisdictions. This will include completion of the online training course. We will undertake further consultation on regulation of people designing and preparing building approval plans, developers contracting for residential projects and builder licence categories. This work covers an additional 15 items in the program. There will be a lot of consultation with industry and the community on the changes as well.

In the motion the program is characterised as 43 separate proposals. That is not quite the case, and I will explain why. They are 43 integrated reform actions. They are carefully thought through and they are designed to work together with each other and within the regulatory system. As an example, minimum documentation requirements set a benchmark for designers to meet. They also establish the baseline for certifiers to assess an application against and for auditors to review approvals and design work.

This documentation is also what a builder can expect to be provided and the owner can use to determine what was approved for construction, to resolve any disputes. So it is also integrated with codes of practice, which will be covered in new training, and which will be required to hold a licence. Once a person has a licence, action could be taken against them if they do not comply with the documentation requirements.

Each of the reforms has been considered in this way. Therefore the reforms are not just a matter of ticking things off one by one, separately; they have to be carefully linked and the work is very detailed, specialised and complex. So we have taken extra time to make sure that everything will work as a system.

There are other reasons why we have taken some extra time with the reforms. We are not alone in dealing with problems with poor building work or unfair payment and contracting practices. There are reforms that relate to security of payments, insolvencies and dispute resolution in our program. These include reviewing the findings of the Australian parliament's Senate Economics References Committee on insolvency in the Australian construction industry, the ACT's security of payments system, and results of trials of project payment models in other jurisdictions.

In December 2016, in response to the insolvency inquiry, the Australian government announced its own review of security of payment systems operating across Australia. The terms of reference for this review included to review state and territory security

of payments legislation and to take into account recent reviews and inquiries, including the report by the Senate Economics References Committee on insolvency.

We thought it best not to continue with reviewing the same inquiries and legislation until the national review was complete. We have postponed work on the relevant reforms until the findings are available to us for consideration. We expect this will be shortly, but it is up to the Australian government. When we have the findings, we will see how they may align with or affect our proposed reforms. We will also need to consider whether there is work that is best undertaken in collaboration with other jurisdictions.

In addition to this, in June 2017 the Building Ministers Forum agreed to commission an assessment of compliance and enforcement problems affecting the implementation of the national construction code, which includes the building code. The Building Ministers Forum is made up of ministers with responsibility for building policy from each state and territory and the Australian government. As I have mentioned, these issues are not just ours. No-one is unfairly singling out the ACT building industry. The scope of this review also overlaps with our reform program. It includes competency, licensing and accreditation, accuracy of design and documentation, quality control and assurance and certification and inspections, as well as auditing and enforcement.

While we have continued to work on our reforms, we have participated in good faith in the national assessment and tried not to pre-empt any recommendations. Like the security of payments review, we will see how the recommendations may align with or affect our proposed reforms and whether there is work that we have underway that will be incorporated in the new national work.

As Mr Parton acknowledged, the reforms will make a major contribution to strengthening regulation in the industry. But, more than that, they will help to lift skills and knowledge in the industry, and that is critical. This is not just a government problem. It is not only government's obligation to make sure buildings and practitioners comply; it is the obligation of every person who holds a licence, everyone involved in the design and construction of buildings and everyone educating and training practitioners. People need to take responsibility for their own work.

I am pleased that the motion confirms that industry bodies agree that substantial and fundamental improvements are needed, and they strongly support strengthening standards and clamping down on shoddy builders. I look forward to their continued support as further reforms are rolled out. I also look forward to their support for reforms applying equally to everyone in the industry and when action is taken against industry members whose work and practices just are not good enough.

It will take some time to implement all of the reforms, and it will take time to see results across the whole industry. As a commitment to this important work, the ACT government has allocated funds to assist in recruiting specialist resources to assist with this work. Unfortunately, while this is happening we may continue to see problems emerge with buildings already designed and constructed. Some of the recent media attention relates to defects in buildings built over a decade ago. We will need to

manage these problems as best we can while we are making improvements to the system and working with industry to improve practices.

We have a reform package supported by industry and the community, but we are happy for other views on what needs to be done, so we invite the relevant Assembly committees to consider whether they wish to do anything extra. I note that the Standing Committee on Economic Development and Tourism has written to Minister Ramsay and me asking for information on the progress of the reforms. We will respond to the committee separately.

While they are considering, we will continue to build on the reforms that we have already introduced and keep working to complete those reforms. And we will do it in a way that makes sure that they are effective. I thank Mr Parton for his motion. I move the amendment that has been circulated in my name:

Omit all words after “That this Assembly”, substitute:

“(1) notes that:

- (a) the Government has an obligation to provide a proper and effective regulatory framework to ensure the building industry delivers high quality property construction outcomes;
- (b) poor construction quality across the building industry not only endangers the safety of those involved in construction activity but potentially the safety of building occupants;
- (c) poor quality construction can have severe financial impacts on those who, in good faith, have purchased a defective structure;
- (d) major industry bodies agree that substantial and fundamental improvements in design and construction regulatory disciplines are urgently needed;
- (e) industry bodies have expressed strong support for strengthening the regulatory framework governing construction standards and also support clamping down on builders that don’t comply with standards;
- (f) the Government is aware of the detrimental effects on the community and industry of poorly designed and constructed buildings which is why it has implemented, and continues to implement, a series of reforms arising from a review of the ACT building regulatory system;
- (g) these reforms consisted of 43 separate proposals that make a major contribution to strengthening regulation of Canberra’s building industry;
- (h) the *Building and Construction Legislation Amendment Act 2016*, passed in August 2016, implements or establishes the foundation for many of the reforms;
- (i) the reforms are wide-reaching and target all stages of the regulatory system—from training, licensing and design to the construction process and through to resolving post-occupancy disputes;
- (j) due to the changes being extensive, results across the industry may take some time to be realised; and

- (k) reforms to date include changes to licensing laws to ensure that only people who have the competency to be a building licensee are granted licenses and to help prevent phoenixing or people shifting their operations to other existing licences instead of fixing defective buildings. Changes also give the building regulator and ACAT a broader range of options to use when things do go wrong;
- (2) further notes that:
- (a) many of the reforms are highly technical, detailed and interrelated pieces of work requiring careful planning and ongoing consultation with industry and the community;
  - (b) the immediate priorities are to develop and improve codes of practice for builders and building certifiers, minimum documentation guidelines and builders licensing reforms;
  - (c) these codes and documentation standards will also inform the new risk based audit system for building approvals and building work, which will start to roll out in 2018. While this system is under development, Access Canberra continues to audit and inspect buildings and respond to complaints; and
  - (d) there are a number of national reviews relating to security of payments, enforcement of the National Construction Code (technical standards) and building product and supply change accountability which relate to the reform program in the ACT; and
- (3) calls on the Government to:
- (a) report to the Assembly on the status of the implementation of each of the 43 *Improving the ACT Building Regulatory System Review* reform actions by the last sitting day in June 2018 and include a forward work plan for any outstanding items;
  - (b) publish updates on progress in delivering any outstanding actions every six months until the reform program is complete; and
  - (c) continue working with industry and community stakeholders to implement remaining reforms from the *Improving the ACT Building Regulatory System Review*; and
- (4) invites the relevant Standing Committee/s to consider conducting an inquiry into construction quality, compliance, enforcement and any gaps in the current building regulation reform program.”.

**MS LE COUTEUR** (Murrumbidgee) (4.58): I would like to start by thanking Mr Parton for this motion. I think this is an issue that is important to most of the Canberra community and certainly is an issue that I am deeply concerned about and have been in this Assembly and the previous Assembly. It is an issue where I feel that Mr Parton has taken a very measured approach. I think it is possible that it could have been a lot more political, but this was a very measured and reasonable motion on Mr Parton’s part.

Having said that, I would also have to say, despite this, that I will be supporting the government’s amendment. My office has worked with Minister Gentleman’s office on this. I will talk about the reasons for supporting that amendment later on. But I think

and I hope that this is going to be one of those occasions when the Assembly can all agree that there is a problem, that there are some ways forward and that more needs to be done. I think that is the essence of what both Mr Parton and Minister Gentleman are saying, if I read it right.

Building quality problems are, sadly, a regular feature of my constituent emails, as no doubt other MLAs find. They also come up regularly when I am talking to stakeholder groups. The individual problems raised with me are very diverse and appear to be the result of problems right through the construction process from design to manufacture to final signoff. You name it, it has got issues.

One of the first emails I got from a constituent in late 2016 was about building problems, a house in this case. She had had an extension done to her house. It was important to her there were no steps inside the house. The plans, agreed with the builder, signed off by the certifier, had an extension with a suspended timber floor at the same level as the existing house. Despite this, what was built was a concrete slab on the ground, a very major change which was not actually noticed by the certifier.

I have been contacted most frequently about problems with apartments, and these span all the way from very serious waterproofing problems to cosmetic issues with quality of the fitout and landscaping of a brand new apartment block.

Another issue I have been repeatedly told about is unapproved building work. For instance, there is one case where a house in a heritage area has been repeatedly extended in breach of planning approvals and then the unapproved work is just signed off in a retrospective approval. The cumulative impact of this on the heritage value of the area has been substantial. These problems are usually not trivial in their impacts on the people. They have a huge impact on people's lives, both financial and in terms of stress and emotional toil.

Just on the money side, I have been told by people in the industry that apartment owners can be required to put in as much as \$80,000 per unit to fix problems. In one case the problems may be unable to be fixed for less than the value of the smaller units.

We have seen recently that the problems are not restricted to residential buildings. I was shocked to see earlier this month media reports about major defects in the National Portrait Gallery that will force it to close for six months in 2019. I quote from the director of the gallery as reported in the *Canberra Times* on 7 March:

We have to replace a brace of windows, in which the double glazing is faulty, we have to replace the floors throughout the galleries, and we have to replace the water proof membrane which underlies the concrete podium that surrounds the building.

The only comfort in this litany of problems is that the ACT is not alone; it is a national problem. I am sure that most members of the Assembly will recall seeing TV or newspaper stories about very similar problems occurring in Sydney, Melbourne or the Gold Coast.

What has caused this outbreak of construction problems over the past five to 10 years? My view is that part of it is the economic deregulation we went through several decades ago. It went too far in many areas. And the construction industry is one particularly serious example of what goes wrong with a light-hearted regulation approach. Decades on, the result is a decline in the skills level within the construction industry, a culture of taking shortcuts which means that people who want to do the right thing are priced out of the market and feel under constant pressure to reduce the quality of their product, and regulators that simply are not strong enough to keep the worst elements of the industry in check.

To return to Mr Parton's motion, it is clear that major building regulatory system reforms will be one important step in resolving this problem. As Mr Parton's motion notes, the government released a reform package in June 2016. Implementation of that package appears to be well behind time, which is a serious problem given the importance of this issue. Much of the package was due to be completed by the end of 2016 and with almost all of it to be done by 2017. Unfortunately, I do not believe even the 2016 ones are all done. It is hard to tell, though, because there has been no public reporting on this that I am aware of. I will return to this later and you will see that fixing this problem is a major thrust of the amendment which I have negotiated with the ALP.

I thank Mr Gentleman for his speech on this. I do agree that it is a complex problem and that some important work has already been done. For example, when I asked about progress on building reforms in estimates, I was told about the builders licence exams:

It has started in the area of a C-class licence holder. There has been a failure rate which exceeds 50 per cent to date.

That is a lot of potentially dodgy builders who will not be entering the system, which is good.

The government also included in the budget last year the implementation of a very important Greens-ALP parliamentary agreement item:

Establish a panel of independent auditors to conduct mandatory annual audits of building certifiers for the self-funding model.

This was an initiative the Greens took to the election based on feedback from stakeholders and the community.

While this limited progress is good, we need to move faster. These problems are having a huge impact on people's lives and dodgy buildings that are started now, before the reforms are fully implemented, will still be impacting people many years down the track.

Given that I agree strongly with Mr Parton's concerns about the delays in getting the reforms implemented, why am I going to vote for the ALP amendment rather than

Mr Parton's original motion? The first thing I guess I would say is that my office has worked closely with Minister Gentleman's office to craft an amendment which I believe is an improvement on the very good foundation that Mr Parton started with.

First, though, there are three reasons. Mr Parton's motion assumes that all these reforms are all that needs to be done. However, I have heard some very knowledgeable people in the industry suggest that there is more to be done. There is a whole raft of additional changes that are going to be required. Suggestions that have been put to me include limiting the professions that can design more complex buildings. I am told that currently there are no rules about this, which leads to totally unskilled people designing critical parts of buildings.

Other suggestions include fundamental changes to the role of building certifiers who, many believe, will never be able to undertake a full supervision role for complex buildings; naming and shaming laws for developers who do not fix failures in their buildings; adding other design professionals such as building designers, to the current architects registration system; and licensing developers as well as buildings. I see the possibility of an Assembly standing committee inquiry as a good step in advancing the next tranche of reforms, and I hope the standing committee or committees in question decide to take this issue up.

Secondly, Mr Parton's motion has a hard deadline for completing all the reforms. Initially I thought this is great. However, I have been told that some of the reforms will need more time or will not be able to be delivered hundred per cent in accordance with the original wording, and there is no point binding the government in a way that simply will not work and they cannot do. However, I do believe there is a good benefit in making sure that this work moves forward faster. From what we have seen so far, I am not comfortable that this will happen unless there is a very high degree of scrutiny of the progress. Thus, we need regular reporting, and the ALP amendment delivers just that.

Thirdly—and I suppose this is more a matter of politeness than high policy—the amendment does keep the major part of Mr Parton's original motion, and I see this as an acknowledgement that Mr Parton was basically on the right track with the motion.

To wrap up, I will be supporting Minister Gentleman's amendment, which I believe is a refinement of Mr Parton's good motion rather than a watering down of it.

**MR RAMSAY** (Ginninderra—Attorney-General, Minister for Regulatory Services, Minister for the Arts and Community Events and Minister for Veterans and Seniors) (5.09): I thank Mr Parton for the opportunity to detail the measures that the government has introduced through some significant reforms in 2013 and 2016 to the regulatory framework to ensure that the building industry delivers high quality property constructions. I am concerned, however, that Mr Parton has slipped into some inaccurate language when it comes to some of the detail. I note that on his social media this morning he claimed that my response to this issue was to call for an inquiry. Today in the chamber he has decided that rather than an inquiry I called for a review. I can assure the Assembly that Mr Parton's characterisation on both accounts is inaccurate.

For the record, I asked my directorate to check on the progress of reform initiatives and, as I do with all my directorates, I asked them to report to me on where they see areas of improvement to ensure that we are continuously improving our regulations.

If Mr Parton is going to seek to quote me, I would encourage him to reflect on attention to detail when it comes to quotes. I always prefer to be quoted accurately rather than have an inaccurate or a misleading quote used and then to receive an attack for what I have supposedly said.

The government is deeply aware of the detrimental effects on the community and on the industry of poorly designed and constructed buildings. That is why we have implemented, and we continue to implement, a series of reforms arising from the 2015-16 review of the ACT building regulatory system. The ACT government is committed to improving the quality of buildings.

Compliance with building laws is a priority for Access Canberra and substantial resources are committed in both policy and operational areas to achieve this outcome. Access Canberra has a senior executive appointed to the statutory office of the Construction Occupations Registrar and has a team of inspectors and auditors that work cooperatively with industry to ensure that buildings comply with the regulatory framework.

The construction audit team in Access Canberra has a strong focus on construction work associated with residential houses and apartment buildings. Not only do they audit these often complex buildings, they also provide a high level of engagement and education with licensees. This approach has the ability to identify poor quality work during construction and address problems at this stage, further reducing the potential of defects arising and the associated financial impacts on the purchaser.

The period 2007 to 2017 saw extensive testing of decisions by the regulator through the ACT judicial processes and this has resulted in judicial decisions that have had a deterrent effect and already eliminated some rogue industry players from the ACT market.

On 1 July last year Access Canberra introduced its new complaints management system which enables much higher quality data collection. The new system also keeps track of the government's investigations into building quality, while enabling complainants to be better informed of the progress of complex investigations. It also serves as a repository of data to identify industry needs. As Access Canberra continues to develop the way that it records complaints and inquiries, increases in numbers may not necessarily correlate directly with increases in concerns but rather improvements in how the information is captured. We have recently been actively encouraging people to engage with the government on this issue.

By improving the quality of data collected by Access Canberra, this data can be analysed more efficiently and in greater detail. This allows Access Canberra to better target its resources to construction licensees who have either a high risk or a history of non-compliance.

While reforms have already begun as a result of improving the ACT building regulatory system's summary of proposed reforms, transformation of the building industry will obviously take some time. It is important that we get this right across the long term so that industry practices and the regulatory system can support increased building activity while maintaining suitable construction standards.

We need to ensure that as the ACT continues to experience rapid growth our building regulator can respond to a need for increased services with more efficient regulation of the industry. The reforms are wide reaching and target all stages of the regulatory system, from training, licensing and design upfront to the construction process, through to resolving post-occupancy disputes. We have been working closely and cooperatively with the support of industry and other stakeholders to ensure that we are getting this right.

On 19 August 2017 the ACT government extended statutory warranties to cover buildings over three storeys to match those buildings that are three storeys and under. Other reforms include steps to prevent phoenixing or people shifting their operations to other existing licences instead of fixing defective buildings.

Changes have also given the building regulator and ACAT a broader range of options to use when things go wrong, such as the ability to condition licences and to use the licence as a more effective regulatory tool. It is important that we continue to assess the current regulations and make changes when required to ensure that our regulators have the right tools in their toolkit to ensure compliance.

The Construction Occupations Registrar can condition the licences of builders, restricting them to performing works only at a particular site, to help encourage compliance and that ensure licensees' attention is focused on the project at hand. This has happened on two occasions. Recently the Construction Occupations Registrar made the decision to condition all licensed building surveyors to address the issues associated with an engineer who was responsible for numerous building defects.

The reform process to date has put industry on notice. Our reforms place clear obligations on licensees for quality control and require an industry-wide commitment to higher standards of work, training and education.

The ACT government has also recently introduced an examination for class C building licences, ensuring that those applying for licences have the appropriate knowledge of the Building Code of Australia. This building licencing examination process is planned to be rolled out to class B licence applications by July and to class A by the end of 2018. This is on top of the formal mandatory qualification and the requirement for a minimum of two years practical relevant building experience required before an application for a class A, B or C licence is accepted. An applicant for a class C builder licence must pass the class C builder licence examination with a pass mark of 80 per cent in order to be issued with an ACT licence. We will not apologise for setting a high bar to enter this industry. The examination is helping to ensure that those who are not capable of demonstrating an effective competency

around the building code and its relevance to construction in the territory cannot enter the industry.

While reform has already begun, transformation of the building industry will obviously take longer than a few months. Access Canberra is focused on continual improvement of its services and acknowledges that it is important that we get this right long term and that industry practices and the regulatory system can support increased building activity while maintaining suitable construction standards.

I wish to conclude by noting that Access Canberra is here for all Canberrans. Its purpose is to provide easier and simpler services for everyone in a safer working and living environment. As a government, we can commit to further continuous improvements on all fronts.

Madam Assistant Speaker, we note the intention behind Mr Parton's motion and can assure you and all members of the Assembly, and the community, that we are working to ensure that we have the settings right and to ensure that Access Canberra is working to improve the quality of buildings here in the ACT.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee) (5.18): I rise today to speak in support of Minister Gentleman's amendments to Mr Parton's motion.

The building and construction industry is subject to regulation and compliance to ensure high quality construction outcomes for buildings in the ACT, because we recognise the impacts of poor quality construction on our community and we are committed to strengthening the regulation of Canberra's building industry.

I really welcome Minister Gentleman's amendments to ask the relevant standing committee to consider examining matters relating to building and construction industry regulation and processes. Referring this issue to the relevant standing committee will open up an opportunity for broad consultation with Canberrans and bring focus to this important issue. Being on the health, education and justice committees, I am not a member of the relevant committees, so I do not have a direct say in what inquiries they self-refer. But I do have an interest in this area and I should be able to have a say in this place about what inquiries are important to my community. This one is. That is why I think this amendment should be supported.

Buying a home, as has been pointed out, is the largest purchase that most people make in their lifetime. When a buyer is spending upwards of \$400,000 or \$500,000 to buy an apartment or a house, they should expect that it is well built and does not have structural and other defects. I myself have rented a brand-new apartment that had ongoing waterproofing issues which, apart from other concerns, turned the wooden vanity in the bathroom into a waterlogged pulp after a very short period of time. We should expect better than that, especially with new buildings. A committee inquiry could invite public submissions from developers, from buyers and from renters to better understand their experiences with building and construction quality issues.

Minister Gentleman's amendments also reaffirm that the ACT government has a commitment to delivering on the 43 suggested reforms that arose from the review of

the ACT building regulatory system. The amendments further outline the ACT government's immediate priorities to develop and improve codes of practice for builders and building certifiers and deliver reform in minimum documentation guidelines and builders licensing reforms. The amendment calls on the ACT government to report back to the Assembly on the status of implementation of these reforms and to keep the community updated on the progress of this issue.

It is important that we set adequate building regulatory frameworks for our growing city. The growth of our city means that there is a lot of new development around Canberra. We need to continue to ensure that there is high quality construction of buildings for new Canberrans to live and work in. Setting high expectations when it comes to building quality helps to ensure that tenants are safe. It also ensures that those who work within the construction industry are operating in a safe working environment.

This is an issue that has been raised with me by constituents in my electorate of Murrumbidgee. Building standards will be particularly important as we see the growth in the greenfield suburbs of Molonglo and in urban renewal areas in town centres, particularly in high density residential development. Ensuring that we have a strong regulatory framework around building standards is vital to ensure that we have resilient buildings in our city and to provide confidence in new construction as well. That is why it is so important that there is community input as we reform building construction regulations. Receiving feedback from developers, landlords, buyers, tenants and the broader community is valuable to inform ongoing work.

Of course, the ACT government is already working to improve building regulations and implementing reforms to the building and construction industry. The government has already passed the Building and Construction Legislation Amendment Act 2016, which implements and establishes the foundation for the suggested reforms arising from the review of the ACT building regulatory system. And we have made reforms to licensing laws and changes to give more options to building regulators and ACAT to use the tools available when things do go wrong.

This amendment to the motion calls upon the ACT government to ensure that these reforms are implemented within a realistic time frame. Mr Parton's suggestion for all remaining reforms to be implemented by no later than 31 December this year would be a disservice to the industry. It would be a disservice to those who are working to ensure that meaningful reforms and long-lasting change can be properly implemented. These are extensive and thorough reforms. They will take some time to implement and they are fundamental to the building industry. This amendment recognises that fact and reaffirms the ACT government's commitment to working with the industry and relevant stakeholders to ensure that there are overarching and meaningful reforms.

It will also be beneficial to have a concurrent inquiry into the building regulatory framework. We should invite the community to make submissions about the state of the building and construction quality that we are seeing in Canberra. This will help us to deliver thoroughly informed and lasting change in the industry and improve building construction practices and compliance.

The ACT government is committed to delivering strong reforms to ensure high quality construction outcomes for buildings in Canberra. The amendments to this motion, especially an inquiry, would provide an important focus on building quality and compliance with the involvement of the community whilst the ACT government continues to deliver reforms in this important area and ensure that buildings constructed in our city are of a high quality. I commend Minister Gentleman's amendments to Mr Parton's motion.

**MS CODY** (Murrumbidgee) (5.24): I thank Mr Parton for bringing this important matter forward today. I note his carer responsibilities, and I understand that carer responsibilities are a major role for many members of this Assembly. It is a shame he cannot be here this afternoon, but I believe that Mrs Jones is going to wrap up for us. These words are mainly directed at Mr Parton, but I thank Mrs Jones for passing them on.

For once I agree with parts of Mr Parton's motion. Do not get too excited, though; I am highly supportive of Mr Gentleman's amendments. Mr Parton notes in part 1 of his motion:

... the Government has an obligation to provide a proper and effective regulatory framework to ensure the building industry delivers high quality property construction outcomes;

What an important issue. I have been very lucky in having a father who has been a builder and has worked in the construction industry for far too many years, and still does today. I have been armed with a great deal of knowledge and experience when purchasing my own home. As we have heard today from many members of the Assembly, many people in the community have not been so lucky. They unfortunately have had many issues when purchasing their properties.

I am contacted on a regular basis by members of the community raising concerns with me about their dwellings. Usually these letters have been written to me as a last resort. The members of the community have, in most cases, started their complaint process with the Master Builders Association, as the builders they have used have been their members. In all cases to date which have been referred to my office and which I have been involved in, the MBA have been unable to help or maybe not willing to. This is a real shame and a blight on society.

That brings me to Mr Gentleman's amendments today. In part 4 of Mr Gentleman's amendment, he calls on the government to invite:

... the relevant Standing Committee/s to consider conducting an inquiry into construction quality, compliance, enforcement and any gaps in the current building regulation reform program.

What a novel idea: a standing committee looking into a matter which impacts on the community.

I understand that it is a matter for a committee to decide on what they do and do not inquire into, but I understand that Mr Parton is a member of the standing committee which would have coverage of this very important matter. I assume that we will see a committee inquiry into construction quality, compliance, enforcement and any other gaps that may be in effect in the current building regulation in the coming months. I hope that when that does happen we all, particularly those members of the community who have raised these concerns with me, get an opportunity to have our say and to provide evidence to the committee on the things that we believe need to be done better. I would have thought that it was Mr Parton's job to look into these important matters as part of being a member of a committee. But when the cameras are turned off he is all celebrity and no policy.

I thank Mr Gentleman for his work today and Ms Le Couteur for her work with Mr Gentleman's office in preparing this amendment. It really embodies some of the issues that have been raised with me by constituents, particularly since I have been elected here but even before that, having, as I said, been around the building and construction industry for many years. I look forward to seeing an inquiry come out of this. I look forward to seeing and hearing from members of the community about the important matters they would like to raise. Again, I thank Mr Gentleman for his amendment and I look forward to supporting that.

**MS ORR** (Yerrabi) (5.29): Like other people, I thank Mr Parton for his support in moving this motion here today. As people in this chamber may be aware, I have been working hard with residents in my electorate on this topic, trying to find a path forward. Part of this has included conducting a survey which my colleagues have also been sharing with their constituents. The survey seeks to understand the extent and intricacies of concerns people have regarding this topic. I have spoken with a number of people in my electorate, as well as community groups, and I am sure some of these groups have spoken to other people within the chamber. I have also been in discussion with the relevant directorates to understand how we currently do things in the ACT. All of these steps are integral to understanding what exactly the problem is and to forming a path forward. I know that Mr Parton understands this and appreciates the work I have already done in this space. I acknowledge that Mr Parton's moving this motion symbolises a bipartisan sentiment and sets aside party politics for the sake of the community.

It is incredibly important to ensure that we get our build quality settings right, because it impacts people's housing decisions. The Winton sustainable research strategies report on the 2014 housing choices community survey found that quality issues were an impediment for three out of five people when considering whether to move to a higher density development. The relevance of this finding is emphasised by the fact that 54.3 per cent of people over 60 and 41.9 per cent of people generally would consider moving to a dwelling in a higher density development in the future. However, half of people over 60 advised that they would not wish to move to a high-density development in the future, due to perceptions of poor quality.

We must listen to the community on these matters to ensure that everyone has the confidence and security they need when making housing decisions. The "Improving

the ACT building regulatory system summary of proposed reforms” was met with wide approval from industry. The Master Builders Association of the ACT chief executive, Michael Hopkins, wrote only this week on the RiotACT about the need for these reforms. Keely Quinn from Engineers Australia wrote just the other day to say, “Let’s get on with it.” This amended motion gives us the opportunity to do just that. And I am certain Mr Parton and his colleagues and everyone in this chamber, based on the debate today, would in no way wish to stall this important process.

I agree with the intent of Mr Parton’s motion and I again encourage his enthusiasm for the issue in bringing this motion here today. I am sure Mr Parton will agree that the amendments moved by the minister seek to strengthen the motion. I dare say Mrs Jones will clarify what Mr Parton thinks.

These amendments resolve the fact that there is no mention of the work that has already been done, which so far has been mainly technical in nature, in enabling things to go forward. The motion as it originally stands also lacks a path ahead. It tells us what needs to be done but does not suggest how. While the reforms contained in the summary of proposed reforms did indeed receive widespread support, it was obvious from the consultation that there was disagreement on how to implement these reforms. The amendment today proposing that the relevant standing committee or committees consider conducting an inquiry into construction quality and any gaps in the current building regulation reform program seeks to resolve that oversight and offer a forum in which we can find consensus on the design and implementation of these much-needed reforms. This process is important for our community as well, as it will also give residents the opportunity to be heard on these issues, offering a more informed approach to resolving these matters, which we have all said is very important.

**MRS JONES** (Murrumbidgee) (5.33): I thank members for their understanding that Mr Parton has had to attend to caring responsibilities for his family. He has given me some guidance on the thoughts that he wanted to share in closing this debate. I will read from his notes.

I feel we have actually achieved something here today. Despite the amendments from the government, despite them skirting around the issue and pretending that there is no great problem, I am buoyed by the support from the Greens and I thank my colleague Ms Caroline Le Couteur for viewing this motion as it should have been viewed. This motion was never about political theatre; it was about responding to calls from the community, responding to calls from the industry and then prodding the government to move in a certain direction, in the way you might prod a sleepy wombat to get off the road, because we all know that that would be the best outcome.

Whatever the final result here in the chamber I know that, if nothing else, the noise created here will probably move that sleepy wombat in the right direction. It goes without saying that I am certainly not comparing the minister in any way to a sleepy wombat. Anyone who had a mental image floating around in their head of Mr Gentleman should instantly erase the image, because that would be most unkind.

Regarding the minister and ACT Labor, I am dismayed that the minister's office made no contact with my office regarding their amendments. They liaised extensively with the Greens but chose to ignore my office, which is disappointing.

All I wanted to achieve here is what is stated in the original motion. There is no political motivation going on here. All I am doing is calling on the government to do what it has already said it is going to do anyway, so I do not really care who provides the amendments or what they say, to a large extent. As long as we move down the path of providing more safety for consumers and more certainty for those in the industry who are doing the right thing, I do not care whose name ends up on the motion or the amendments. I just want to get it done.

It is almost ironic that one of the many stakeholders in this space, the Master Builders Association, is loudly calling for a tougher regulatory framework. When the MBA is screaming out for more regulation and more enforcement, you certainly know that the government is not doing its job in this area.

Although we are not particularly pleased with the government's amendments, we will not oppose them. I just want this government to stop sitting on its hands in this space. If we move forward on its own terms as distinct from my terms, that is fine. I do not really care.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

## **Housing affordability**

**MR PETTERSSON** (Yerrabi) (5.36): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the challenges facing Australia in relation to housing affordability and homelessness;
- (b) that on numerous indicators, the ACT rates among the best performing jurisdictions on housing affordability and provision of housing support and homelessness services;
- (c) the active role played by the ACT Government in improving housing affordability for all Canberrans through measures such as phasing out stamp duty and accelerating land supply;
- (d) that the ACT Government provides the highest rate of public housing of all States and Territories and a large public housing portfolio is a major contributor to affordable housing;
- (e) that Community Housing Providers provide important affordable rental and purchase options for Canberrans on lower incomes; and
- (f) that a mix of housing types including public, affordable, community and privately owned can help promote social inclusion and cohesion;

(2) further notes:

- (a) State and Territory governments are in negotiations with the Australian Government on a new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement;
- (b) that housing affordability is influenced by a range of factors and policies at both the Territory and National levels;
- (c) that the ACT Government is developing a new housing strategy and early measures such as the affordable home purchase database, the new innovation fund and targets for community housing will help make housing in the ACT more affordable, accessible and fairer; and
- (d) that the ACT Government is also working with other jurisdictions to progress national reforms that will lower barriers to entry for home ownership and improve affordability for first home buyers; and

(3) calls on the Government to:

- (a) continue to evaluate and build on current housing affordability measures;
- (b) proactively respond to the community feedback arising from the consultation and housing summit last year to address housing affordability; and
- (c) release a new housing strategy in 2018.

Every Canberran deserves a place to call home. Currently, housing affordability is one of the most pressing issues we face in this country, and in our city. The dream of owning your own home is becoming increasingly out of reach for many Australians, particularly for our children and subsequent generations. Tackling this issue should be a priority for every state, territory and federal government.

While we endure a federal government that refuses to get tough on negative gearing and capital gains tax, and is happy to let wages stagnate and fall below inflation, I am proud to stand here today as a member of the ACT Labor government and reflect on the work we have done in this area, the reforms we are implementing and the work to be done.

The ACT is among the best performing jurisdictions on housing affordability, with a host of housing support and homelessness services and continued investment in the public and community housing sector helping to achieve these outcomes. Our Labor government is implementing policy to help to support Canberrans entering the property market. The broad goals of our government, which have been endorsed by the independent Affordable Housing Advisory Group, are: (1) increasing affordable home ownership; (2) increasing affordable rental housing; (3) strengthening social housing assistance; and (4) reducing homelessness.

How will this be achieved? Our government will play an active role in making it more affordable for first homebuyers and will provide a wider mix of housing to make it fairer for Canberrans. We know that to fix a demand-side problem we need a supply-side solution. We are committed to ensuring that Canberra remains a livable and affordable city.

First and foremost, our government is leading the nation in progressive taxation policy for first homebuyers. With the phasing out of taxes such as stamp duty, first homebuyers will have better access to the market and will no longer need to borrow thousands of extra dollars in order to afford the tax. In phasing out stamp duty, we are targeting the most affordable homes first to drive change fast. These tax reforms are supported by almost every economist in Australia who understands the effect of speculative investment, and I am proud that our government has responded accordingly. These policy changes have already taken real effect. Over the past 12 months the ACT recorded the highest growth in the number of first homebuyer approved loans, with almost 22 per cent of loans being for first homebuyers.

When it comes to tax reform, it is sometimes too easy to get caught up in the high-level economic analysis rather than reflect on the real impact that it has on people's lives. Our changes to stamp duty are a perfect example of this. Make no mistake; these changes have made a significant impact on the cost of buying a home. To give an example, if we compare stamp duty on a \$300,000 home in 2011-12 and 2017-18, we see that there is a 45 per cent reduction in stamp duty. That is a significant change and it will make it easier for people to enter the housing market, especially at lower price points. Similarly, at higher price points, for someone buying an \$800,000 house the stamp duty in 2017-18 as compared to 2011-12 has been reduced by over a quarter. That has a huge impact, and we are seeing the benefit flow through in home purchasing data.

The economic policies of our government have given the ACT a home loan affordability index reading of nearly 51 per cent. That is far above the national average of just under 32 per cent. Of course, the higher the value of the index reading the more affordable the market, which is good news for people looking to buy their first home. These policies, alongside our strong economic performance, low unemployment rate and comparatively high wages, are helping to keep home ownership within the reach of everyday Canberrans.

Alongside sweeping tax reforms, which help to make houses more affordable, our government is ensuring that the supply of housing keeps up with demand. It is this focus on meeting demand with supply measures that puts Canberra at the forefront of making housing accessible. Given that our territory grows by 7,000 people each year, and there are expected to be half a million Canberrans by 2030, it is imperative that more land be freed up to make way for the building of affordable homes for new Canberrans.

Over the past 10 years our government has released 37,000 dwelling sites to ensure that we continue to match the increased demand for housing. Of these, some 2,000 sites have been dedicated to affordable homes for purchase at pre-determined rates. It is this release of land that has allowed the development of new dwellings in rapidly expanding areas, like in my own electorate of Yerrabi.

The Housing Industry Association report found that, as well as the ACT government's nation-leading tax reform program "having the anticipated positive impact on the economy", it has also encouraged more construction and has seen more homes added

to the Canberra housing supply. I am proud to see, particularly in my electorate of Yerrabi, the construction of myriad differently styled dwellings on the market, such as apartments, townhouses and stand-alone homes. These all suit the different needs of our growing population.

The ACT government's light rail project will also encourage increased density along the light rail corridor, which is essential for Canberra's expansion and growth. By doing so, we will ensure that Canberra does not grow exponentially outward and will ensure that increased public transport options are more viable. The data on multi-unit projects in planning and under construction show quite clearly the impact that light rail has on improving housing supply in the ACT. From 2011 to 2013, the years prior to the approval of light rail, the number of multi-unit dwellings in planning and under construction had remained relatively stable. From 2015, immediately after approval, these numbers grew to more than double what they were prior to light rail being approved. This has directly led to an increase in construction activity from 2016 onwards.

I am sure that my fellow MLAs from Yerrabi—a couple of them are here in the chamber with me—could attest to the fact there are cranes right along the horizon as we head into the Assembly every day. This activity is obviously good for jobs and good for local businesses. It is also putting downward pressure on unit prices.

Increasing the density in the town centres will also mean that services are more streamlined and effective as our population grows. Increased density will also ensure that people do not get priced out of areas close to the CBD. This means more townhouses and apartments and will allow more Canberrans to find affordable living along transport corridors.

To ensure that housing remains affordable and accessible to all Canberrans, we are committed to a mix of housing types. This includes public, affordable, community and privately owned, which will help to promote social inclusion and cohesion in our community.

As the motion highlights, on top of this broader housing policy, our government continues to commit to affordable public and community housing for the most disadvantaged members of our community. Currently, Canberra has the lowest public housing wait list of all jurisdictions as a proportion of total stock. On top of this, the rate of people receiving accommodation support services in the ACT is triple the national average, which means that people are accessing and receiving intensive support to address the issues that cause homelessness.

Our priority is to focus on the 1,700 homeless Canberrans currently living in supported accommodation, couch surfing, living in an overcrowded dwelling or sleeping rough. Alongside this group there are 7,000 Canberra households who currently spend more than 30 per cent of their income on rent and are therefore facing severe housing stress. To help combat this problem, over the current financial year our government will release 530 dwelling sites for public housing, community housing, affordable home purchase and land rent. Of these, 54 dwellings are for additional public housing, 89 dwellings are for public housing renewal, 353 dwellings are for

dedicated affordable home purchase and land rent, and 34 dwellings are for community housing, all important additions to our housing stock.

The land rent scheme is one thing that I think is particularly noteworthy. This scheme allows householders to rent their land from the government rather than buy it outright. In doing so, it removes substantial barriers to entry and reduces the borrowing requirements that Canberrans face. It is just one example of the many schemes and programs that this government has introduced to address housing affordability.

On top of this, the government is currently renewing 1,288 older public housing properties to better meet the needs of the tenants. This includes approximately \$50 million to renew the public housing at Gowrie Court in Narrabundah to be a culturally appropriate centre for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our community. On top of this, our government is developing a new housing strategy, and introducing measures such as the affordable home purchase database and the new innovation fund which will make housing in the ACT more affordable and accessible. This will all be in conjunction with other state governments and the federal government through the national housing and homelessness agreement. This includes the almost \$20 million that our government is investing in homelessness support services in our community.

Finally, I call on the government to continue to evaluate and build on our current housing affordability measures. In new developments across our city we must ensure that there remain affordable options for low income Canberrans and first homebuyers. We must respond to community feedback and reflect the needs of Canberrans. In particular, we need to hear the concerns of marginalised Canberrans who are in housing stress. We must adequately address their needs to ensure that no Canberran is without the security that a home provides.

Tackling housing affordability is a huge issue in our country and in our city. I call on this government, our ACT Labor government, to continue to work with other states, territories and the federal government to come up with a comprehensive housing affordability scheme.

**MR COE** (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (5.47): Mr Pettersson's motion is a bit curious, when you have a government member coming in here to talk about the success of their government with regard to housing affordability. There is perhaps a more sinister motive than not being aware of the real struggles that so many households are facing. It could be that he does not actually believe that the government is going to release a new housing strategy this year. Surely, if the housing minister announces that there will be a housing strategy released by the end of the year, she does not need another motion to say that there should be a housing strategy released this year.

If Mr Pettersson wants to contemplate some things with regard to housing in Canberra, he might like to consider this government's management of public housing, in particular, managing the leaseholders. Mr Pettersson might also like to consider the debilitating taxes and rates imposed by this government on Canberrans who choose to buy a unit as their first home. Let us not forget the huge embedded lease variation

charge which is on so many units that are purchased these days, except, of course, if you are the Canberra Labor Club and you are doing a development in Braddon, in which case you do not need to pay lease variation charge or change of use charge for those 36 apartments. There is no change of use charge there; no lease variation charge. It is a pretty good deal if you can get it. Of course, with the Labor Club, “It’s all about you!”—can make it happen.

Mr Pettersson could also put together a motion to try to get the government to at least remove some of the pressure that they are putting on land release by not strangling the market as much as they are, because they really are strangling the land release in Canberra, and that is why we are seeing the cost of land go up at such a huge rate. That is why you get land at \$1,000 a square metre in Throsby. That is why the land to construction ratio is at times 60-40, as opposed to times gone by, when it was more like 20-80.

Another piece of advice that Mr Pettersson would do well to take on board would be to spend some time with the dear leader himself, Mr Stanhope—to sit down and have a chat about housing affordability. Rather than patting yourselves on the back and saying, “We’re all doing a great job,” you might like to go to confession with Mr Stanhope—go into that booth and admit exactly what this government has created. Admit the housing stress. Admit the cost of land. Admit the rates increases. Admit the land tax increases. Admit the record stamp duty. Mr Stanhope might be able to pass on some of the advice that he has given so many other Canberrans through his various articles.

The Labor-Greens government have failed on housing affordability. There are no two ways about it: they have failed. In addition to that, in addition to the words of Mr Stanhope, there are academics such as Professor Peter Phibbs from the University of Sydney. He has more than 20 years of experience in housing research. Earlier this year he said in the *Canberra Times* that the ACT government’s affordable housing targets were so small that they are almost insignificant.

This is a progressive government; this is a government that is supposedly about people who are struggling. Of course, Professor Phibbs, Mr Stanhope, Dr Ahmed and just about every other academic or expert in this space are all criticising the government with regard to how they have managed housing in this city.

Professor Phibbs pointed out that the government’s high land sales profit margins far exceeded the industry standard. I interpret that as gouging. When you have the government owning the land, controlling how much is released and also controlling the planning system, that is one big gouge. That is exactly how you would describe this government’s housing policy. If there is one word to describe this housing policy, it is “gouging”. That is how they operate: they squeeze at the land; they squeeze at stamp duty; they squeeze in construction; they squeeze in rates; and they squeeze in land tax. On every single step this government has put massive burdens, and that is why we have a massive housing affordability issue.

You can have all of these schemes and strategies to try to treat the symptoms but, rather than treat the symptoms, how about going to the cause? And the cause is this government’s management of every aspect of housing policy.

It is a shame that there is not too much reality in the motion today or in the speech presented by Mr Pettersson. We certainly hope that he will be able to sit down with Mr Stanhope soon and get some home truths about the Labor government.

**MS LE COUTEUR** (Murrumbidgee) (5.54): The Greens will be supporting Mr Pettersson's motion today. But in addition to Mr Pettersson's motion, we would also like to note the work of the public housing renewal task force in rehousing existing public housing tenants. I draw the Assembly's attention to the accessibility of these new dwellings. Almost all of the new dwellings meet the gold standard for livable housing design guidelines for the new public housing stock to better meet the housing needs of a wide variety of tenants, including, importantly, people with disabilities and older people.

I understand the Justice and Community Services Directorate is currently undertaking work on more reformation of the Residential Tenancies Act 1997. I am not really in a position to say much more about that except that I hope that some of the reformation of this will benefit tenants in the private rental market, especially those on low incomes who have a very limited choice in their housing.

As has been pointed out by other speakers, housing affordability is an issue that affects a wide range of other social and economic circumstances. Rough sleepers, for example, have more engagement with health services and the justice system. Conversely, the positive, non-shelter outcomes of housing assistance programs are well documented and include wellbeing outcomes in poverty reduction, health, education and social cohesion.

But this is not an issue that affects just people living in housing stress or experiencing homelessness. One of the worst and, indeed, one of the most long-lasting outcomes of our high housing costs is the increase in inherited inequality. Speaking yesterday at the National Press Club at the launch of the everybody's home campaign, Professor Julian Disney noted that wealth inequality in Australia is 10 times greater than income quality. People's housing options and careers are being increasingly defined by their parents' wealth as more and more young adults receive help from their parents to become home owners: the bank of mum and dad.

Housing stress is experienced most deeply in the rental market. In the ACT we have the highest proportion of people—48 per cent—in any state or territory who are paying more than 30 per cent of their income in rent after receiving commonwealth rent assistance. The housing affordability crisis is a text book example of market failure. Where markets fail in essential goods and services, like having a safe and secure home, people quite reasonably expect governments to step in and protect them from market failure.

In that spirit, I welcome the focus of Mr Pettersson's motion. Housing affordability in the ACT is affected by a range of factors, including many that are, of course, outside the ACT's government control, such as the federal tax system and our monetary policy. However, there is still a significant role for the ACT government in alleviating pressure on people experiencing homelessness or housing stress. Despite the

challenges for governments in this space, including the significant capital cost of constructing new public housing, we have at our disposal a range of resources, including, as was mentioned, control over land release in the ACT and, importantly, our planning system.

In that vein I note the recent work being done by ACTPLA on housing choices. Potentially this could be some of the most important work as far as housing affordability and housing provision is concerned. I am hopeful that housing choices will look seriously at housing affordability as part of the solution and make positive changes in this regard. I hope it will not be restricted just to the missing middle; there is a missing bottom as well. I think we need to look at all of this, and the Greens' submission to housing choices attempts to do a better balance of environmental outcomes as well as improve social outcomes such as better housing affordability.

Governments also control the public housing system. Sadly, in the ACT public housing has fallen relative to our population. Public housing currently makes up 7.1 per cent of ACT's housing stock. In 2001 this figure was 10.2 per cent. The Suburban Land Agency has identified a huge 143 dwelling sites for public housing in 2017-18. During this period 4,120 dwelling sites have been scheduled for release by the ACT government. This means that only 3.5 per cent of this new housing will be public housing.

*At 6 pm, in accordance with standing order 34, the debate was interrupted. The motion for the adjournment of the Assembly having been put and negatived, the debate was resumed.*

**MS LE COUTEUR:** If the proportion of public housing in areas under the jurisdiction of the City Renewal Authority and the Suburban Land Agency remains at 3.5 per cent and the public housing capital delivery program continues to barely replace or not replace the existing stock, then the proportion of public housing in Canberra will continue to fall. This is why the Greens have repeatedly called and will continue to call for at least maintaining the current level of social housing in Canberra.

The national housing and homelessness agreement, which is due to come into effect on 1 July this year, will include a supplementary bilateral agreement between the commonwealth and the territory. The legislation is still before the Senate, but I note that the third reading of the bill notes that:

Financial assistance is payable to the State under this section for the financial year on condition that, at all times during the period ascertained in accordance with the primary housing agreement or the supplementary housing agreement, the State will:

- (a) have a housing strategy for the State that:
  - (i) indicates the level of housing supply needed to respond to projected housing demand, and outlines the reforms and initiatives that contribute to meeting this need; and
  - (ii) includes such other matters (if any) as are specified in the primary housing agreement or the supplementary housing agreement; and

- (b) so far as is reasonably practicable to do so—make the housing strategy available on a publicly accessible website.

I will be really interested to learn about the methodology the ACT government proposes to use to determine the housing supply. The sadly disbanded National Housing Supply Council produced data which detailed the amount of housing that was affordable and available to households in different income deciles. It did this by calculating the number of dwellings that would be affordable to people on low incomes but which were being rented by people on higher incomes. It would be really useful to know the demand for and availability of particular types of housing in the ACT.

It is worth noting that payments from the commonwealth as part of the national housing and homelessness agreement are based on a jurisdiction's population. This funding formula means that states and territories that have a relatively high proportion of public housing, such as, fortunately, the ACT, are at a relative disadvantage to those with a low proportion of public housing.

At yesterday's press club event, Professor Julian Disney noted that the most pressing and the single most helpful measure in responding to our housing affordability crisis is to increase the supply of affordable rental properties targeted to people on low and moderate incomes. This must include social housing targeted at households on very low incomes and affordable rental housing targeted at households on low and moderate incomes.

In conclusion, there are major benefits of having a more functional housing system where low and moderate income earners are able to access housing that meets their needs and which goes beyond the question of bricks and mortar. Of course the Greens support the overall intention of Mr Pettersson's motion. We do, nevertheless, have concerns about the unacceptably low targets for affordable, public and community housing that have been published by the Suburban Land Agency. I sincerely hope that, as a result of Mr Pettersson's motion and the new housing strategy, that will be released later this year that there will be a dramatic increase in the dwelling targets for affordable, community and public housing in 2018-19 and, even more importantly, an increase in actual affordable, community and public housing and an accompanying mechanism to better understand and respond to housing demand.

**MS ORR** (Yerrabi) (6.04): In the debate over housing affordability we often lose focus on the fact that more than one or two approaches are available to us. Our focus often overlooks one of the most fundamental and sustainable approaches to housing affordability available: to increase the supply of the existing housing stock coming on the market. Often when we have this debate, we tend to talk almost exclusively in terms of increasing the housing supply by building more homes or by managing demand through subsidies or tax settings. The recent Grattan Institute report on housing affordability made recommendations on each of these measures, and it is certainly the case that governments at every level must continue to pursue reforms targeting these outcomes.

Our population continues to grow and therefore we must ensure that we are building an adequate supply of housing to accommodate this. While our population grows, we must also acknowledge that a house, neighbourhood or suburb does not just materialise out of thin air and that it takes time to build a dwelling. Taxes and subsidies can be used in the short term to manage demand. However, these are only two parts to the toolkit available to policymakers, and both of these approaches must be viewed in light of the fact that, in Australia, 32 per cent of those living in separate houses and 29 per cent of people living in apartments are in a dwelling with one spare bedroom. In all, 48 per cent of people living in an apartment and some 79 per cent of those living in separate houses have one or more spare rooms. The 2016 census estimates that the ACT has an average of 0.8 persons per bedroom. The Winton Sustainable Research Strategies report on the 2014 housing choices community survey found that 16.3 per cent of residents would like to move to a more suitable dwelling.

There are clearly a number of Canberrans who are living in dwellings that may not be well suited to their immediate needs. In many circumstances, this does not present a problem. For a young family expecting to have a child in the coming year it would be practical to have a spare bedroom available. So too for empty-nesters with children living away from home who visit regularly. However, when families feel obstructed from living in properties that better suit their needs, this indicates that there are systemic issues that prevent the efficient allocation of property. This inefficiency impacts on housing affordability and can create dead weight losses if it is the result of an obstacle. That obstacle is usually taxes like stamp duty. This is in no small part why the ACT government is undertaking the tax reform every economist is telling us we need to take.

What is interesting too is that despite the Canberra Liberals' opposition to this policy, the opposition spokesperson for planning and for housing, Mr Parton, has seemingly been speaking in support of this policy since taking on his new role. Across the media, Mr Parton has been quite vocal on the need to make more single dwellings available. How do we make more single dwellings available? The most immediate way is to increase the supply of the existing stock of single dwellings in the ACT. And how do we do that? By removing the handbrake on that stock coming to market, namely, stamp duty. I thank Mr Parton for agreeing with me, I guess, and I too agree that the ACT government needs to continue to pursue this tax reform.

I also agree with the need to consider how we can better diversify the housing stock in the ACT to allow people to remain in the communities they live in. I look forward to making a worthwhile contribution to the how rather than the what through the ACT government's housing choices consultation currently underway.

With Canberra and its population undergoing significant transformation, there is a real need to answer how we offer a diverse range of housing options to an increasingly diverse Canberra community. For example, the Winton report found that while more than half of those aged over 60 surveyed would consider moving to a higher density development in the future, half also said they would not as there were none available where they wanted to live. Single dwelling properties are of course part of the strategy,

but they do not address the needs of everyone, all of the time. I thank my colleague Mr Pettersson for moving this motion today, and I am happy to support it.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Community Services and Social Inclusion, Minister for Disability, Children and Youth, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations) (6.08): I thank Mr Pettersson for bringing forward the motion before us today. As each of us in this place is undoubtedly aware, housing is one of the most significant issues of concern for many people in Canberra. In fact, housing affordability remains a significant issue faced by people across Australia. I am proud to be part of a government that understands this and also understands the critical role that safe, secure and affordable housing plays in enabling people to participate in their communities.

On many measures the ACT is doing well in responding to the housing needs of Canberrans, including our most disadvantaged households. However, we can always do more. The ACT government has been both proactive and responsive in seeking to address housing affordability in the ACT. This work is a credit to the efforts of the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, the Deputy Chief Minister, Ms Berry.

As Mr Pettersson's motion notes, in addition to developing a new housing strategy, Minister Berry has already announced a number of measures aimed at making housing in the ACT more affordable, accessible and fair. The initiatives—a housing innovation fund to seed new affordable housing initiatives, community housing targets, and a new affordable home purchase database—were the direct result of community engagement. These initiatives are in addition to the significant public housing renewal project which is currently underway. Renewing our public housing will ensure that our housing stock better meets tenants' needs now and into the future, creating a more sustainable public housing system.

Appropriate and affordable housing, including public housing, is an integral part of any social inclusion agenda. When it comes to building a more inclusive Canberra, a high priority for me is developing accessible, affordable and safe housing options for people with disability. Housing affordability and accessibility are an acute issue for many people with a disability. There is significant research indicating a strong correlation between disability and poor housing outcomes. Improving housing outcomes means ensuring that affordable housing options that empower people with disability to choose how they live and where they call home are available.

I am therefore pleased to report to the Assembly that the Office for Disability is currently working with Havelock Housing on the development of a website that assists people with disability in the ACT to be informed about models of housing and accommodation and how they can make a decision about what model and support arrangement are right for them. The website will include information on housing and accommodation models operating in Canberra and the services supporting people to live in different ways in the community, as well as information on models that are being developed and implemented nationally and internationally. This work is targeted at the whole of the community and will benefit anybody who has an interest

in different models of accommodation. The website will be launched in 2018 and will be responsive to new information and a changing environment. Promotion of these models is critical to developing a supply of affordable and appropriate housing for people with disability.

One significant and ongoing reform in this space is the national disability insurance scheme's specialist disability accommodation stream. The SDA, as it is called, is the funding mechanism to increase housing supply and develop better and more suitable housing for NDIS participants whose complex disability and support needs require a specialist accommodation response. In the ACT we expect that between 350 and 700 participants may be eligible to receive SDA funding in their plans. The National Disability Insurance Agency has opened conversations on this front, and the ACT Office for Disability will support and engage with the community and business to achieve good outcomes in housing and accommodation for Canberrans with a disability.

While the NDIS is a fantastic Labor initiative that will transform lives, it is just one piece of the puzzle when it comes to improving affordable, appropriate and accessible housing availability for people with disabilities. States and territories need to keep working with people with disabilities, not-for-profit organisations, innovative developers and the community housing sector. In the ACT and across Australia there is a need to increase the supply of affordable and accessible housing for people with disability.

As I outlined in *Parity* magazine last year, this must include diversifying housing types so that there are more mainstream properties suitable for people with disability, rather than just an increased supply of disability-specific properties. I firmly believe that working with property developers and the housing industry is critical to ensuring they understand the need and the demand for universal and livable design properties.

In respect of the ACT government's housing stock, Housing ACT continues to redevelop ageing and inefficient public housing stock with modern, more contemporary designs which are built to either class C adaptable standard or livable guidelines gold level. This provides more affordable properties that are better able to respond to the needs of tenants such as those with a disability, allowing people to stay in dwellings as they grow older whilst maintaining the community links they have established.

Beyond the social and public housing sectors, work across tenure type will also provide increased affordable rental options for people with disability. This means working with the private sector and within the private rental market to develop longer term tenure types so that people with disability are afforded greater stability and security in rental accommodation.

Alongside this, work is required to develop and test innovative new financial products, such as shared equity, which facilitate home ownership for people with disability along with others who are currently disadvantaged in the housing market so that they are no longer locked out of the housing market and the wealth creation that comes from home ownership.

The work required to facilitate appropriate housing choices and pathways for people with disability remains critical and will require sustained effort from the NDIS and state and territory governments, in partnership with the private and not-for-profit sectors. Accessible, affordable, safe and secure housing is not just an issue for people with disability. However, it is an acute issue for people with disability, one which highlights the importance of affordable housing initiatives in cohesive and inclusive communities.

I thank Mr Pettersson for bringing this motion before us and commend Minister Berry for all that has been achieved to date and for the ongoing commitment to addressing housing affordability concerns in Canberra.

**MR STEEL** (Murrumbidgee) (6.15): I thank Mr Pettersson for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. This motion is concerned with one of the most fundamental needs on Maslow's hierarchy, the need for shelter. Whether you are stuck in an insecure rental paying off someone else's mortgage, need help purchasing your own house or you do not even have a roof over your head, our government and Labor will always work to ensure that people in our society have a safe and secure place to call home.

This is not an easy thing to do. Canberra is growing. We are growing by 7,000 people a year now. By 2030 we will need to house half a million people, so we must continue our efforts to develop housing policy to meet the needs of Canberrans and where they will live in the future.

This is challenging. Australia is facing an unprecedented housing affordability crisis, with a significant undersupply of new housing causing ballooning prices. Across Australia we are seeing an increase in the number of people without a permanent roof over their head. We see the various real estate pages praise every price increase. We see articles about the latest \$1 million homes in your suburb and how you can cash in. But the jubilation these papers have for price increases ignores the real societal costs of restricting secure housing to only the richest in our society.

But there are things governments can do to make things easier for those who are struggling. Federal Labor has made a commitment to abolish the regressive forms of upper class welfare like negative gearing. ACT Labor is also working to make housing more affordable for those who need it. Those who need it include younger Canberrans. They are generally lower income Canberrans. They are Canberrans who are attempting to purchase their first property so that they can have a roof over their head.

Those who do not need the help are investors tossing up which suburb they are going to buy their 13th negatively geared property in. ACT Labor has a comprehensive plan to reduce barriers to entry for first homebuyers, such as abolishing stamp duty, a regressive tax that serves as a massive impediment to purchasing your home, particularly for younger and lower income people. It was ridiculous to see the comments made by the Leader of the Opposition in question time today on that point. He leads a party that has been totally opposed to our reforms to abolish stamp duty over the last few elections.

As a government, we are also increasing the amount of land available to people. Regions like the Molonglo Valley in my electorate, which did not really exist five years ago, currently house almost 6,000 people and will be home to over 20,000 people by 2021. This will mean that approximately 10,000 houses that did not exist will be available for our rapidly growing population.

Of course, not everyone wants to live in new suburbs or, indeed, in houses. Many people still do, but not everyone. This is why it is also excellent to see new and innovative housing types across the spectrum. We are seeing regeneration in our town centres, with more people living in the town centre cores. We are seeing densification take place in those town centres.

This is not just about removing barriers to purchase a house. We also need to ensure that there are enough houses to purchase and that they are in locations with services that people want to be close to. In 2006, flats and apartments made up 11.3 per cent of Canberra's dwellings, below the national average of 14.2 per cent. In 2011, 12.4 per cent of Canberra dwellings were flats or apartments compared to the national rate of 13.6 per cent.

Most recently, in 2016 Canberra has overtaken the national rate of 13.1 per cent for flats and apartments, with those dwellings now making up 15 per cent of Canberra's dwellings. This not only demonstrates the changing demand among young Canberrans for that type of housing, as more people want to live within walking distance of transport corridors and connections, employment hubs and recreational activities, rather than driving everywhere. It also shows the transformative nature of how we view ourselves as a city. Spurred on by transformational investments like light rail and an integrated transport network, we are starting to see our city's built form change.

I certainly welcome the work that Minister Gentleman has done through the housing choices paper in this regard to start a discussion about the range and continuum of housing—from standalone dwellings right through to apartments and the discussion around the missing middle. As we build different types of housing, this does provide an entry point for people into the housing market.

According to the Domain report in 2017, median house prices in Canberra were \$723,000, whereas the average price of a unit was \$403,000, which is more affordable for people looking to get into the housing market. It is also positive that while house prices continue to rise around nine per cent a year, unit prices did actually slightly fall to four per cent, which is welcome news for housing affordability.

These reforms are important to make our housing system more equitable and affordable. But, of course, these reforms do not mean anything to those in our society who do not even have a roof over their head and those who are the most disadvantaged in our society. According to the 2016 census, there were 1,596 people without permanent homes across the ACT. This means that 0.4 per cent of Canberrans are in that category. In my electorate of Murrumbidgee there are 211 people without homes, 0.27 per cent of the whole electorate. While there are proportionately fewer people without homes in the ACT, the national average is currently 0.49 per cent.

However, things are moving in the right direction for Canberra. While there was a nationwide increase in homelessness, homelessness did fall in Canberra by approximately eight per cent. Even with an 11 per cent increase in the number of people living in Canberra between 2011 and 2016, homelessness fell by 8.1 per cent.

This decrease is occurring through a combination of factors. I realise that there are some issues around the reliability of that data as well. However, the ACT government is undertaking a massive project to renew our public housing stock—1,288 new dwellings in Canberra, which will help those in our society who are in need of shelter. We are now at the halfway point, with 662 dwellings becoming available. I think that is a fantastic milestone.

Many of those renewal properties are being built in my electorate of Murrumbidgee. There are approximately 70 in Chapman, Holder, Mawson and Wright. The government has been working with the communities on these projects, despite some opposition from the Liberal Party. When completed they will complement the existing range of public housing that is already in my community in places like Coombs and in my own home suburb of Kambah.

I understand that sometimes there is opposition to those developments, but we are living in an egalitarian city. That means making sure that our most vulnerable people are supported. It is what makes Canberra a great place to live. I fully support the government's public housing renewal and its push to locate public housing across all suburbs in Canberra. Significant concentrations of high density disadvantage along Northbourne Avenue in particular and in other areas like Red Hill were not an ideal situation. We have been addressing that in a systemic way.

Our government is working and consulting on a new housing strategy. Last year Minister Berry held the housing homelessness summit. It had some important outcomes, including the \$1 million housing innovation fund, which will look at affordable rentals, new affordable housing targets and home sharing, including intergenerational home sharing. The outcome of the summit also demonstrated what people want the ACT government to prioritise with housing. People want to see a stronger homelessness sector to address gaps in services, including more crisis accommodation and coordination in the sector. They want to see more social housing stock and, indeed, a more diverse stock so that people have better access to the homes that suit them.

People want to see rentals become more affordable but also they want to see more affordable homes become available to purchase, and there is a need to build more affordable housing properties. So this process is ongoing. By the end of 2018 we will have a housing strategy that looks at the challenges facing the ACT in relation to housing affordability and homelessness. It is important to note that the ACT is one of the top jurisdictions when it comes to improving housing affordability and providing public housing.

We are doing a lot of things right. As we grow in population we must continue to work hard to ensure that we outperform other jurisdictions to minimise the number of

people in our community who are struggling due to unaffordable housing and housing stress. This is what our new housing strategy will tackle. I thank Mr Pettersson again for bringing forward this motion on such an important issue in our community.

**MR PETTERSSON** (Yerrabi) (6.25), in reply: I thank all the members who contributed to this debate. Amongst the back and forth there is an underlying desire from all members in this place to make sure that every Canberran has a place to call home. Importantly, this government has done a lot, but there is still more to do. We are up for the job and we will not rest on our laurels. This government will continue to reform our tax system.

We will do this because it is the right thing to do and because it will make our housing more affordable. The removal of stamp duty and a broad transition to land tax will reduce speculative investment in our housing stock. Speculative investment in our housing stock does not make more jobs, does not make our community more productive; it simply inflates prices and allows for the transfer of wealth from one generation to the next.

I am still waiting with my fingers crossed that the federal government will take action on negative gearing. This blight on our tax system quite simply drives up the price of housing in Canberra. I mentioned some numbers before and I will mention them again. They are important numbers. If we compare the stamp duty paid on a \$300,000 house in 2011 to 2017, a homebuyer will pay 45 per cent less stamp duty. That is less money being borrowed from the bank, and that is a good thing.

One of the things I find puzzling about this place and ACT politics on the whole is that the Canberra Liberals always undermine this tax reform process. They are happy to run a scare campaign, but it seems they are just not serious enough to actually read an economic textbook. When all of their interstate Liberal mates endorse what this government is doing, they refuse to do so.

Madam Speaker, this government will continue to release land for new homes in our city and we will continue to release land for affordable homes. In the past 10 years we have released 37,000 dwelling sites. Of these, 2,000 sites have been dedicated to affordable homes for purchase at predetermined rates. We have seen incredible growth in our city in recent times. Just last year we welcomed a further 7,000 people into our city. It is expected that our population will hit half a million by 2030.

This is exciting for our city, but not all of these Canberrans will want to make the same housing choices as previous generations. As we build our suburbs, as we increase the density of our town centre, our city will change, and it will change for the better. We will continue to pursue affordable and diverse housing choices for the Canberrans of today and the Canberrans of the future.

The other thing I found particularly strange about Mr Coe's contribution to the debate was his insistence that greenfield development is the solution to housing affordability. I wonder what the Canberra Liberals will have to say about housing affordability if we ever reach a place where there is no greenfield development available.

Madam Speaker, this motion is not just about buying a house. This motion is about housing affordability, about reducing homelessness and housing stress. Canberra has the lowest public waitlist of all jurisdictions as a proportion of total stock. We are triple the national rate of residents receiving accommodation support services. This is worth noting but, of course, there is work to be done. We will continue to prioritise the 1,700 Canberrans sleeping rough, couch surfing or staying in supported accommodation. That is why this year the ACT government will release 530 sites for public housing, community housing, affordable home purchase and land rent.

The supply of housing and the market that surrounds it is incredible complex. The countless government initiatives, tax settings, land release time lines and population projections make for a variable market. We in this government, with our core values, are determined to make sure that all Canberrans have somewhere to call home.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

## Adjournment

Motion (by **Mr Gentleman**) proposed:

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

## Harmony Day

**MRS KIKKERT** (Ginninderra) (6.29): I wish to take the opportunity this Harmony Day to acknowledge a special group of people who work tirelessly to help establish harmony in our Canberra community. These are the leaders and others who donate thousands of hours to the more than 70 multicultural community organisations that operate here in Canberra.

Last week I had the opportunity to host 50 of these multicultural community leaders at a reception held here at the Assembly, in the lead-up to Harmony Day. I took the opportunity to thank those who could attend for all that they do, but this afternoon I wish to repeat some of my expressions of gratitude.

I have some sense of the hundreds of meetings that these community leaders and other volunteers attend in order to plan, prepare for and organise events for their communities and often for the wider community. All of this work, of course, is followed by the events themselves. And this does not even touch on the many hours these multicultural leaders spend providing support to individual members and families in their communities.

Harmony Day is a day to celebrate Australian multiculturalism, based on the successful integration of migrants into our community. Our cultural diversity is one of our greatest strengths and is at the heart of who we are. I know from personal experience that much of the success and vibrancy of our multicultural society is a consequence of the hard work and dedication of the community leaders and other volunteers who carry our active multicultural organisations upon their shoulders.

I worry that sometimes these roles can feel thankless, so today I want to say thanks once again for all that these good women and men do. Thank you for caring. Thank you for putting the needs of others above your own comfort, often spending hours away from your families in order to serve and strengthen your communities. Thank you for helping new migrants and refugees find solid footing here in our territory. Thank you for the mentoring, for the shepherding and for the many kindnesses that you share.

It is one of my privileges, Madam Speaker, and has been for a number of years, to work alongside these inspiring Canberrans. Today I am grateful for all that they do to establish genuine harmony in our society. I hope they will feel the comfort, the support they need to keep going. I am proud to have them as my colleagues and as my friends.

### **Harmony Day**

**MS ORR** (Yerrabi) (6.32): Each year Harmony Day provides us with the chance to recognise how lucky we are to live in such a diverse multicultural city. In recognising the diverse range of cultures in our community, we also recognise the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we live, work and play, the Ngunnawal people. I acknowledge the everlasting contribution they make to the territory and acknowledge their elders, past, present and emerging.

Canberrans value the contribution multicultural communities make to the life of our city. As the local member for Yerrabi, I often have the opportunity to attend a variety of cultural and religious celebrations within my own electorate as well as across Canberra. The National Multicultural Festival is an outstanding showcase of the diversity of culture within our city, but there are plenty of other celebrations throughout the year that highlight the significance of Canberra's multicultural community groups.

I would like to take the time this evening to acknowledge and thank the people I have had the pleasure of meeting with over the last month. Earlier this month I attended the Federation of Indian Associations of ACT Community Harmony Day and joined the Canberran Indian community in promoting inclusiveness and networking for community leaders.

I celebrated this year's International Women's Day with the team at Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services, with a focus on recognising the incredible contribution women from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds make to Canberra and the surrounding regions. Each year, International Women's Day shines a light on the success of women in our community and the work that still needs to be done to achieve gender equity and equality. I would like to thank MARSS for the work they are doing in empowering women in cultural communities, and I congratulate the women I spoke to who are paving the way and supporting young women from across Australia. This coming Friday, MARSS will be holding a Harmony Day sports carnival. I look forward to joining them further for the work they do.

Over the weekend I visited the recently established mosque in Gungahlin. This was the second time I have visited the mosque. It was fantastic to see and speak with the growing Islamic community who worship there and call the Gungahlin community home. On Saturday I celebrated Holi, commonly known as the festival of colours, with hundreds of Canberrans, including the Chief Minister; Minister Rachel Stephen-Smith, the Minister for Multicultural Affairs; and Mr Steel. Holi is the celebration which traditionally marks the arrival of spring in the Northern Hemisphere, but it is also a chance to celebrate traditional cultural practices from the Indian subcontinent. I joined with the Canberra Hindu and Indian communities on what was a sunny day full of love and acceptance, highlighting the fantastic sense of community within these cultural groups in Canberra.

On Sunday just past, I joined with the Canberra Multicultural Community Forum for their world peace bell Harmony Day event. The event brought together members of the multicultural community at Lennox Gardens, where the world peace bell is located, to reflect on the meaning of Harmony Day and to ring the bell as a symbol of our commitment to acceptance and diversity.

Our community is enriched by the variety of cultures and religions that are observed and celebrated each and every day. On this Harmony Day, I hope all Canberrans were able to come together with friends, family and colleagues to encourage love, respect and acceptance. I thank each and every Canberran who contributes to the multicultural success of our city and wish them a happy Harmony Day.

## **Neighbour Day NeuroMoves**

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH** (Kurrajong—Minister for Community Services and Social Inclusion, Minister for Disability, Children and Youth, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Multicultural Affairs and Minister for Workplace Safety and Industrial Relations) (6.36): My campaign slogan, for want of a better term, was that vibrant, sustainable, inclusive cities do not just happen; they are built by governments with a vision for a better future. While I stand by this, it is also true that no government can do this alone. Building inclusive communities takes individuals and groups committed to creating, building and strengthening community spirit in their own spheres of influence, whether these are interest groups or local neighbourhoods.

Seeing this commitment in action is one of the great privileges of living and working in Canberra, especially being a candidate for or a member of the Legislative Assembly. To see people committed to supporting each other, connecting with each other and advocating for better outcomes is something I am sure we all appreciate. Earlier this month I was pleased to be able to hear examples of people working within our community to build and strengthen the vibrant, inclusive city we live in. On 1 March, I had the honour of launching Neighbour Day in the ACT, alongside Constable Kenny Koala at the Gungahlin Library.

Held this year on 25 March, Neighbour Day is Australia's annual celebration of community, when people are encouraged to connect with those living nearby. Neighbour Day has been a celebration of strong communities and friendly streets since 2003, supported by Relationships Australia. This year's theme is the importance of a supportive neighbourhood for children and young people. Children and young people thrive in an environment of supportive and caring relationships, so it is important for young Canberrans to feel safe, supported and valued in our neighbourhoods and suburbs.

As Canberra continues to grow, Neighbour Day is a great reminder that we all need to take time to reconnect with our neighbours and welcome new people into our community. I encourage everyone to get involved in any events held around Canberra in the lead-up to and on Neighbour Day.

At the ACT launch, ACT Neighbourhood Watch announced its good neighbour award winners, Amy and Prescott Pym from Forde. Amy and Prescott actively promote community spirit, inclusiveness and engagement through the work they do with the Forde Community Association. They were part of the original team to establish the group and work tirelessly to engage with the residents of their suburb through social media and annual family events held throughout the year. I congratulate Amy and Prescott on their work in the Forde community and the recognition they have received.

The strength of our community was also on show last month at the launch of the NeuroMoves program in Canberra. Provided by Spinal Cord Injuries Australia, NeuroMoves assists Canberrans and people from the wider region with conditions such as spinal cord injury, acquired brain injury, stroke, multiple sclerosis, motor neuron disease and cerebral palsy.

The program uses specialist equipment and a range of therapeutic exercises to help people achieve their individual goals for mobility, strength and fitness. In turn, this helps people become more independent, boosting their self-esteem and their mental health. Most importantly, this means that Canberrans with spinal cord injuries and other neurological disabilities no longer need to travel to Sydney to access the innovative rehabilitation and exercise program.

ACT Labor—and, I note, the Canberra Liberals—committed to establishing NeuroMoves at the last election, following a grassroots campaign seeking a \$300,000 investment in a specialist facility. I acknowledge the passionate advocates who drew our attention to this opportunity. I first heard about it when I was doorknocking in Campbell. Then I heard about it again when we were phone banking into Campbell. Then I heard about it again, from a different set of people, when we were, again, doorknocking in Campbell. It was truly a grassroots effort from a few very dedicated people who hammered this message home to candidates in their community.

NeuroMoves has now been up and running in Canberra since November. It was wonderful to hear from participants and learn how the program has already improved their quality of life in just a few short months. The specialist gym is established at the

Flynn community hub. I could not agree more with the comments shared at the launch. The gym has breathed new life into the community hub. The space is full of life and is warm and welcoming to participants. There is no doubt that this special place will encourage participants to give their rehabilitation their best efforts. I look forward to visiting the gym again in the future and hearing more from participants and their loved ones about its success.

### **St Bede's Primary School**

**MS LEE** (Kurrajong) (6.40): Earlier this week, my staff and I had the pleasure of attending St Bede's Primary School at Red Hill. It was St Bede's open week, and I took up the invitation to tour the school and see firsthand the inspiring learning that is happening there.

St Bede's is a Catholic systemic school in the Canberra and Goulburn diocese. I met with the principal, Mrs Julie Douglas, who introduced us to two senior girls, Amelia, a house captain, and Georgia, leader of the school's media group, who had been tasked with escorting us around the school. They were excellent guides, well prepared and very knowledgeable about and proud of their school. We were taken to every classroom; the music room; the library, including the quiet area; the languages room—they teach French at that school—the star room, where students who require it receive one-on-one help; the playgrounds; the climbing and sporting equipment area; the hall; the canteen; a boutique where you can buy second-hand school uniforms; and the buddy bench. In fact, I am pretty sure we visited every room, met with almost every teacher and smiled at every student.

The community within the school is further enriched by the plethora of groups and societies they have established, including media, social justice and environment groups, which allow students to turn their skills and attention to causes and activities they are passionate about.

For those of you who are not familiar with St Bede's, it is a small school in my electorate of Kurrajong, tucked away near the shops at Red Hill, on a back street, set in lovely grounds with lots of shade trees and space. It was established in 1963 by the Sisters of the Good Samaritan and run by them until 1985. It was named after St Bede, a Benedictine monk born in England in the year 673, who devoted his whole life to learning, teaching and writing about his faith. St Bede's school currently has an enrolment of 130 students from K to 6, with a small but passionate and very committed staff.

The walls of every hall and classroom are covered with projects, themes and craft work from the very proud students. Unfailingly, every pupil that I met was beautifully mannered with a big smiling face. But I must say that my absolute favourite moment had to be being greeted by the year 3 class with a "Good afternoon, Ms Lee, and peace be with you." It brought back some memories of my own Catholic school education. It was a very happy place, and I can well understand why parents would want their children to go there.

Mrs Douglas and her team should be congratulated on creating a beautiful environment for learning. I thank them for the opportunity to see firsthand the inspiring work they do. Indeed, to all the students and teachers and the entire St Bede's school community, I say today, on this Harmony Day, as we celebrate our great diversity and peace: peace be with you.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

**The Assembly adjourned at 6.43 pm.**