



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH  
AND COMMUNITY WELLBEING**

(Reference: [Inquiry into annual and financial reports 2019-2020  
and ACT budget 2020-2021](#))

**Members:**

**MR J DAVIS (Chair)  
MRS E KIKKERT (Deputy Chair)  
MR M PETERSSON**

**TRANSCRIPT OF EVIDENCE**

**CANBERRA**

**WEDNESDAY, 3 MARCH 2021**

**Secretary to the committee:  
Mr A Snedden (Ph: 620 50199)**

**By authority of the Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory**

Submissions, answers to questions on notice and other documents, including requests for clarification of the transcript of evidence, relevant to this inquiry that have been authorised for publication by the committee may be obtained from the Legislative Assembly website.

**APPEARANCES**

**Community Services Directorate.....115, 136, 152**

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*Amended 20 May 2013*

## **The committee met at 9.00 am.**

### Appearances:

Berry, Ms Yvette, Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Early Childhood Development, Minister for Education and Youth Affairs, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women

### Community Services Directorate

Wood, Ms Jo, Director-General

Windeyer, Ms Kirsty, Coordinator-General, Family Safety

Gilding, Ms Louise, Executive Group Manager, Housing ACT

Loft, Ms Catherine, Executive Branch Manager, Infrastructure and Contracts, Housing ACT

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome to the second of two public hearings of the Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing on the 2019-20 annual and financial reports and 2020-21 estimates. The proceedings today will examine the annual reports, expenditure proposals and revenue estimates for the Community Services Directorate in relation to budget statements C.

Before we begin, on behalf of the committee, I acknowledge that we meet today on the stolen lands of the Ngunnawal people. We respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to life in this city and in this region.

When witnesses speak for the first time, I ask them to acknowledge the privilege statement on the pink sheet of paper. All of our proceedings today are being recorded. They are transcribed by Hansard and they will be published. We are also being live webstreamed. When taking a question on notice, it would be helpful for our secretary and Hansard if you clearly state, "I will take that question on notice," so that we can keep a record.

In the first session we are going to hear from the Minister for Housing and Suburban Development. We are not going to take opening statements, so we will proceed straight to questions.

Minister, referring to output 1.1, people with disabilities are over-represented in the social and community housing sector. How will you ensure that people with disabilities are consulted on residential building design and accessibility?

**Ms Berry:** We have, particularly recently, spent a lot of time working with groups that represent people who are living with a disability. Also, when we build new residences, we invite people to come along who have lived experience and can provide advice on the build that we have just developed, so that we can keep improving the builds we do into the future.

Previously, we used to invite people like Sue Salthouse, who we miss desperately. We have invitations out to Craig from Disability ACT and ACTCOSS to give us advice

on the practical use of those sites for people who have a physical disability. We are also working with people who might have different kinds of needs, such as disabilities as a result of getting older, where people need more adjustments to housing so that they can keep living their life in their own house.

I will ask Ms Gilding to provide a bit more detail on how we consult and what we build now.

**Ms Gilding:** I acknowledge the privilege statement. It is important that we get the voices of our tenants and people who are living in our houses into the design part of the process in terms of our construction. Back in June 2019, I think it was, as part of refreshing for the next phase of public housing growth and renewal, we undertook an extensive rethink and redesign of our design brief. The design brief sets out clear instructions on how we want our houses to be built. Prior to that, we had two different documents that we were working to. We needed to take that step back and make sure that the design brief was reviewed so that it was more performance based, more resident focused, and more accessible.

That is the foundation for how we make sure that our buildings are compliant. They need to be compliant with the Territory Plan, the National Construction Code, the Livable Housing Australia Design Guidelines, the adaptable housing standard, and the design for access and mobility. If that is the platform, that is the foundation. Then we need to also build in a process of continuous improvement. Yes, we have ticked all the boxes we need to tick for the legislative, statutory requirements, but when we get the voice of the user into our designs, suddenly they come alive and we can be quite adaptive in how we make changes as we go forward.

In terms of the more formal mechanisms to get the voice of the user into that process, sometimes we will do that with individual groups on bespoke builds. If you look at the process we used for our elders units, for example—we worked extremely closely with the Elected Body, with multiple meetings over multiple months over multiple design phases. The latest development in Lyons was a good example of how the design changed as we moved through that process according to the feedback that we were hearing from the Elected Body.

Likewise, Common Ground is an example of working very closely with the Common Ground board, getting their insights into how Gungahlin has worked, and feeding that into the process in terms of what we are doing at Dickson. But it is not only the board; with some tenants who are living currently in Common Ground Gungahlin, we have been able to bring their voices into that space as well. Youth house is another one.

More formally, under the first phase of renewal, we had linking into new communities, a group of our community partners who gave us feedback from tenants on how those designs are happening.

In a sense, we have just come through that first 18 months to two years of growth and renewal. We have reviewed all our governance systems and processes. As part of that, we have refreshed the link group, and we are establishing something called GRIP—I quite like that acronym—which stands for growth and renewal inclusive partnerships. Again, we have key voices there. We have representatives from ADACAS, Northside

Community, Woden Community and ACTCOSS. Craig Wallace is the representative from ACTCOSS.

We want that group to have a key role in looking at particularly the property side and the people side, and bringing those two things together so that we have a continuous improvement focus. That is sitting on the foundation of the design brief, but we have those voices coming in on a regular basis around how we can make sure that our designs are not only meeting the needs of our tenants with accessibility needs, but, as we know from our stats, the incredible number of people in our properties living with some form of disability. We need to hear from those voices, and we need to make sure that we have a continuous improvement process.

There is also the tenant participation group. They are not backward in coming forward, in telling us what they do or do not like about our designs. Again, as part of the programs, we regularly invite them to walk through the new properties and tell us how we can make improvements. Likewise, our housing managers give us feedback, as do we. I often walk through and go, “Why have you put the clothesline there?” There are formal processes and informal processes so that we make sure that our builds are continually evolving and meeting the needs of the people who will live in them.

**Ms Berry:** Sorry, but you have also forgotten the other group that we engage with in the housing and renewal program in the implementation of the housing strategy: the advisory group. That also has public housing tenants and others on it.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. I think it would be safe to assume that there are people with a disability currently waiting for public housing. I assume we already know who our tenants will be for the next tranche of public housing that is disability friendly. What work are we doing, specifically with people we know will be the occupants of the very next properties that we roll off the line, to ensure that those properties are meeting their needs? I imagine it must be easier than in the private market to build these properties to meet tenant specifications, since we should already know exactly who those people are.

**Ms Gilding:** We do look at the waiting list and the data coming through. There is a full range of disability. We do not necessarily build bespoke for each person, each applicant. Sometimes we do; there are some builds where we are specifically building for a particular person and a particular need. We will work with them and their advocates in getting that design right.

The other part is, as I said, the design brief, which is informed by the statutory requirements around livable and class C. We find that the livable and class C meet a great range of needs, but once we know who the applicant for the house is, we can tailor it, work with our occupational therapists to build in design modifications at that point in time.

**THE CHAIR:** You have listed a range of formal and informal processes where feedback is solicited. Have you received any negative feedback on some of the more recent developments that tenants are moving into and then been able to rectify and modify those properties based on that feedback?

**Ms Gilding:** I would have to call on one of my colleagues to say if we have done that. It is more characterised as a matter of whether this specifically meets someone's actual need. For example, one of the tenants who moved into Toolangi in Kaleen is in a motorised wheelchair. We needed to make modifications to install automatic doors not only to his particular unit but to the complex.

Sometimes we hear that people are not as comfortable as they want to be with particular aspects of particular things. That is not to say that there is anything wrong as such with the design; it is more about trying to work with our tenants to understand what is right for them: the right location, the right house, at the right time, with the right supports. It is hard to choose. You are the best person to know what sort of house suits you. Our job is to work very closely with tenants and applicants to do that matching process and to provide choice as part of that.

**MRS KIKKERT:** In the interests of time, I will pass my question to the shadow minister, Mark Parton. On the record, can I please ask for more time on this topic. Half an hour is just not long enough to talk about Housing ACT.

**Ms Berry:** We did not set the time frame, but we are happy to talk more if you need us to.

**MR PARTON:** Minister, I refer to table 18 on page 108 of the annual report, which provides some details on the complaints received by Housing ACT. My question is about properties that are set to be renewed as part of the renewal strategy. Are maintenance complaints actioned while tenants are waiting for those properties to be renewed or are work orders for those properties simply ignored?

**Ms Berry:** No, they are not ignored, but I might have to get somebody to come up and talk through how we manage that within properties that have been identified for renewal. Of course, we are not going to put in a new kitchen in a home that is going to be demolished. If some minor repairs and maintenance need to be done just to make sure it is still livable and fit for purpose until that time, that should be the case.

**Ms Loft:** I acknowledge the privilege statement. I look after maintenance for Housing ACT, and also growth and renewal, the asset side, when we identify the properties for sale. We have gone through 400 assessments through the asset assessment panel to date. Two hundred of those have been returned to the portfolio; the remaining 200 have been tagged for either renewal or sale.

That is part of the vacant process. We go through a panel that covers off a multitude of areas within Housing; it is not just within the asset branch. We look at the tenant consideration. We look at the complaints. We look at the age of the property. Is it still fit for purpose, form and function?

Once a decision is made, we spend a lot of time considering the tenants' needs. The complaints around maintenance for those properties are based on the age of the property, the future intent. As Minister Berry just said, we would not install a new bathroom if the property had already been identified for sale. Maintenance is always about keeping the property safe and secure for the tenant. If a work order is in, regardless of whether it has been tagged for sale or redevelopment, if something is

unsafe, that work is going to happen. We will always make sure that the tenant is safe and secure.

**MR PARTON:** With regard to those work orders, they are obviously Programmed delivering. You rely on a number of local subcontractors to manage a lot of those work orders. Are you able to tell me approximately how many Canberra-based small businesses completed work for Programmed over the past year? It might need to be a question on notice, but if you could just give me a ballpark figure, that would be worthwhile for me.

**Ms Loft:** We have had 77,000 work orders completed over 70 subcontractors within Canberra. They are all Canberra companies. Programmed subcontracts all the work to Canberra companies.

**MR PARTON:** It has come to my attention, though—it was suggested to me by people in the space from a number of sources—that much of the work for local subcontractors ceased as of January this year. What is the reason for that? What is going on? And was this properly communicated to those many Canberra-based small businesses? The feedback I am getting is that it was not and that many of them are facing a pretty uncertain future. Is anyone able to shed light on that?

**Ms Loft:** Yes. We had an incredibly busy year last year. We spent more than we had forecast, due to attending to crisis. We had the fires, the smoke, COVID, increased maintenance complaints. We did not stop. We did not turn the tap off on the funding. We kept the funding going. We went into this year's budget to complete the crisis work that we needed to do last year. This year, we are managing our budgets and our work orders. We are making sure that any maintenance to keep the properties and the tenants safe happens. However, we are looking at what needs to be completed to keep those tenants safe, considering that we did overspend last year around the crisis.

**MR PARTON:** So you are telling me that you have scaled it back to the bare minimum.

**Ms Loft:** No. We are working within the budget. We are still attending to maintenance needs. We have pulled back on some of the capital upgrades that we can stretch out to the last quarter of the year. Anything that needs to happen is still occurring. What the subcontractors are experiencing—and I understand it has been communicated very clearly from Programmed to manage subcontractors—is that the volume last year was increased due to the crisis and now we are back to BAU. That is the difference. It is not that we are scaling back; it is just that last year the volume was significantly increased.

**MR PARTON:** If I am getting emails, you must be getting emails, so you would know about a number of these businesses that are still recovering from the impacts of COVID. Is the government willing to recognise the serious consequences, at a business level, for a great number of them, of ceasing all work without a great deal of forewarning and no expectation?

**Ms Gilding:** Perhaps I could provide some context for the committee. Funding for our maintenance has not reduced. With businesses that have been doing work for the TFM,



if we look at the spending over the last several years, you will see that last year there was an increase in spending that flowed straight through to those subcontractors, particularly around the extra funding through COVID. In actual fact, I think significant funding has gone to support those businesses.

We expect high standards from our subcontractors, as does Programmed. There might be one or two subcontractors who are not happy with the level of work they are getting where it might—dare I say it?—be connected to Programmed requiring a higher standard.

**THE CHAIR:** I have a quick supplementary. In that line of questioning, you mentioned the asset renewal scheme. You said that 400 properties were assessed; 200 stayed in the portfolio and 200 have been sold.

**Ms Loft:** Two hundred have been identified for redevelopment or sale.

**THE CHAIR:** Are you able to tell me how many properties have been sold in the last financial year?

**Ms Loft:** Absolutely.

**MR PARTON:** And how long do they stay in limbo once they are identified?

**Ms Loft:** I will answer this question first. For 2019-20, there were 61 sales. Year to date this year we have completed 50 sales.

**THE CHAIR:** Has the number of properties that have gone on the market been the same number of properties that have sold? We have sold everything we have listed?

**Ms Loft:** Correct.

**THE CHAIR:** Can you talk me through the process of appointing agents to list and market those properties?

**MRS KIKKERT:** You want your old job back?

**THE CHAIR:** I am very comfortable with my job now, Mrs Kikkert; I will keep it for a while. I am cognisant of the fact that there are reservations, to say the least, within the real estate industry around the process of how we identify listing agents, what marketing mechanisms they are using, whether the process is returning the best value for taxpayers—not only getting the best value from the property but what we are paying for those services—and whether it goes to an open tender. I am curious to explore that process.

**Ms Loft:** We have recently worked with colleagues at Major Projects Canberra and Procurement ACT to establish new panels at Housing ACT. We have completed six of those panels. The real estate agents panel is one of those. Fourteen real estate agents are on the panel, have been successful. They have gone through an evaluation of some pre-qualifications and experience, independent evaluation, to get onto the panel. Once they are on the panel, it is on a rotational basis. Everybody gets an

opportunity to tender for work.

**THE CHAIR:** Each individual property? Is that how that works?

**Ms Loft:** We try to put packages together, to have economies of scale, depending on the location and how many we get at a time. We sent a large tranche through recently. Arbitrarily, through those, we will send out to three real estate agents. They will put in their tender prices. Their fees are capped, and they can choose to come in under those or not. Out of those three, there is a very short evaluation process within Housing; there is an independent one there as well. Then one sales agent will be awarded the tranche of properties or the package of properties.

**THE CHAIR:** What is the fee that they are capped at? Do you know?

**Ms Loft:** I will have to take that question on notice.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Can I ask a follow-up question on maintenance? How many Housing ACT properties are currently vacant? And how long for? I understand that there is a house in Page that has been empty for years and the neighbours are quite concerned about the state of the house. Also, how many families are currently on the waiting list? If we have so many houses that are currently vacant, why are we not maintaining them?

**Ms Gilding:** Before Ms Loft answers the question about how many are vacant, I will set some context. It is a tricky question because there are multiple phases throughout vacancies. If I can connect it to our accountability indicator in the budget papers, that sets us a target of having 96 to 97 per cent of our houses occupied, depending on the year. That means at any given time about three per cent of our houses will be in one part of the system but will not have people in them. I would love to have 100 per cent of our houses with people in them all the time, but that would mean that no maintenance would get done, that people do not move and we are not growing and renewing.

**MRS KIKKERT:** That is great, but I understand that there are many homes in my electorate that have been empty for months or years. I do not understand why they are empty when there are so many people on the waiting list. Could you take on notice how many people are on the waiting list.

**Ms Gilding:** I can answer that now. There are 2,700 people on the waiting list. At any given time, we have between 300 and 400 properties that are vacant. Within that vacancy list, some will be undertaking maintenance, some will be for property redevelopment, and some—I will get Ms Loft to give you the exact numbers, about 60 to 70—are available for allocation.

**MRS KIKKERT:** In regard to those properties that have been vacant for years, according to the neighbours, what is the excuse behind that? Is it because they are waiting for redevelopment or they are going on the market?

**Ms Gilding:** More than likely. The ones that have taken potentially longer are probably going through that development process. Think about the time it takes to

develop. We need to have moved the tenant and then demolished the house, put in a development application, engaged with the community on the designs and the consultation and then started construction. That can take up to 18 months. I will hand over to Ms Loft for the detailed numbers and also the process.

**Ms Loft:** As of 31 January 2021, out of the 10,912 public housing dwellings, 360 were untenanted.

**MRS KIKKERT:** So 360 were empty homes?

**Ms Loft:** Three per cent untenanted.

**Ms Gilding:** That is within the accountability indicator, which says we will have something like 97 per cent or 96.5 per cent. We are meeting that indicator.

**MRS KIKKERT:** How many homes have been sitting empty for over a year? Can you break that down?

**Ms Loft:** We will have to take that on notice for the longer term vacants. I can advise that, out of those 360, only 56 are available for allocation for tenants.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Goodness.

**Ms Loft:** 177 are not available for allocations; that is for ongoing maintenance. Repair or upgrades: 125. And 45 are subject to assessment and those planning decisions. It is important to remember that this is point-in-time data. The asset assessment panel meets three times a week to make those decisions. That 45 is not a static number, and those decisions are turned around three times a week. There were seven new acquisitions waiting for final approvals before they could go through the allocation process. There are 127 in preparation for sale or redevelopment. They would be the properties you were talking about. We can find out if any of those have been vacant longer term for redevelopment, out of that 127.

**MRS KIKKERT:** We know full well that it has been vacant for a very long time.

**THE CHAIR:** I have a quick supplementary. What capacity does the department have to fast-track the maintenance required on those 177 properties, taking note of Mr Parton's earlier question about a number of contractors feeling short-changed in terms of the amount of work they have had relative to last year?

**Ms Loft:** Those 177 are currently with contractors. The average time with the contractors is 26 days. Currently none of them are overdue. With our routine maintenance, there are 55 properties. They are turned around within 10 days.

**Ms Gilding:** There is a great churn happening through that number of properties all the time. Tenants move. We have tenants vacate properties for a multitude of reasons. We take that opportunity to look at the property and do an assessment of whether it needs routine maintenance or whether it needs a further upgrade, which will take a long time. It is much easier to do maintenance and upgrades when we are not working around a tenant, so we take that opportunity. There are set time frames and KPIs with

our contractors.

**MRS KIKKERT:** I understand all of that. I am just thinking about the empty home in my electorate that has been there for years. The neighbours are frustrated.

**Ms Gilding:** Perhaps you could let us know where that is.

**MRS KIKKERT:** I think I did. I am pretty sure I did.

**Ms Gilding:** One other reason why sometimes our homes might appear to be vacant is that our tenants are in other parts of the human services system, if I can put it that way as a euphemism. They may have a period of incarceration, for example. We do not automatically reallocate their home whilst the tenant might be somewhere else.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Do you maintain it, though? Do you mow the lawn?

**Ms Gilding:** Yes, we do.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Not according to the neighbours, and I have seen the homes.

**Ms Gilding:** Let us know and we will see what we can do.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Will do. I did let you know.

**THE CHAIR:** I am cognisant that Mr Pettersson has not had a substantive question. With everyone's permission, I might extend this session slightly to let Mr Pettersson do that; then we will move on.

**MR PETTERSSON:** I was hoping for an update on two specific lines of work. How is Common Ground Dickson coming along?

**Ms Berry:** It is coming along really well. The concrete has been poured. I drove past it a couple of weeks ago and I think I saw scaffolding going up. It is starting to take shape, which is really exciting. As Ms Gilding referred to before, we learned so much after our first Common Ground in Gungahlin. This one has provided many opportunities to improve not just the infrastructure but the experience for people who live in Common Ground. Is there anything newer than what I saw in my visit two weeks ago?

**Ms Loft:** No. Things are going well. The project is still on track. We are still ready to complete at the end of this year.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Wonderful. When do we expect people to be moving in?

**Ms Berry:** End of this year.

**Ms Loft:** It does take time, once something has been built, for tenants to move in, particularly for something like Common Ground. We hope to have the property and tenancy manager and service provider on board towards the latter half of this year. They will start working to make sure that we fill the complex as quickly as possible,

but that may take up to six months.

**MR PETTERSSON:** The second project I am particularly interested in is housing for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. How many homes were delivered recently?

**Ms Berry:** There were five at Lyons. The original Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders housing was in Kambah. As Ms Gilding talked about earlier, we learned from and worked with the elected body and the tenants who were living in that housing in Kambah, to do an even better job—more culturally appropriate and better meeting the needs of those individuals—in Lyons. It is quite an incredible place. It was a wonderful experience to get feedback from tenants and from the Elected Body about the whole housing project out there. There are five houses. I am not sure how many people are living in that property, but there are five spaces out there. They all have their own courtyards or gardens. There is a fire pit and a yarning circle. It is really beautiful, culturally appropriate housing to meet the needs of those individuals.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Are there more in the pipeline?

**Ms Berry:** Yes, there are. There is another one coming in Dickson.

**THE CHAIR:** Mr Pettersson, I am cognisant of the time. Thank you, Ms Loft. Thank you, Ms Gilding. We will move on. I take Mrs Kikkert's earlier point that next time we might want to schedule a bit more time for this subject. There is an appetite for a lot more questions.

We will move to questions for Minister Berry and officials in her capacity as Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence.

**Ms Berry:** I understand that Mrs Vassarotti is coming along later today; there will be more opportunities to ask about housing then.

**MRS KIKKERT:** She takes care of the maintenance of Housing ACT. Correct?

**Ms Berry:** No; she is housing and homelessness. She does the allocations; we do the properties, maintenance and renewal.

**Short suspension.**

**THE CHAIR:** Mrs Kikkert, would you like to start?

**MRS KIKKERT:** Can I go to the training of ACT government staff?

**Ms Windeyer:** Yes.

**MRS KIKKERT:** How many staff have been trained so far?

**THE CHAIR:** Just as a reminder, Ms Windeyer, could you acknowledge the privilege statement?

**Ms Windeyer:** I acknowledge the privilege statement. Mrs Kikkert, your question was—

**MRS KIKKERT:** How many ACT staff have you trained?

**Ms Windeyer:** The total number of staff that have been trained to date, and that is across all of the different training, is approximately 3,890.

**MRS KIKKERT:** 3,890?

**Ms Windeyer:** Correct.

**MRS KIKKERT:** How much funding did that receive to be able to pass that service on?

**Ms Windeyer:** I would have to get the exact figure because it has been over a couple of years.

**MRS KIKKERT:** How much funding do you get a year to train—

**Ms Windeyer:** It is approximately \$580,000.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Is the government currently targeting a specific group of ACT government employees for training?

**Ms Windeyer:** Because of COVID there was a pause on the training last year. The training was paused for a period of time because people were offline and working from home. It is recommencing now. The training is focused on both the foundation training, which is for all ACT government employees, and manager training, because it is important that managers are trained so that there is a safe workplace, as well as what we describe as tier 1 training. Tier 1 training is for those who are working with the public, where they might meet people who are experiencing domestic and family violence. Also, there is tier 2 training, which is more intensive training for those who are likely to work with people who experience domestic and family violence. That might be school psychologists, for example, or social workers.

There is a focus on all of that training, and rolling it out. The directorates have plans to roll out that training. They started again, in February this year. There is a plan to significantly roll it out for the rest of this financial year and into the next year.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Do you plan to finish the training sometime next year?

**Ms Windeyer:** The training is ongoing for a couple of years, but the primary focus of it is over the next year. One of the advantages of the pause and the realignment of the training during the COVID period is that more of it is now online training, so it can be continued to be rolled out over a longer period of time than if it was all face-to-face training. That will continue to happen. The second phase of the training will include the sector and more training for other frontline services, to start to roll it out into that.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Have there been reports from ACT staff after the training has been

rolled out?

**Ms Windeyer:** After the first line of training, in the 2019-20 period, there was feedback. That came back and that was taken into account in the realignment of the training, during last year, in 2020. That was incorporated to the extent that that was considered necessary.

**MRS KIKKERT:** I am thinking about the staff coming forward with some domestic violence that is currently happening in their life, or a family member, a friend or a colleague who is experiencing this. The whole purpose of doing the training is to raise awareness for staff. Since it has rolled out, have you had any reports of domestic violence that is currently happening with the staff that have been undertaking the training?

**Ms Windeyer:** We are aware that that has happened. They might not necessarily come to our office. It would be expected that it would come through the directorates or through a different way, or through their managers. Of course, that is part of the manager training. Part of the foundation training says where people can go if they are experiencing domestic and family violence. There are a range of places that they might choose to go to. They might not choose to tell their workplace; they might go to another service, a trusted friend or a trusted colleague. There are all sorts of different places that people might go. It is expected, and when any educational training program happens you do get an increase in disclosures.

One of the things that we have happening at the moment, and we are working with the University of New South Wales on it, is an evaluation of the ACT domestic violence training. That is where those types of things will become very clear. We are working on a framework with UNSW at the moment. That evaluation will commence soon; then we will have more figures, as opposed to anecdotal stories, about what is happening.

**MRS KIKKERT:** That is good to know. You spoke about frontline service people getting the training. When will they be getting it?

**Ms Windeyer:** The ACT government people who work on the front line will receive either tier 1 or tier 2 training, depending on where they work. That is part of the directorates' rollout. For example, Education are commencing their rollout from now. That will take place over this year and the next financial year. If it is a school counsellor, for example, or a school psychologist, they will receive the training in accordance with that directorate's implementation plan.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Would that include the crisis centres?

**Ms Windeyer:** The crisis centre is with the sector, so it is outside government. What I have been talking about is ACT government training. In terms of the sector, that is the next phase. We are looking to have a proposal about how that will be rolled out in the next financial year. We are trialling it. It is proposed, because we want to adapt the training materials so that they can be appropriately used in the sector and in the crisis sector.

Often, in the crisis sector, where they are working with domestic and family violence all day, they are specialists in any event. It is about the people who might touch people who are working in domestic and family violence—the youth workers, those who work in the community services—where they will touch on domestic and family violence all the time but they do not necessarily have that specialist training. That is the type of place we will be looking to adapt it, with their support and with the knowledge of specialist domestic violence workers, so that it is appropriate for use in those sectors.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Considering that the frontline workers are working with traumatised adults and children, have they come forward seeking assistance to support them in a way that will support the children that they are currently looking after?

**Ms Windeyer:** Our office has been having discussions, particularly with people in the youth sector and the youth peak, in order to work out what their training needs might be. One of the things that has been identified is a need for youth workers and people who work with children to be trained in domestic and family violence so that they can recognise it, and respond and refer as appropriate.

It fits in with the work that the office did in relation to children and young people. In the project that the Family Safety Hub did last year, the hub went out and spoke with children and young people to find out what their experience of domestic and family violence was—those who live with it. From those conversations—and they were held in a safe manner; we had an expert advisory group to assist with that—a number of insights came out of that. We then presented those insights to a range of different people. The sector came to that, as well as lots of people who work at CYPS and Health. Those presentations were part of the understanding of a cultural shift, so that people could come to understand what children and young people experience and what they might need when they experience and live with domestic and family violence.

As part of that discussion, we do not just want to look at it from the adult perspective; we want to look at it from the point of view of what children and young people really need. That project was done in conjunction with the office of the Children and Young People Commissioner. That builds, along with what we hear from the sector—I am just talking about the youth sector here—into what might be needed.

**MRS KIKKERT:** It seems to me that there is just talking and talking, and no action, when these kids are actually in need of significant support. My issue is with the funding. The domestic violence levy is funding the training for the ACT staff—\$580,000. How much a year is the government receiving from the domestic violence levy?

**Ms Wood:** Mrs Kikkert, that is reported in detail. All of the levy funding is reported in detail—

**MRS KIKKERT:** It is about \$5 million.

**Ms Wood:** in the budget outlook. Yes, it is about \$5 million.



**MRS KIKKERT:** What is the rest of that money being used for, if we are not allocating it so that children's voices are being supported and heard, and they are being given what they need?

**Ms Berry:** First of all, as you will understand, domestic and family violence is incredibly complex. As we do more work, conduct more pilots and understand domestic and family violence better, our response, preventive and supporting people if they have been victims, changes because the whole country learns differently about how to respond to domestic and family violence and how complex it really is. It is not just a matter of physical violence; and you would understand that, Mrs Kikkert.

The levy goes to a range of preventive and supportive approaches, when it comes to domestic and family violence, but it also investigates different kinds of ways that we can meet the needs of our community. Training is one of them. The training is about raising awareness, and that is important, so that we can understand it even better and support people even better.

Hearing from young people about their experiences and understanding what their needs are is important. They have not been engaged in a conversation like this before. That is why we worked with the commissioner to hear from young people so that we could say, "Okay, what are the needs of young people? How can we address that best?" This is by working with experts in the sector, rather than assuming that we know what those people are experiencing and what their needs are.

There is detail in the budget papers about where the levy funding goes. Ms Wood can probably take you through, in more detail, what the funding goes to and what it delivers on the ground.

**Ms Wood:** With respect to the context, in talking about the levy funding, which is about \$5 million a year, the levy is only one part of the government's investment in response to domestic and family violence. There are a range of services that are funded outside the levy that work with families, that work with children and that do a lot of the work in responding to people's needs. The levy provides additional funding above and beyond those core services.

As the minister said, it funds a diverse range of initiatives. It provides funding for frontline services. It provides funding for Safer Families grants that go directly to people experiencing domestic and family violence. It provides really important funding that is about how we reform and change responses to domestic and family violence. As the minister said, our understanding of this continues to evolve. We have worked really hard in family safety in the ACT to hear directly from people's lived experience, both adults—a diverse range of adults as well—and children and young people, to ensure that we are able to reshape the responses so that they meet their needs.

The whole country has come from a place where the primary response was a justice response. That does not work for a lot of people, and we have heard that really strongly. We have been working on a range of different approaches. A really good example is our health-justice partnership. That is an example of the type of innovation that has been directly driven by what people told us they wanted. They wanted a safe

conversation. They wanted an opportunity, in a safe place, to talk about what was happening to them, seek support and have the support come to them where they are.

When I am engaged in conversations with officials across jurisdictions, the Safer Families levy and the fact that there is capacity there to shape new reform and try new things is one of the advantages the ACT has that other jurisdictions look at with some level of envy. If we do not have some dedicated funding for that change, we will not get there. That is why it supports a diverse range.

**MRS KIKKERT:** I understand that, Ms Wood, and I have nothing against the funding going towards reform, as well as understanding what could be done to prevent domestic violence. I want to draw your attention to making sure that we can do both. If we can do that, we can look forward in the future to reforming our domestic violence services, while at the same time supporting those who are currently in the situation of domestic violence.

I understand that there is a women's shelter that has been seeking funding for two child specialists to help the children that come into the centre. Currently, they see up to 80 children. At any given time they see up to 80 children. It is my understanding that for the last three years they have been seeking funding for a specialist child counsellor to come in and speak with the children. They had in one year, 2018-19, 300 children through their residential services. Seventy per cent of the clients and their children were seeking support and safe accommodation due to domestic and family violence. I completely understand that they are in need of that accommodation, but at the same time these are specialist services who also understand the emotional and social need. They have been asking the government to support them in that regard. For three years they have been starving, these kids have been starving, to receive that service, but they have not, so I do not see why you cannot do both.

**Ms Wood:** We absolutely do both. Specifically, Mrs Kikkert—

**MRS KIKKERT:** Not according to this service, because they have asked for three years and they have been told no.

**Ms Wood:** There has been specific funding for the women's specialist DV services for their work with children. I will take on notice the specific initiative. I recall that it was in the 2018-19 budget and it was ongoing funding, but we can take on notice to give you the detail of the funding that was provided directly to services.

**MRS KIKKERT:** But this particular service that sees 300 children in one year has been asking for the last three years for support, and they have not had it. What happens to these children? They do not get treated and they do not get the support that they need. These are high-level traumatised children, and you have denied them the support. I do not understand why.

**Ms Wood:** Mrs Kikkert, I have taken on notice to provide the detail of the specific funding that has been provided to services.

**MRS KIKKERT:** They have given you submissions. You have read them; you have seen them. It is evidence based. It is a beautiful submission. If I were in government,

I would happily give them the \$400,000 that they are asking for—\$400,000 to support these 300 children a year that they see. But your government have said no to them. I do not understand why.

**Ms Berry:** Mrs Kikkert, it is a complex and—

**MRS KIKKERT:** You have the money from the domestic violence levy—\$5 million. You have the money. You can do both.

**Ms Berry:** Chair, is there a question for me to respond to?

**MR PETTERSSON:** I have a question.

**THE CHAIR:** I did not hear one. On that note I might move on to Mr Pettersson.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Could the committee get an update on the development and establishment of an ACT domestic and family violence death review mechanism?

**Ms Berry:** Yes. This is important work in order to understand more clearly how we can respond to domestic and family violence, and understand where domestic and family violence might occur and is not identified, when a person's life is taken. That death review work is really important. I will ask Ms Windeyer to respond and provide a little bit more detail on that.

**Ms Windeyer:** The domestic and family violence death review is currently being constructed. There is funding for that. At the moment we are looking at what the model might look like. It is anticipated that that will go through to law reform, to legislation in the next sitting period, and the death review will then be up and established.

All of the other jurisdictions have a death review, so it is great that the ACT is about to get one. It will really help, and it is part of the integrated system and response to domestic and family violence in the ACT. It will help us to understand any systemic issues that arise and to have reform.

Although it does look at individual cases, the intention is that it will look not only at deaths but also at near deaths, suicides, accidents and other incidents that lead to death or near death where there is domestic and family violence. Once it is established then it is likely that it will have an expert reference group, which will comprise lots of experts from various places in the community and government with specific expertise in domestic and family violence.

**MR PETTERSSON:** I am still a little unsure as to how it works. Who is doing the review? Is it the coroner or is it a separate body?

**Ms Windeyer:** There are a range of places where it could be. At the moment the intention is that it be put with the coordinator-general position, so that it will be in the office. At the moment I am the Coordinator-General, Family Safety, so it would be in this office. The intention is that the expert advisory group would be there for two years. The reason for putting it here is that it has synergies with the other work that

the office is doing. For example, with the common risk assessment framework, the domestic violence training and the integrated response model that the office is working on at the moment, all of those things feed together with the death review, and it is important that they underpin it. Once those two years are up, there might be a different place where it would go, but at the moment it is considered that that is the best location.

**MR PETTERSSON:** How are cases identified? Would there need to be a known entity or will this pick up cases,, potentially of women that have died and we are unsure of the circumstances?

**Ms Windeyer:** Sorry, in what circumstances?

**MR PETTERSSON:** One of the problems here is that a lot of domestic violence is hidden and unseen. How do we go about identifying cases for the review?

**Ms Windeyer:** That could be from a range of places. It will not specify particular people or organisations who can feed that into the DFV death review. It could be from a member of the community or from the family; it could be from an agency. For example, if the emergency department at one of the hospitals becomes aware of something, they might refer it. It might be one of the specialist domestic violence agencies or one of the other service providers in the community. It could be the schools or it could be the police. There are a range of places from where the information might come to the death review; then the death review would make a decision on whether it was something that should be part of the review.

**THE CHAIR:** I note that, in response to the increase in domestic and family violence during COVID, the Victims of Crime Commissioner and the Coordinator-General for Family Safety established a round table for sector agencies to discuss their response. Has the round table been useful, and do you envisage keeping that round table active beyond the COVID pandemic?

**Ms Windeyer:** It has been really useful. The feedback from the round table was that it was very useful for them, particularly in the initial phases of COVID. It was established early on, when COVID was just starting. It brought together a range of different agencies and organisations who work with people who experience violence and those who use violence. It included the criminal justice side—the police, the courts, Legal Aid and the legal system—and the various directorates, Health and CYPS, where they might have engagement. It included the service sector—the women’s refuges, the Domestic Violence Crisis Service and the Rape Crisis Centre. These are the people who particularly engage.

The feedback from those who attended was that it was particularly useful. The fact that everybody continued to attend is a little bit like voting with your feet. They all turned up. We have not had one this year, but it is intended to continue that because it was so useful. One of the things that we did was to try and work out, particularly for the sector, what would be most useful for them. Of course, they were on the front line and really dealing with what was going on.

They fed back to us that they found it very useful, for example, to hear about what

was happening in the courts, in the criminal justice system. Sometimes those links are not so obvious to them, as well as what the police were doing. They could raise their concerns about what was happening in the criminal justice system, if need be; then that would come back to the next meeting or be taken offline.

It was a COVID initiative and, over time, as COVID in Canberra became a less dominant issue, the meetings were less regular. In the beginning they were weekly, then it was fortnightly and then it was once a month.

**THE CHAIR:** A layperson outside this room who hears about another round table might roll their eyes. As you have pointed out, it has been very useful for the sector. Were there any specific, really tangible outcomes that came about as a result of the round table that would not have existed otherwise?

**Ms Windeyer:** For example, early on there was a concern expressed by the sector, when we were in the COVID period and it was unclear what would happen. The sector was concerned about what would happen to children of women who had fled domestic and family violence if the mother was taken to hospital or was unable to care for them. There was a working group to look at that, and we looked at that across government, with other directorates. A scenario was come up with as to what would happen, and some funding was, and still is, set aside in case of that scenario.

That is one example. Another example of an issue that arose was in relation to women and children who are fleeing domestic and family violence from another state and coming into the ACT—the policies and procedures relating to that, both from a housing and from a support perspective. That led to some significant work between OneLink, Housing ACT, the sector and the round table, which we were facilitating, so that a clear policy and procedures were agreed and became known.

**MRS KIKKERT:** My question is on the intermediary scheme for child witnesses.

**Ms Berry:** That is not for us, Mrs Kikkert.

**MRS KIKKERT:** That is not part of this section?

**Ms Wood:** That is victim support.

**THE CHAIR:** I trust you have another, Mrs Kikkert.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Let us look at the domestic violence risk assessment framework. The government is currently testing and designing a domestic and family violence risk assessment and management framework. Is it being tested in a number of sites prior to being finalised? When does the government intend the framework to be finalised?

**Ms Windeyer:** Currently, it is being trialled in a health setting—in a hospital setting. That trial is well underway and we hope to have the feedback soon. Our office is in discussions with a community provider in relation to trialling it in a community sector space. That is likely to commence soon. The draft framework is on the office website, the coordinator-general website and the safety website.

**MRS KIKKERT:** What is the benefit of having it in the community sector?

**Ms Windeyer:** Because it is to develop common understanding, common language and how we might respond to that. There is not just one sector; there are lots of different places where it needs to be used. In order for it to work as a whole-of-ACT framework, it is good to get feedback from different places. The government, the hospital, is one place. The community sector is another place. It is beneficial to get those different views so that we can feed that in and ensure that the framework is suitable for the different locations. That is the aim of it. The framework is important because it underpins all of the work that we then do. It underpins, for example, the domestic violence training. It underpins the domestic and family violence death review. In order to bring it together, it is good that we can trial it in a couple of different locations.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Talking about the location for the community, you are currently discussing it. When do you expect to have something concrete?

**Ms Windeyer:** We would expect that within the next month. It will always be a working document. One of the things about the framework is that it will be a working document and it will be dynamic over time, as needed, and as there is more research. With domestic and family violence, as the minister said at the beginning, we are learning more things about it all the time. As we learn more, of course, we will update the framework that underpins the integrated domestic and family violence response in the ACT. We would hope to have the—

**MRS KIKKERT:** While we are learning more, let us not forget those who are actually suffering at the moment.

**THE CHAIR:** We will take that as a comment, Mrs Kikkert. I will let you finish answering the question.

**Ms Windeyer:** It is intended to have the final published this year. One of the other things going into it is a section on perpetrators. Our office has a working group on perpetrators, which consists of both government and non-government organisations who work with people who use violence. As well as developing a perpetrator standard for organisations who work with perpetrators, and looking towards accreditation of that, that working group is developing a section for the common risk assessment framework.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Will the government support those children by giving them their voices through a child therapist when they need one?

**Ms Berry:** We have already provided some information on work we did with the commissioner—developing that work on understanding what children and young people need. We can provide the link to that information, Chair, for the committee. Mrs Kikkert, I am not exactly sure what you are talking about, or which organisation. Perhaps you could email me outside, because I have not heard from you about this.

**MRS KIKKERT:** I will email you the submission they have sent to the government three times now.

**Ms Berry:** Okay.

**MRS KIKKERT:** I just want to ask about the Room4Change program. How is the effectiveness of this program being measured?

**Ms Berry:** I might talk a bit about Room4Change, just to give a bit of a perspective around it for committee members who might not understand it. As we have learned about domestic and family violence more and increased our understanding—and people were telling us that they did not necessarily want a legal response; they just wanted the violence to end—we wanted to stop families, women and children, having to leave their home when they felt unsafe, and we could support perpetrators to change their behaviour. That is what Room4Change is about. It is not easy. It is not easy work by any means. It is very complex and requires significant expertise to work with these individuals who come to that program. But it is about giving that perpetrator the chance to be out of the home. The family and the children can stay safely within their home and the perpetrator is supported to change their behaviour.

Sometimes that might mean that the relationship is repaired and that they can come back together and have a good, respectful relationship. But sometimes that might not be the case and that is not the answer. The answer to all this is changing the perpetrator's behaviour and making sure that the family can stay safely in their own home and not have to leave. Do you want to have a chat about the evaluation of that?

**Ms Windeyer:** There has been an evaluation conducted by the ANU in relation to the Room4Change program. There has been a preliminary draft and it is positive in terms of how the program is working. It is expected that it will be finalised as soon as possible. I know that the Domestic Violence Crisis Service is working with ANU to do that as soon as possible. We expect it soon.

**MRS KIKKERT:** In the 2020 safer family statement the Room4Change program is talked about as a six-month therapeutic program. The budget also describes it this way. The ACT's implementation fourth action plan describes the Room4Change program as a nine to 12-month therapeutic residential program. Are these different programs or has the residential program been reduced in length?

**Ms Wood:** I think the different lengths of time really depend on the different needs of the people in the program. It was originally designed as a six-month program, but the Domestic Violence Crisis Service have developed experience with the program and adapted their model, which they need to do for different groups of people. It really depends on who is in the group. They do a lot of group work as well as individual work with the men in the program and they need to take different approaches, depending on the needs of those people.

They started with a six-month program. They have found at times that they have needed to extend that time frame for particular groups or extend the support for particular people, for some of those people exiting. They do a lot in the program but exiting the program back into their usual kinds of lives can actually throw up a whole lot of challenges. They need to be very flexible.

**MRS KIKKERT:** It is flexible, based on case by case?

**Ms Wood:** Yes.

**MRS KIKKERT:** That is good news. What is the accommodation capacity?

**Ms Wood:** I will have to take on notice the specific accommodation capacity at this point in time because it has grown. It started small, and additional properties were added to the program over time. We will take on notice the specific number of people that can be accommodated. Not everyone who is in the program needs or uses the accommodation. It is an option. One of the pieces of feedback from DVCS has been that the accommodation is often very important at the beginning to get people engaged in the program, but once they are in the program they may move out into other accommodation. We will take on notice the number that can be accommodated in total.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Thank you. If you do have the number of men that are on the waiting list, if there are any, that would be great.

**Ms Wood:** We can take that on notice.

**Ms Windeyer:** If it is helpful, I can give you figures on men who were accommodated in the 2019-20 period.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Yes.

**Ms Windeyer:** That was nine men accommodated in that program. To date, in the 2020-21 period there have been 10 men who have been accommodated and there are currently six.

**MRS KIKKERT:** On the waiting list?

**Ms Windeyer:** Accommodated.

**Ms Wood:** I just add that the number of people accommodated is much smaller than the number who have participated in the program. In 2019-20, 51 men participated and 43 partners and ex-partners were receiving support.

**MRS KIKKERT:** The family is receiving support as well as the men?

**Ms Wood:** Yes.

**MRS KIKKERT:** It would be great to get notice on how many men are on the waiting list.

**THE CHAIR:** We will wrap it up here. If witnesses have taken any questions on notice today could you please provide answers to Andrew, our committee secretary, within five working days of release of the proof *Hansard* from this hearing. The time being 10.16, the committee will suspend and we will meet back here at 10.30 to see the Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services.

**Hearing suspended from 10.17 to 10.30 am.**



Appearances:

Vassarotti, Ms Rebecca, Minister for the Environment, Minister for Heritage, Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services and Minister for Sustainable Building and Construction

Community Services Directorate

Wood, Ms Jo, Director-General

Gilding, Ms Louise, Executive Group Manager, Housing ACT

Loft, Ms Catherine, Executive Branch Manager, Infrastructure and Contracts, Housing ACT

Nielsen, Mr Shane, Executive Branch Manager, Policy and Business Transformation, Housing ACT

Aigner, Mr Geoff, Executive Branch Manager, Client Services, Housing ACT

**THE CHAIR:** Welcome back. In this third session we will hear from the Minister for Homelessness and Housing Services. If there are new officials present can I remind witnesses of the protections and obligations afforded by parliamentary privilege and draw your attention to the pink privilege statement. Before you begin speaking, for any officials in the room, please acknowledge that statement. On that note, we lead into questions. I will kick us off today.

Minister, noting the work done by the directorate to support women and children using homelessness services due to domestic and family violence, listed on pages 112 and 113, what extra support did the directorate provide for these services due to the impacts of COVID-19?

**Ms Vassarotti:** There have been a range of services that have been provided in relation to COVID-19. It was really fantastic to be able to establish a range of new services. Some of those are specifically targeting women and children. The establishment of MacKillop House is probably a really good example of that. There was also some additional support provided to domestic and family violence services that sits somewhere outside my portfolio area. I might look to officials to provide some more details of that.

**Ms Wood:** I think I failed to acknowledge the privilege statement earlier. In addition to the specific services that are funded, particularly MacKillop as part of the broader community support package, the community support package also provided some specific funding for domestic and family violence services directly, both as part of the ACT package and then through the national partnership agreement, which is obviously Minister Berry's portfolio, from commonwealth funding. There was specific funding that was related to the expected increase in demand for those services, to give those services capacity to respond.

There was also, really importantly, the flexible funding under the Client Support and Accommodation Fund, which was also available to services working with women and children and families impacted by domestic and family violence, to provide both accommodation options but also the supports that were needed to get people into stable housing. In the community support package the ACT's contribution to domestic

and family violence support directly to those organisations was \$550,000 and then in the client support fund—do we have that figure? None that I have. I know that it has been \$150,000 and \$300,000 going forward. And I think it was \$330,000 previously.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Minister, in your parliamentary agreement with Labor you indicate support for the establishment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander controlled community housing provider. Page 45 of the 2020-21 budget priorities reflects this as well. What progress has been made in implementing this initiative?

**Ms Vassarotti:** I will note that that responsibility sits with Minister Berry. As you note, there has been the allocation of funds through the 2019-20 budget to progress this initiative. I might look to Jo to see if she can provide some further details.

**Ms Wood:** There has been work over a number of years that has led to this initiative, with the dedicated resources to support the establishment of a specific organisation. Ms Gilding is best placed to talk about the preliminary work.

**Ms Gilding:** We could ask Mr Nielsen.

**Mr Nielson:** I acknowledge the privilege statement. As part of the commitment in the parliament agreement, two positions have been identified for forward funding over the next four years. We are currently working with the ATSI office in relation to the duty statements and we are about to send out for recruitment of those positions. It is part of a broader commitment that we have in relation to other work, working with the Elected Body, and part of that work is in relation to other commitments in terms of participation approaches and the like, as well as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander controlled community housing provider.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Do you know how much is provided in this budget for those two positions?

**Mr Nielson:** I will confirm the exact number for you.

**Ms Wood:** The amount for 2020-21 is \$375,000.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Which ATSI entity would have oversight of this?

**Ms Wood:** There is broader work happening across CSD to support the development of Aboriginal and community-controlled organisations generally. There is some work around a governance framework that the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs has undertaken which will help all the different parts of government that are looking to support the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations. There is not an organisation identified. It is about doing work with the community and with the housing sector on what is the right model and approach: what role does the community-controlled provider want to plan?

In the homelessness and housing sector there are a broad range of different types of organisations that have a different focus. There will be a really strong engagement process with community to identify what are the needs and then we will work with organisations that may come forward wanting to take on that role. It is possible that

there may be multiple organisations, depending on who in the community actually wants to take on those roles.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Just to clarify, Minister, you mentioned that this area falls under Minister Yvette Berry. The operation of it as well, would that fall under Minister Berry or you?

**Ms Vassarotti:** At this stage, in terms of the development work, it does sit with Minister Berry. I think what is absolutely envisaged, as Ms Wood spoke about, is working closely with a range of other entities. The Elected Body was one of the other entities that have been specifically identified as needing to work really closely with. The roles sit within CSD but it does sit within Minister Berry's purview.

**MR PETTERSSON:** I have some questions about the sale to tenant scheme. How do you identify which houses are eligible for sale?

**Ms Vassarotti:** I might ask our officials to answer that.

**Ms Gilding:** I think that is one for Ms Loft. While a swap happens, I might give some context, while Ms Loft comes to the table. The sale to the tenant starts with our sustainability income review. We have a program where we work with tenants who have reached an income threshold where they might be able to be in a position to actually purchase their house. I think the first part of it is understanding the financial capacity of the household and their ability to actually do that, to enter into a mortgage.

That said, then we also need to make sure that they are able to buy. If I could give an example, a standalone, three-bedroom house is more likely to be able to be purchased by a tenant than, say, a single unit in one of our multi-unit complexes where we do not necessarily have all the strata arrangements in place. We just would not sell that single unit in Jerilderie, for example.

The age of the property comes into play and whether or not it would be something that we would put forward as part of our redevelopment program. For example, if it was a set of properties that led itself to consolidation, that property might not be eligible for sale to the tenant. However, we are also able to work within the portfolio where those tenants might find something that they can then purchase. Once that decision has been made and the property has been identified and all those boxes and the financial sustainability in those boxes have been ticked, there is then the process of whether that becomes an outright sale to the tenant or whether we enter into a shared equity arrangement as well. In terms of the actual numbers of sales to the tenant, I think Ms Loft will have that number for this year.

**Ms Loft:** Yes; correct. I acknowledge the privilege statement. So far in 2021, sales to tenant applications have been received by 15. Of those, five sales have been settled, a further seven applications have been approved to proceed and three applications are currently still under assessment.

As Ms Gilding said, that assessment is made by the asset assessment panel, not dissimilar to our sale and redevelopment properties under growth and renewal. If the panel made an assessment to retain that property we would continue to work with the

tenant to find other opportunities available to them.

**MR PETTERSSON:** When you say “other opportunities”, are you talking about other properties to purchase?

**Ms Loft:** We would find another house if they were interested. But in this case—

**MR PETTERSSON:** Within ACT public housing stock?

**Ms Loft:** Correct.

**MR PETTERSSON:** For the people that made the initial inquiry but did not proceed, did they give reasons why they did not proceed?

**Ms Loft:** I would have to—

**Ms Gilding:** Yes, they would give us reasons why they did not proceed but I suspect there are probably quite a range of reasons, again starting with the gateway of financial capacity, and appropriateness of the property. Sometimes you find that people, as they go through those considerations, realise that they had other opportunities as well. And we sometimes find that they actually buy in the private market.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Circling back, I was not aware that you would help find them other stock of public housing potentially for sale. Are they properties that have been identified as being for sale already? That is why they are offered up as an alternative to the one that they are potentially in already?

**Ms Loft:** This year that has not happened. That would be in a situation if the asset assessment panel decided that this property really is not suitable or it was a better redevelopment opportunity. We would work with the tenants. Our aim is to sell to the tenants. We want them to secure home ownership. And if we can work with them to do that, that is absolutely our first preference. A no is never a no; we would always work with opportunities if there were other opportunities to explore that the tenant might not know about.

**MR PETTERSSON:** And what is the process for getting a valuation for one of those properties to sell to a tenant?

**Ms Loft:** We have, again, a panel of valuers. It is across ACT government; it is not a Housing panel; and we utilise that panel.

**MR PARTON:** I refer to page 106 of the annual report, which outlines responsibilities of the tenant experience team. Among those responsibilities, the tenant experience team must attend client service visits and must also investigate and complete complaints. Minister, can I ask specifically what client service visits have been undertaken at the Condamine Court housing complex in the past 12 months? Is anyone able to furnish me with that sort of information?

**Ms Vassarotti:** I will look to officials in terms of specifics. I am not sure if we are

able to provide specifics in terms of particular developments, how many service visits have happened. But certainly client services are a really important element of the work of the tenant team. Obviously the 2019-20 period was challenging, given the context of COVID and certainly you will see that there was a drop in the numbers of client service visits that happened across the board just because of the issues with COVID-19, and there was a period where that did not happen.

Noting the specifics of the area that you talk about, there is also some work that is happening around multi-unit complexes. Certainly we would highlight the work that is happening around the Connecting Communities program, which was started as a pilot in 2019 and has continued, really focusing on the multi-unit apartments and really having quite a specific intention and giving more intensive oversight of those sites that would absolutely pull in the client visits. With that preliminary, Geoff, are you able to provide any further detail around the specifics of that?

**Mr Aigner:** Yes, absolutely. I acknowledge the privilege statement. When we are talking about multi-unit properties, which are properties which have a size of more than 20 tenancies, we have 87 in the portfolio across the territory and that represents about 20 to 25 per cent of our portfolio in terms of tenancies. For properties of that size, as the minister said, we have what we call a connected community strategy, which was rolled out in this financial year after a pilot in the inner city. The aim of the connected community strategy is to bring a site-specific focus to reduce the amount of housing staff on site but increase their frequency so that we have more oversight of what is going on, better connections with support services, better monitoring of vacancy. That will mean that, on a site of the size that you are talking about, you will probably have a housing manager on site one, two, three times a week engaging with tenants because there are so many tenants and they tend to have a number of complex issues.

**MR PARTON:** I appreciate the background on that. Can I ask specifically: is safety a concern when members of the tenant experience team complete client service visits at Condamine Court, for argument's sake?

**Mr Aigner:** Safety is a concern on any site that we go to, for the officer who is going on site and our tenants and support workers. We have processes to monitor any incidents that happen on site through our own internal risk systems. But absolutely it is a concern.

**MR PARTON:** But that complex does not stick out any more than any other in regard to safety concerns for the people who are visiting for those purposes—no?

**Mr Aigner:** There are a number of designated high-risk sites; there are probably about 20 of those. We probably focus a lot more of our time on site and have more connections with support services.

**MR PARTON:** The *Canberra Times* reported on 8 February that a spokeswoman from Housing ACT had said that Housing ACT had nightly patrols at Condamine Court. That is not the feedback that I am getting from residents. Is anyone able to confirm or otherwise that that was an accurate statement on 8 February?

**Mr Aigner:** There are a number of our sites where there are nightly patrols, but I would need to check on the frequency of that particular site. I am pretty sure it has nightly patrols, but I could not confirm that now.

**MR PARTON:** Okay. Additionally, it was brought to my attention that a number of locks on certain stairwells had been removed. Specifically, the stairwell leading to the aged persons unit was removed, around 11 or 12 February. Tenants contacted Programmed maintenance for over a week to raise their concern about that. I know that when we get to Programmed we are drifting into the other minister's ground. In relation to the tenant experience team, can anyone confirm whether this set of locks and the other removed stairwell locks have been refitted?

**Ms Wood:** If is a question about maintenance, can you put it on notice and Minister Berry can respond?

**MR PARTON:** Right.

**Ms Wood:** If it is specifically about the locks and whether they were repaired.

**MR PARTON:** It is. If we have officials in the room that can give us an answer on it, could we not just get an answer on it now rather than take it on notice?

**Ms Wood:** Given that it is a different portfolio, my preference is that we take it on notice.

**MR PARTON:** All right. In closing on this line of questioning, Chair, what is being done in the long term to address the pretty serious safety issues that are experienced by tenants at Condamine Court?

**Mr Aigner:** Perhaps I can speak more generally about our multi-unit properties which we would consider high risk. Firstly, the connected community strategy is a way to bring focus to those kinds of issues. Secondly, we have a team which has those skill sets and is supported to look at more complex clients and communities. Thirdly, this year we have been able to increase our insights and analytics around complaints and incidences on site. That is in its first phase. Over the coming year we are looking to improve our responsiveness as we now have better data on what is going on onsite.

**MR PARTON:** Do you think that is providing better outcomes at Condamine Court? Does anyone think that that is providing better outcomes at this stage?

**Mr Aigner:** We would not do it for any other reason.

**MR PARTON:** So you think it is providing better outcomes? You are of the belief that things are improving?

**Mr Aigner:** Well, we know from our pilot that when we worked in the fashion that we have in the connected community strategy we saw a reduction in serious issues onsite. It is a bit too early to tell on sites more broadly in the portfolio, given that the rollout of the connected community strategy was hampered by COVID-19, so we were not onsite as much as we wanted to be. Those engagements on all the other sites

in the portfolio really did not get going again properly until the end of the last calendar year. But that is absolutely the intent—to increase safety and livability onsite.

**MR PARTON:** Right.

**Ms Vassarotti:** I would also note the work of the directorate in relation to refining that program and engaging with tenants onsite around that project—that is a program that is beginning to roll out—and also the really important work in terms of connecting with other services. On a number of these multi-unit sites there are other programs that are working really closely with the connecting communities program. The strengthening communities program that runs through Justice and Community Safety is one of those that works on a number of sites as well. Being able to harness a range of supports will enhance the work of the organisation charged with tenant experience. It will support them in engaging with the tenants, in terms of the complexity of some of the tenants that they are working with, and with us.

**MR PARTON:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Parton. Minister, on page 114 of the annual report you discuss the Early Morning Centre. I understand that, as a result of the parliamentary and governing agreement, you announced an expansion of this service. Can you outline for the committee how that work is progressing?

**Ms Vassarotti:** Absolutely. As you note, additional funding was provided through the most recent budget. That was to expand the service from a five-day a week service to a seven-day a week service. The Early Morning Centre is a program that has been operating for many years. It been providing a significant service for those people who are sleeping rough and homeless or people who have in the past experienced chronic homelessness and are at risk of homelessness.

There has certainly been a real recognition that, while the work they do is fantastic, homelessness does not get to have a weekend and there are a number of clients that are not being serviced on the weekend. Again, I might ask the directorate to provide some further details about the most current progress, but certainly there were significant discussions with the service in relation to how to roll out a seven-day a week service.

Obviously, it will be a different service on the weekend from what it is on a weekday. It will focus on essential services, rather than a range of additional services that are provided during weekdays. My understanding is that it is on track to be operational from the middle of the year, but I will look to officials to see whether there are any additional updates that we can provide.

**Ms Gilding:** Only minimal, Minister; you have covered it pretty well. The Early Morning Centre are aiming to start as of 1 July. The funding includes \$50,000 in this financial year so that they can get ready, which includes recruiting staff members and making sure they have got the systems and processes in place for the Saturday and Sunday staff. There is \$250,000 across the full year, which will enable, I think, four hours on a Saturday and four hours on a Sunday.

**Ms Vassarotti:** Yes.

**Ms Gilding:** They rely on volunteers, so they also need to get ready in terms of that training and those staff.

**Ms Vassarotti:** One of the interesting things about this service is that moving from a five-day week to a seven-day week is quite a significant change. It is not just an extra two days. It means that the service is operating seven days a week. Certainly, in the discussions and the development of the model there was recognition that to deliver services on the weekend—although it is primarily a volunteer service—professional staff need to be put in place. There is some complexity and there are some costs in terms of doing seven days a week. However, in terms of the return on that investment and supporting people who are sleeping rough, it is absolutely a worthwhile investment.

**THE CHAIR:** I have a couple of follow-ups. From your initial consultations with the Early Morning Centre, do you expect that it is going to provide a service to more people, or will this mean that it is able to provide the same service to the same people but over seven days a week? I can imagine that, historically, Monday has been a pretty tricky day for the Early Morning Centre, based on what you have explained.

**Ms Vassarotti:** Again, I can look to officials in relation to some of those discussions. I have some insight into this service, having sat on the management committee, so I do understand a little about how it works. My observation is that the clientele that access the Early Morning Centre are pretty variable. There is a core group of people that are very regular. I was really interested in the early evaluations and discussions with some of those clients. Even some of those that are now housed were predominantly people that had experience of chronic homelessness, and long-term chronic homelessness, and were absolutely a core.

Given the transient nature of homelessness in the ACT, there is variability about who is actually accessing the service. Certainly, different cohorts of people come in. Different cohorts of people come in at different times of the week, depending on lifestyle and other services that might be able to be provided. In starting up the seven-day a week service there will be learnings in terms of who will be accessing the service and whether it is a very different cohort to the cohort during the week. I know that the service is really interested in tracking that, to make sure that it is a responsive service and is meeting the need.

**Ms Gilding:** I think that is right. We anticipate that it will be current users but also there will be new users. Unfortunately, we will always see new faces on the street who need these services. What we do see with the Early Morning Centre is that they provide a critical service ongoing. I guess the best description of it is belonging. Once people have formed a connection with the Early Morning Centre we see them come back again, even when they are housed, because there are those social connections. We will see a strong ebb and flow of both new faces and familiar faces. They provide services for about 50 guests a day. We will need to look at the data, and certainly the qualitative and quantitative analysis coming through will be keenly looked at.

**Ms Vassarotti:** The only other point around that is that there are seasonality issues as



well.

**Ms Gilding:** That is right.

**Ms Vassarotti:** It does tend to change a little bit, depending on seasonality.

**THE CHAIR:** My last follow-up question is this: you mentioned that this additional funding will, in part, be used to create some new jobs. How many new jobs will this new funding create?

**Ms Gilding:** Initially, our advice from the Early Morning Centre is that it will be two new jobs. The funding includes their infrastructure and supplies across the year as well. As we said before, they need to restructure their rosters to the seven-day service. There is also the increase in volunteers that are needed for the expansion of the services.

**MR PARTON:** I am on page 106 of the CSD annual report for the financial year 2019-20. Housing ACT received 1,861 applications, including 539 transfer applications. The CSD webpage also indicates that 2,764 people are currently on the waiting list and 935 are awaiting transfer. Minister, should we expect that the waiting list will continue to increase over the next 12 months?

**Ms Vassarotti:** That is a really good question, Mr Parton. We did see an increase in the waiting list, which was not unexpected, given the economic impacts of COVID-19.

**MR PARTON:** There is a crystal ball sort of aspect to it, isn't there?

**Ms Vassarotti:** Absolutely. We have reflected on some of the changes to income support. With the reduction of the COVID supplement in terms of JobSeeker, it would not be surprising if this puts further stress on low-income households. We could well see an increase in waiting lists. That is part of the reason—and certainly through the parliamentary agreement—we have looked at how we increase the stock. Certainly, the work that has been happening around the thousand properties in terms of renewal and 400 in terms of new stock is an issue. Are there other insights that the officials could give in relation to this?

**Ms Gilding:** There are multiple factors that come into play on our waiting list. Overarching, when we see a tightening in our general vacancy rates, which we have seen in the private sector, people are less able to meet their housing needs and we see that reflected on our waiting list. That said, there are also other factors around the waiting list and how often a review takes place. I am going to hand to Mr Aigner to talk about that. Sometimes that number will go up and down due to people either being housed or finding other means to satisfy their housing needs and coming off our waiting list because they have found another solution. Mr Aigner, do you want to talk about that?

**Mr Aigner:** Sure. As Ms Gilding said, we do regular reassessments of our waiting list. Our frequency on the priority list is supposed to be every 12 months, and every 18 months for our high needs and standard lists. We have had some delays in that over the last year, given that people have been working in and out of the office, and given

some of our paper-based systems. Our intent over the next year is to get back to a higher frequency of reassessments to make sure people are on the right list, whether they should be on a list at all, and to check in while they are on the list that their situation is okay and if they need any supports. As Ms Gilding said, that may move the numbers up and down over the course of the year.

**MR PARTON:** Given the pressures that particularly the minister and Ms Gilding have alluded to, in terms of the potential that these waiting lists could become greater, would it suggest that there is a high likelihood that we will end up with more people homeless in that period? Would that necessarily follow? If the pressures that you are talking about are going to increase the waiting lists, surely that means that there will be those who just cannot find a spot on the merry-go-round.

**Ms Vassarotti:** We certainly know that there will be an increase in housing stress. There are a range of implications in terms of sleeping rough and overcrowding. There are a range of responses to that housing stress. That is one of the reasons we have looked at increasing funding in the homelessness service sector. The \$2.6 million funding increase in the homelessness sector is really looking at how we can increase the capacity within that sector.

One of the useful elements of the COVID response that we have continued is this flexible funding that we have been talking about. It provides OneLink support services with more flexible ways of responding to issues when people reach out for support. Some issues are in our control and many are not, but what are the suite of responses that we have in place when people are reaching out for help? I do not know whether officials have anything more to add?

**Ms Gilding:** Just to confirm that during 2020—when we look at our specialist homelessness information platform data—whilst we had seen a trending down in the previous years, we saw that trend shift back up and we are seeing an increase in numbers and an increase in complexity of people.

**MR PARTON:** Okay.

**Ms Vassarotti:** One of the issues that we have always grappled with—and we are not alone in that—is getting a good understanding of the data. Rough sleeping is a good example of that: have we got the counting right? I recognise the work that is happening at the moment on that issue in terms of being confident in and improving our data. That means we may see an increase in the robustness of our data because we are counting properly. We need to acknowledge that better data will get us to a point where we understand the situation and are able to provide the responses.

**MR PARTON:** In closing on that line of questioning, Chair, can I just ask: with regard to those waiting lists, the average waiting time now for standard housing is 1,324 days. Does the minister consider that that is an acceptable time frame for Canberrans to be waiting to be allocated public housing?

**Ms Vassarotti:** The waiting list process tries to identify who are the people in greatest need. The data that you are talking about is on the general list, but we have the priority list and the higher needs list. Certainly, it is a long time to be on the general

services list. This is around looking at the properties that we have.

In comparison to other jurisdictions, we are dealing with a high proportion of public housing. The government recognises the need to grow stock and that is what the parliamentary and governing agreement is around. The ability to prioritise in terms of the very highest need is a way for us to ensure that the people that are in the greatest and most urgent need are not waiting the days that you are talking about. That would be my initial response. Again, I would look to officials to give additional feedback.

**Ms Gilding:** When we look at the time to house on our priority lists and the time to house within three months and compare our data over the last couple of years—I am not sure whether you have got those stats—we see that we are getting better and housing more people more quickly from that priority list within that three-month period. Have you got those numbers?

**Mr Aigner:** Yes; 99 to 100 per cent of people who are allocated housing within three months are people who are on priority or high needs lists. That is almost a doubling in two years of that three-month time frame for those high-risk groups. That is a great step forward in terms of your earlier question, Mr Parton: are we going to end up with more homelessness?

**MR PARTON:** Would you suggest, then, that the standard housing list waiting time of 1,324 days is, as much as anything else, a reflection on the failure of the private rental market or the tightness of the type of rental market? Let's go with that.

**Ms Vassarotti:** There are challenges in our rental housing market; we know that. There are very low vacancy rates, and people look at public housing as an alternative to that. We have seen over a period of decades a shifting of public housing to be allocated to people who are at particularly high need and are unable to operate within the private market. Work is happening through government, across a range of areas, in terms of looking at how we can create something that is in between a private rental market and public and social housing. Again, that sits outside my portfolio area, but certainly there is a need for us to look at different models. That is something that the government absolutely acknowledges and is working on.

**MR PARTON:** Thank you, Chair.

**MR PETTERSSON:** I have a question about the rental rebate policy and a particular clause of it: voluntarily reduced income. I will just read it for everyone's benefit:

A tenant who is a member of a union engaged in a 'strike' or other industrial action will not be granted a new or additional rebate for the period of the strike action.

Can someone provide some context for that clause?

**Ms Vassarotti:** I might look to officials on that quite specific one.

**Mr Aigner:** I will have to take that on notice.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Okay. I point to a clause higher up with regard to fluctuating income. To summarise my specific question: why is voluntarily reduced income, as stated in that clause, somehow different to the fluctuating income clause?

**Mr Aigner:** I am probably going to have to take that on notice too. My guess is that voluntarily changing income may have something to do with caring responsibilities.

**MR PETTERSSON:** I think it is probably best to take it on notice.

**Ms Gilding:** Perhaps I can make a general comment in terms of what was included in the income, particularly during COVID. All of the increased payments were not included in the calculations for rental rebates during the last year.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Wonderful. Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr Pettersson. Minister, there are many services for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, as discussed on pages 113 to 116 of the annual report. Can you talk us through what the overall coordination of these services looks like? How do they talk to each other?

**Ms Vassarotti:** In relation to specialist homelessness services, about \$25 million worth of support is provided by the ACT government and in partnership with the commonwealth government through a national agreement. Each of those services has a service agreement with the directorate. There are a range of other mechanisms in place that provide an opportunity for the coordination and integration of services.

The key one of those is a mechanism called Joint Pathways. That is led by the sector, and the chairing role is taken up by a community representative. I think that is an elected or by consensus decision that is held by the YMCA currently. It was previously held by Northside Community Service; it changes. That provides an opportunity for services to get together and look at what some of the ongoing trends are.

It is a really good opportunity for directorate officials to engage. I think an official goes to each of those meetings. There is an executive group that talks around more governance-type issues and then a broader group. It is a particularly useful mechanism, given that we have a centralised intake service, OneLink. It provides a really useful link for services to get together and talk to the centralised intake service as well. They are the key mechanisms that I am aware of. I may have missed some, so I look to officials to fill in the gaps.

**Ms Gilding:** Again, I think you have covered it very well, Minister. I think the central intake model is unique, apart from the governance mechanisms, as you have mentioned—Joint Pathways and the Joint Pathways executive. The central intake model is unique to us as a jurisdiction in that it covers our whole service system. Other jurisdictions might have regional central intake systems, but OneLink provides that for the whole jurisdiction. It means that we have a mechanism that grows in maturity in terms of how it operates and how it operates with those 28 to 30 providers who are funded. It means that we are triaging on a daily basis those who need the services of the specialist homelessness sector. If we did not have that then people

would be doing the ring-around to try and find vacancies and we would not be assured that those who need it most on any given day are actually the ones that are receiving the services.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. Has there been any analysis done or is there a plan to do any analysis of any gaps that may remain in the services?

**Ms Vassarotti:** Absolutely there are plans. We are looking at the arrangements around specialist homelessness services. Those service arrangements will be coming to an end in June 2022, so we are doing the early stages of work in terms of how we look at the service system and provide certainty to services moving forward. Part of that process is looking at the service system as a whole and where there are gaps. As officials have said, some significant work has been done on looking at the analytics and some of the issues. I know that some internal planning has been going on. Again, I might look to officials to fill in some more detail in relation to that.

**Ms Gilding:** That is a big body of work that is coming. Previously we did that gap analysis. We have seen programs for women, all women, and also asylum seekers. COVID gave us an opportunity to be innovative. The client support fund is a flexible fund; it is adaptive funding. Through that we have seen that some of our service gaps have actually been solved through the provision of services.

A particularly good example is Haven house. We know that there is a gap in the specialist homelessness services. We do not have lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer-specific accommodation or outreach. OneLink has expressed to us that it is difficult to make those referrals. It can be a barrier for folk who need those services to access specifically. Our traditional vulnerable cohorts, or our target cohorts, might be men or they might be women and children and families.

There was a need to find a particular bespoke accommodation service. By using the client support fund they have been able to address the service gap by establishing Haven house. I think they are working in partnership with the Y, and also with A Gender Agenda, to fill that gap simply through having the client support fund as a flexible funding arrangement. I think it is fantastic to see the sector being able to work together and pivot and take the resources that they have and apply them to a gap immediately and quickly—far more quickly than the other longer processes would take. We need both, but it is good to see them operating together that way.

**THE CHAIR:** Are you able to talk me through Haven house a little bit more—the where, the when, how many beds?

**Ms Gilding:** Funding comes from the client support fund, and it is transgender and gender diverse people with supported accommodation, based on a 12-month share housing model. The residents have signed leases. They have an understanding that they are housemates for the duration of the program. Haven house is not actually crisis accommodation; it aims to prepare clients potentially for the private sector housing market.

We have identified a three-bedroom property. That will be a Housing ACT property that has been head leased and is suitable for a share house. The house has two service

users at the moment and a third bedroom utilised for case management. The YWCA provides case and property management and receives cultural expertise and support through A Gender Agenda. A Gender Agenda were involved in the development of the model and have made referrals for clients for consideration. In terms of eligibility criteria, it is for 18 years plus, obviously transgender and gender diverse, and willing to share with another person. I think it is a good start and there will be learnings from that. I think that, again, we will be able to use the flexible infrastructure and funding to ensure that we are meeting the needs.

**THE CHAIR:** Assuming that a review will conclude that this pilot project has been successful—that is what I would hope, but I will not presume what the analysis will show—would you consider a specialised new dwelling? I know that CHC dwellings have semi-detached pods, if you will, around a congregated social area that may be able to accommodate more people and may be more suitable for the kind of living arrangement you have described, rather than having to retrofit a Housing ACT property. Is that something that has been considered?

**Ms Gilding:** We consider all sorts of diversity in our built form, and it does need to meet the diversity of our clients. I can give you a quick example. We have worked with Canberra Health Services on our mental health and wellbeing houses, which are, again, a bespoke design build that are four or five-bedroom properties with ensuites, plus extra living area. Depending on the needs of the particular client group, we certainly have had bespoke projects in the past, without pre-empting that it may or may not be a possibility. We will need to wait for the policy analysis and the information coming through.

**MR DAVIS:** While we are on the subject, you identify that Haven house is particularly for transgender, non-binary, intersex people. What services are currently available for the G, the L and the B in that alphabet soup acronym in terms of refuges and housing services that are specialised—if there are any? If there are not, what, if any, work has been done to identify models that might be appropriate?

**Ms Vassarotti:** It has been a really interesting time because new services have kind of popped up, but it has not had a lot of intervention by the directorate. Another one that I am aware of that has happened quite recently is a partnership between Havelock House and Meridian. They have identified a property and are looking to use that as a transitional property. They are working quite closely with ACT Housing and are looking at, once they have a person in the transitional property, the pathways out.

I think it is a really good example of what can happen when we identify a need. Prior to any structural work taking place, services came together and identified a need, identified an opportunity and worked nimbly to put everything together. I think we would never want to get in the way of that work happening. It has given some insight into the fact that when there is a bit more flexibility and an authorising environment, some of these things can happen. That is another example of one that I know that has happened quite recently. I do not know if there are others.

**Ms Gilding:** Not off the top of my head. In terms of the general funding, all of our services provide support for all people. What we are hearing is that there are barriers and there is a need for services. People are not precluded from those services across

the \$25 million, but at the same time we know we can improve.

**Ms Vassarotti:** I would say further that in terms of “not precluded”, there is an obligation on services to be non-discriminatory. There are particular services—gender services, for instance—that might have some specific criteria around safety and therapeutic approaches, but certainly there is an obligation through service agreements around non-discriminatory practice. With family day services, we would expect that they would be providing services to families in all their diversity. I know that there has also been work done by services in terms of ensuring that practices are appropriate and welcoming of tenants, independent of the experiences that they come with.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**MRS KIKKERT:** I refer to page 51 of budget statements G, which sets out the accountability indicators for Housing ACT. Does Housing ACT benchmark its performance against other public housing providers?

**Ms Vassarotti:** I might look to officials in terms of a benchmarking exercise. Through programs or mechanisms like the *Report on Government Services*, that is absolutely a benchmarking exercise. It looks at housing authorities and benchmarks us across those. There are some challenges with benchmarking because the way that we manage services can look a little bit different, and there are specific reasons for that. I look to officials in relation to that.

**Ms Gilding:** That is correct. Many of these accountability indicators are based on the ROGS formulas and the ROGS data. I could go down the whole list and it is probably by exclusion more than anything in terms of the satisfaction surveys. They are very much connected with ROGS and national collections.

**MR PARTON:** Does Housing ACT benchmark its performance—never mind against other public housing—against community housing providers, or is that not really possible?

**Ms Vassarotti:** It is really comparing different things. I know community housing providers are increasingly using tools that are used across the sector in relation to that.

**MR PARTON:** Yes.

**Ms Vassarotti:** Different criteria sometimes are at play. Ms Gilding, do you have any additional information?

**MR PARTON:** I know we are going to run out of time here. The specific question that I have got at the end of this is: if subjected to the same audits and standards as community housing providers—this is a serious question—would Housing ACT actually qualify as a community housing provider or would Housing ACT not make the mark, not meet those standards?

**Ms Gilding:** I would have to say that we would absolutely strive to meet those standards as a social model, a social landlord, and in fact strive to continuously

improve and set the standard for industry.

**MR PARTON:** But, as things stand at the moment, there is a high likelihood that you would not actually—

**Ms Gilding:** No; I disagree. I would also add that Housing ACT is often the landlord of last resort. If we were to benchmark then I would have to say we would also need to benchmark on the complexity and the vulnerability of the clients that we house.

**Ms Vassarotti:** I think this goes back to the fact that we are really comparing different things. The proportion of social housing clients in a public housing authority compared to community housing that has a mix of affordable and social housing could be vastly different. There might be specific criteria that certain community housing providers have in relation to tenants because of their particular purpose or mission. I think we are comparing different things and it is difficult.

**Ms Gilding:** I agree.

**MR PARTON:** Thank you.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you. It being 11.30, we will wrap up there. Thank you, Minister; thank you, officials. I remind everybody that if you have taken any questions on notice, please get those through to the committee secretary.

**Short suspension.**



Appearances:

Davidson, Ms Emma, Assistant Minister for Families and Community Services,  
Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health and Minister for Mental Health

Community Services Directorate

Wood, Ms Jo, Director-General

Sabellico, Ms Anne-Maree, Deputy Director-General

Pappas, Ms Helen, Executive Group Manager, Children, Youth and Families

Brendas, Ms Tina, Executive Branch Manager, Bimberi Residential Services

Summerrell, Mrs Jessica, Executive Branch Manager, Inclusion and Participation

**THE CHAIR:** I will go to Mr Pettersson for the first question.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Thank you. I have some questions about Bimberi. Can you update the committee on what actions have been taken since the riot in 2019 to make Bimberi a safe place for staff?

**Ms Davidson:** I can. I will ask Jo to talk about the detail of that. I know that there has been a lot of work happening to make sure that it is safe for staff, as well as for the young people that are in our care there.

**Ms Wood:** Immediately in response to that incident, work was undertaken and Mr Peter Muir, who has expertise in youth justice, was engaged to undertake a review. He did quite an extensive review and made a number of recommendations that go to a range of issues from the physical infrastructure of the Bimberi facility through to training of staff and therapeutic supports for young people. We have been progressively working to implement all of those recommendations. Some of those recommendations required additional funding and the government has provided additional funding to support them. I can hand over to Ms Brendas, who can go through that work in a bit more detail.

**Ms Brendas:** I acknowledge the privilege statement.

**THE CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Ms Brendas:** Further to the response from Jo, from the recommendations of the Muir review we have had a series of infrastructure upgrades. There were positions—a full-time principal practitioner position, a training officer, a work health and safety officer and an intelligence and classifications officer—appointed to Bimberi as part of the review and the upgrades.

**Ms Wood:** The principal practitioner role, in particular, is about improving the therapeutic supports for young people in Bimberi. We recognise that the safety of staff and the likelihood of major incidents are vastly improved if we do the really good therapeutic work with young people. That is bringing a new level of expertise into Bimberi, which is supporting young people and is part of the proactive, preventative response to further incidents.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Did the review make any recommendations about personal protective equipment?

**Ms Brendas:** Yes, it did. We had personal protective equipment which was quite outdated. The review went to upgrading our personal protective equipment, which we have done. We bought a whole heap of new shields, helmets and safety vests, which we have.

**MR PETTERSSON:** What made the old equipment unsuitable?

**Ms Brendas:** Just the change in the standards around PPE. The equipment that we had was from when Bimberi was first opened, so it was over 11 years old. We were upgrading it from that.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Right.

**Ms Wood:** We always ensure that our equipment is meeting the relevant standards. The report from Mr Muir and the recommendations coincided with a shift in the Australian standards, so that was an opportunity to upgrade at that point in time.

**MR PETTERSSON:** In layman's terms, is there a way to describe the difference between the old PPE and the new PPE?

**Ms Brendas:** In layman's terms? It would probably be best to take that on notice because I may not be the best person to provide the information. I can get that back to you on notice.

**Ms Wood:** We can take that on notice. It will be quite a technical answer.

**Ms Brendas:** It is; it is all technical.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Is the old PPE stab, blunt force trauma and ballistics rated?

**Ms Brendas:** I will have to take that on notice, sorry. I cannot answer that confidently.

**Ms Davidson:** Jo was talking earlier about the work that the principal practitioner does. It means that we should see fewer incidents that result in that kind of incident in the first place. That is a much better way of working with young people, to rehabilitate and ensure that everyone is safer.

**MR PETTERSSON:** I completely understand what you are saying. I think it is a very salient point. If you are taking things on notice, in terms of the recommended equipment, are they stab, blunt force trauma or ballistics rated? That would be good to know. I guess a supplementary to this is: what use-of-force training is provided to staff?

**Ms Wood:** We can take that specific question on notice in relation to the PPE. Ms Brendas, can you speak to the training? There is quite an extensive range of training provided to staff in Bimberi for the work that they do with young people.

**Ms Brendas:** There is a seven-week induction program that is offered to all new staff at Bimberi justice centre, which covers our policies and procedures, trauma-informed practice, working with vulnerable young people, as well as responding to critical situations. A proportion of that is use-of-force training.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Have there been any changes to use-of-force training?

**Ms Brendas:** At the moment it is still the same training. We provide a staff refresher on that training. We are working closely with our colleagues in other jurisdictions around the use-of-force training. Our training we currently receive from New South Wales, and it is adapted to work within our policies and procedures. We are working closely with New South Wales around that. Unfortunately, due to COVID we have not been able to progress that as much as we would like, but now with the easing of some of the restrictions we will be working closely—

**MR PETTERSSON:** They get an induction; how often is the refresher training?

**Ms Brendas:** Annually.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Annually.

**Ms Brendas:** Staff are provided a refresher in responding to critical situations and use of force annually.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Is the training still the same as previously or have there been any changes to the training?

**Ms Brendas:** They are the same as previously.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Were there any recommendations in relation to that in the review?

**Ms Brendas:** Not that I can think of, off the top of my head, but I can go back and have a look.

**Ms Wood:** We will check that.

**MR PETTERSSON:** That is all. Thank you.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Just a follow-up question on that: during the peak of the most recent lockdowns at Bimberi I received distressing phone calls from members of the public. They were concerned about the mental health of the young people in their cells for quite a long period of time. What additional resources have helped the young people in their cells during lockdown?

**Ms Brendas:** Unfortunately, we have had to have lockdowns and that was from the major incident and the flow-on from that incident, as well as the bushfires and COVID. So we have seen an increase in the last financial year around lockdowns. It is noted, Mrs Kikkert. During lockdowns, we try and maximise the young person's access to being outside of their rooms, but while they are in their rooms for extended

periods of time they have reading materials, they have access to the education materials and they have their television. We have also been providing them colouring-in books and other things of interest that they can access in their rooms while they have been secured.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Thank you.

**Ms Brendas:** With regard to their mental health, Forensic Mental Health Services provide a service to all the young people at Bimberi Youth Justice Centre, as well as our principal practitioner. There is Community Services, and Relationships Australia work with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Gugan and Winnunga are also available and come in to work with the young people in the centre.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Thank you. On notice, can you please provide a report of staffing levels at Bimberi from May 2019 to January this year?

**Ms Wood:** Yes, Mrs Kikkert. We can take that on notice.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Thank you. Thank you, Chair.

**THE CHAIR:** Given the small number of young people that are living in Bimberi currently, would other justice strategies maintain a closer connection to the community for these young people?

**Ms Davidson:** Yes, I will ask Jo to talk more about that.

**Ms Wood:** One of the challenges but also the good things about the work under the youth justice blueprint in the ACT has been that we find ourselves over time with fewer young people in detention, which is obviously where we want to be. It is a question for the courts. When young people are coming to the justice system the court makes a determination about whether detention or some kind of community justice order is the appropriate response. There is a commitment from the government to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility, so that would see, for that younger end of the people who may be in Bimberi, alternative options.

We know there is a range of work to do and a range of work that is already happening with services that support young people directly and support families, that try to ensure young people stay connected to family and schooling and have supports that reduce the kind of risk-taking behaviour that may see them encounter the justice system. So a restorative therapeutic approach across all the services that touches young people is our aspiration. A range of work has been done on that and there will continue to need to be a range of work.

**Ms Davidson:** That is certainly consistent with what I saw when I was at Bimberi recently. A very small number of young people were in Bimberi at the time and it meant that the staff were all able to take the opportunity to do some additional training. They were all talking about wanting to do more rehabilitative work with young people and really committed to supporting those young people to learn a lot of skills and improve their situation while they have the opportunity.

**MR PETTERSSON:** In terms of the work to improve CCTV at Bimberi, that project is anticipated to be finished in 2021. Is that work underway or completed?

**Ms Brendas:** It is almost completed. A series of additional cameras have been added to the centre, as well as upgrades to the cameras. It is an 11-year-old facility and software ages out, so we have had to upgrade our software as well as adding over a hundred additional cameras to the site.

**MRS KIKKERT:** The Official Visitors' annual report, at page 6, notes a couple of instances recently where young people are stepping down from Bimberi and there has not been sufficient planning for their exit. Who is responsible for planning the young person's transition from Bimberi to the community? Do any community organisations support a young person's transition from Bimberi to the community?

**Ms Pappas:** Our child protection system and our youth justice system is integrated, so we have one case worker that attends to the entirety of that young person's circumstance. In other jurisdictions you have your child protection worker and your youth justice worker. What that means for the ACT is that we have a single case management approach, so regardless of where the young person is their case worker follows them. The case worker works with families and with young people to do the planning that needs to happen to help young people transition, in this circumstance, out of Bimberi. They do that in partnership with the services and the supports that are in Bimberi and looking for the best option for those young people, whether that be returning home or into independent living or some other arrangement that that young person wants to engage with.

It is an iterative process; it does not always go to plan. I think we were saying last time I was here that it requires quite good engagement from young people to talk about what they want to achieve, how they want to achieve that and who they want to help them do that work. The youth workers and the child protection workers that work with those young people are focused on making sure that planning happens in the best possible way but acknowledging that circumstances change and young people engage or disengage depending on where they are up to.

All efforts are made to do that planning as much as possible and as early as possible with the information available to us. But to take the OV's point, there is no doubt there is some work we could do to try and think of different strategies and different ways we might be able to reach those young people who are not wanting to engage as much in that planning process.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Do you keep data on how many kids are not actually engaging with CYPS?

**Ms Pappas:** No, we do not. It is not a finite decision—kids fluctuate backwards and forwards. We have really low numbers in Canberra, particularly kids in Bimberi. The effort is to find the person that that young person is most likely going to engage with. We have recently established a program with Ozchild, for example, the youth justice program. That works with young people and their families to minimise their offending behaviour. So maybe it is the functional family therapy worker or the worker at the PCYC, or a worker at Gugan. The strategy is to find the person who that young

person feels most comfortable to do that work with, and that will be different for different people

**MRS KIKKERT:** To do the case manager work?

**Ms Pappas:** Yes, or to have the conversations, to support young people to have those conversations, to support young people to implement what they want to achieve after they are released.

**MRS KIKKERT:** You are currently doing that?

**Ms Pappas:** Yes, different iterations, depending on the young people. There is not any one person that does this with young people; it is really spread across those services that are either in Bimberi or in the community or that the young people identify themselves. It could be somebody in the school system. It is about being able to have those conversations early enough and regularly enough for young people to be able to identify who they are.

**MRS KIKKERT:** But I understand that it is the case manager from CYPS that oversees those conversations.

**Ms Pappas:** That is right.

**MRS KIKKERT:** I have spoken to a few young people and found that, because of their background and experiences with CYPS, they do not trust anybody working within CYPS. Is it possible that they do not want to engage with CYPS based on that, and have you thought about passing on the responsibility of being a case manager to someone else whom they do trust?

**Ms Pappas:** Community providers can do some of that work through the Children and Youth Family Support program. They are contracted to do some work with young people in the community, so that could be an option. The functional family therapy youth justice program is another option. There could be the school counsellor or a particular teacher. I am not saying they would do that case work on their own, but the CYPS worker can sit in the background. Through the use of care team meetings and family group conferencing and all the mechanisms that help families engage in decision-making for young people, the child protection worker does not have to be front and centre. They can be sitting in the background and still work to support those people that have that relationship with these young people.

**MRS KIKKERT:** I was speaking to a young person who had just left Bimberi and she was outside Coles collecting money. She said, "I've just left Bimberi and I have nowhere else to go." That makes me wonder what support they actually have when they do not want to engage. You mentioned all of the services, yet they are not there to support her.

**Ms Davidson:** I think this is a good example of why we needed to have programs like the functional family therapy pilot up and running. There are young people in the ACT who have a lot of other complexities in their life and for whom a more integrated response that looks at housing, family support, mental health and all those

things is really important. We are looking at ways that we can provide those supports, and that is why we are doing this.

**Ms Pappas:** The sustainable approach with young people is being available and being ready to respond when young people are ready to engage. Sometimes that can take weeks, sometimes it can take months and sometimes it can take longer than that. It is about the service system being ready to respond when young people are ready to engage in issues of concern to them at the time.

**MRS KIKKERT:** When does the transition begin for the young person in Bimberi? Does it start as soon as they exit Bimberi or is it beneficial for them to start several weeks or months before they exit Bimberi? Do those conversations about case managers and so on happen while they are in Bimberi, rather than having them later on when they are already lost?

**Ms Pappas:** The transition planning starts the day the young person enters Bimberi. For some young people that is longer than for others. They are decisions the courts make around how long kids stay in Bimberi. But certainly the day a young person lands is the day the Bimberi team start to have those conversations. They may not be known to the child protection system; they might be known to others. We do not want to force or unintentionally drag young people into the statutory system, but the day those kids land into Bimberi the Bimberi team start their planning and having their conversations about what will happen to that young person, with the young person, their family and their support network.

**MRS KIKKERT:** So regardless of whether they are known to child protection before they enter Bimberi, after they exit it is all about CYPS being their case manager?

**Ms Pappas:** It depends on the order the courts make.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Does there have to be an order from the court for them to have a case manager?

**Ms Pappas:** If the courts order supervision, CYPS are required to provide supervision of that young person. If the courts do not order supervision, those young people can access any supports necessary for them outside of the CYPS system.

**MRS KIKKERT:** So a kid that is in Bimberi may not have a court order that says you must be supervised after Bimberi?

**Ms Pappas:** Again, that is a matter for the courts. The courts will make their determination about that, depending on the evidence before them. They make those orders and the system then falls behind those young people. So if they do not have a community youth justice order with supervision then the Bimberi staff can start connecting those young people to other services in the community, certainly drawing on the advice and information of the CYPS system.

**MRS KIKKERT:** But they do not have a case manager?

**Ms Pappas:** But a lot of those young people are still really connected to their families

and their families are really involved in the lives of those young people. They are certainly not left, but the system needs to respond to the requirements set out in court orders.

**MRS KIKKERT:** But on the example of that young girl I met outside the shops, let's assume she did not have a court order. She will be left without any support?

**Ms Pappas:** No, people are still able to access support.

**MRS KIKKERT:** But she does not have a case manager.

**Ms Pappas:** You do not have to have a court order to have support in the community. Any of those young people can still access support without a court order; it is about the type of support. If you have a court order with supervision you are likely to have a CYPS worker that manages and coordinates community support. If you do not have an order with supervision you can still access the community support in the same way; it is just a different pathway.

**MRS KIKKERT:** But if you are disengaged with society and with the community, there is no-one else to encourage you and help you to get in touch with those services, whereas if you have the court order you have CYPS to help you out.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Do we have a full contingent of staff at Bimberi at the moment?

**Ms Pappas:** There have been concerted efforts and we have regular recruitment processes underway. I understand we have just got some new staff who have started their mentoring and are on shift shadowing of old staff. Nine new staff have just landed, but I will ask Tina to talk about the levels of staffing. The recruitment processes are regular. They take a long time because we want to get the right people with the right characteristics and the right motivation to be working in Bimberi. The training has to be completed in order for the staff to be able to discharge their responsibilities when they are working with young people.

**Ms Brendas:** We have 74 FTE at Bimberi Youth Justice Centre, and that is a range of operational and non-operational positions. As Helen mentioned, we have the nine youth worker recruits that are currently completing their seven-week induction process. We have also just gone out for a further youth worker recruitment. Because of the nature of the work, we are always planning for people to take leave and people acting up and a range of things, so we need a casual pool. We are going back out to replenish our casual pool and we have a recruitment process at the moment. Our workforce strategy is to run at least two recruitments for youth workers a year. We would never try not to increase our youth workers.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Are the 74 FTE the current staffing or is that the full cohort?

**Ms Brendas:** That is the full cohort. That is including me, the others in the management team, the principal prac that we spoke about, the program services manager, the sport and rec officer, the cooks, the facilitators, the youth workers, our work health and safety officer, our training officer and all our supports.



**MR PETTERSSON:** So there are 74 people currently employed. Are there vacancies on top of that?

**Ms Brendas:** I would have to take that on notice. We have 74 nominal positions and that is not including our casual pool. But I will take that on notice and provide exact figures.

**THE CHAIR:** My question is on veterans and the veterans policy. Minister, it has been put to me that there is the perception that the veterans policy, and veterans funding more specifically, comes from the commonwealth. What is the value of having an ACT-based response to veterans issues?

**Ms Davidson:** We have a range of programs in the ACT to support veterans. While I understand there are a lot of things that are going on federally, we have around 26,000 veterans in the ACT and so we need to do a lot of work to make sure those veterans are able to access things like health, including mental health services, employment as they are leaving service and, if they are posting in, that their partner is able to find employment while they are here. I will pass to Jo to talk more about our veterans programs.

**Ms Wood:** For the next layer of detail I will ask Mrs Summerrell to step in, but one of the really important initiatives that is helping shape how we respond to veterans in the ACT is the ministerial council supporting veterans and their families. That is a very active group that has been very helpful in shaping the work we are doing with the veteran community and ensuring it is targeted at the right needs.

**Mrs Summerrell:** I acknowledge the privilege statement. As the minister said, we have a very large veteran population in the ACT—26,000 equates to about one in six or one in eight people in the ACT who are veterans, either current serving or former serving. So it is really important to us that we support them and that we understand the specifics of their needs locally. As Ms Wood mentioned, we have the ministerial advisory council on veterans and families, and a really important component to how we support veterans is recognising the role their families play. It does not necessarily mean spouses; it just means families more broadly, who play an enormous part in how our veterans are supported during and after service.

We know the things that are important to our veteran community locally relate to transitions from the Australian Defence Force into civilian life. We work really closely with the ministerial advisory council to support that work. We know it is really important to veterans that their skills are recognised more broadly outside the Australian Defence Force and for ongoing employment outside the ADF.

Everyone is aware of the mental health and wellbeing components of supporting our veterans, and that is another really key component of how our ministerial advisory council supports veterans locally. The council is made up of 12 people who have a range of skills and experience to provide advice. They have four key themes they particularly focus on: education and communication, consultation and engagement, recognition, commemoration and heritage, and support to veterans and their families. We have seen through DVA an increased focus on that family support.

The council is a very high-functioning council led by Brigadier Alison Creagh, who has formed a number of working groups to guide the work of the ministerial advisory council over their term. Those working groups have particular focuses on the veterans and families expo. The working group on that topic explores options of how we can hold families and veterans expos in Canberra, similar to what we see in the seniors expo space, which is about allowing the community to connect with veterans and see the value and the work that they do.

The veteran support working group looks at options or pilot programs that link younger and older veterans together, which is another really important piece of work. The veterans transitions working group goes to those issues of transitions I mentioned before. It is great to be able to work to support our veteran community, and I know the council members are all very passionate about the work that they do.

**THE CHAIR:** What are some of the key initiatives you are driving, as veterans minister, for the coming year?

**Ms Davidson:** Having taken on the advice I received from the ministerial advisory council, and keeping in mind the interactions between different portfolios I have responsibility for, a lot of good work can be done in making sure veterans are able to access the appropriate health services they need at the right time, as well as the employment services issues.

With health services issues, for example, there is a mix of veterans in the Canberra community who might have a white card or a gold card for accessing health services, and trying to find a health services provider who will accept those cards is sometimes challenging. We have to make sure that people who do not have those cards can still access the right health services for their specific needs when those times come up. That is a particular challenge we will need to work on.

**THE CHAIR:** You mentioned, Mrs Summerrell, the veterans plan. Can someone articulate how that will be funded and if there is funding for a position within the public service to implement that plan?

**Ms Wood:** As we have talked about, lot of work has been done with the veterans ministerial advisory council on the priorities, and there are a range of ways those priorities can go forward. Some of them are well underway. In addition to being supported by CSD in the veterans portfolio, the minister is also supported by the Chief Minister's directorate, which leads on employment opportunities for veterans in the public service. There are a range of ways that that work can happen through existing mechanisms. There is ongoing work with that advisory council to set future priorities. Depending on what those future priorities are, that may result in a proposal to government for funding for a specific initiative or specific roles. If we reached that point, that would need to be considered in our budget process.

**THE CHAIR:** I saw online an announcement about funding that has been made available. Do you mind talking us through that and what other practical supports we provide specifically to veterans and seniors as well?

**Ms Davidson:** Sounds like the veterans grants program that you might have heard about recently in the media?

**THE CHAIR:** It could be.

**Ms Davidson:** I can pass to Jo or Jessica to talk in more detail about the numbers in that grant program and who those grants went to. But this is something that is really helpful for the community in terms of providing funding to veterans groups who are able to use that to build connections in the community and to support their members.

The veterans community in the ACT is incredibly diverse across age ranges, their experience in service, the things they are looking to focus on and the objectives they want to achieve within the community. Being able to provide financial support to a wide range of community groups is reflective of that diversity in our community and really helps them to do their work.

**Mrs Summerrell:** We run two grant programs: the seniors grants program and the veterans grants program. They are two separate grant programs. In relation to the seniors grants program, a total of \$80,000 was available in that grant round. We run two grant rounds and it is split into \$70,000 in the first grant round and \$10,000 in the second round. We received a total of 31 grant applications—20 in the main round and 11 in the second round.

The grants that we administer through that program tend to go to organisations that place a particular emphasis on programs that address elder abuse, meeting the diverse needs of seniors, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander seniors as well as seniors from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

In the particular round we are reporting on we saw funding go to seniors social table tennis, an LGBTIQ elders dance program, and an elder abuse awareness campaign, and some healthy eating workshops for seniors. That was a successful grant round. Our grants are well subscribed and the community looks forward to the opportunity to apply for grants in those rounds.

**THE CHAIR:** You said \$80,000 in total. What was the total amount asked for?

**Mrs Summerrell:** I would have to take that question on notice. I do not have that detail in front of me.

**THE CHAIR:** I am curious about the difference between what the community is asking for and what we are allocating.

**Mrs Summerrell:** Yes, that is fine. In relation to the veterans grant round, similarly, it is an \$80,000 grant round split into two rounds of \$70,000 and \$10,000. We had five applications in the first round and 10 applications in the second round and we funded all 15 applications in the veterans round. Some of the organisations we supported were for garden sculpturing, some mental health training, a mountain bike program which was pretty cool, and a social art platform.

**THE CHAIR:** So the entire \$80,000 we allocated to the program was divvied up

between those 15 successful applicants?

**Mrs Summerrell:** The expended amount for that grant round was \$79,613.

**MRS KIKKERT:** My question is based on the community based orders. The 2020-21 *Report on Government Services* shows the ACT has the nation's lowest proportion of young people successfully completing community based orders. Most troubling is that the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the ACT who successfully completed these orders has been in decline for the past five years: in 2015-16, 81.8 per cent; in 2018-19, 62.9 per cent; and in 2019-20 the number crashed to only 15.9 per cent. This is in stark contrast to Australia as a whole, where the proportion of First Nations young people successfully completing community based orders has increased every single year over the same five-year period.

This is not only the worst result in Australia but is only one-quarter of the second lowest jurisdiction's outcome, behind Western Australia. Why is the government going backwards on this whilst the rest of Australia is improving, and what specifically happened in 2019-20 to result in five out of six Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people failing to successfully complete their community based orders?

**Ms Davidson:** I will pass to Helen to answer that in more detail, but I want to make a couple of quick points. Because we are talking about very low individual numbers of young people in the youth justice system in the ACT that can have a really big impact on percentages, so we have to use a little bit of caution and read those numbers carefully. The other thing is that the functional family therapy program will be working with young people on community, and that also includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. I will hand over to Helen to talk in more detail about the 2019-20 results for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

**Ms Pappas:** Can I check where that data is from?

**MRS KIKKERT:** The 2020-21 ROGS report.

**Ms Pappas:** I am probably going to have to take that on notice. What I will say is that the number of kids are on community based orders is decreasing in terms of a population. As the minister was saying, the kids who are not completing are on the spectrum of being more complicated and recidivist in terms of their behaviour.

**MRS KIKKERT:** So they are not completing their community based orders.

**Ms Pappas:** Yes, and they are attracting new orders over the course of the 12 months. But the overall population of young people on community based orders is decreasing and has been since the implementation of the blueprint for youth justice.

As we spoke about earlier, some of the diversionary efforts in terms of how police are interacting with young people, how courts are making their decisions about the types of orders that they are placing on young people, and then the work that CYPS, Bimberi, and community organisations are doing is seeing a sustained decrease in the

numbers of community based orders. But I will have to come back to you in terms of the ones who are not completing.

**MRS KIKKERT:** I have it that there are 44 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids with community based orders—I do not see that as a low number at all—and only seven have successfully completed. Are my numbers incorrect? That is from 2019-20—44 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids on community based orders with only seven succeeding.

**Ms Pappas:** I will need to come back to you because I think it depends on the data question you are asking. The ROGS data compared to the ACT data can be different depending on the measure. So I will need to check what ROGS uses and come back to you on notice.

**MRS KIKKERT:** I think they would count by heads—how many people would be on them. It says 44.

**Ms Pappas:** I do not know the elements; they do not provide the data. The elements of ROGS sometimes can be different in terms of how they count that data.

**MRS KIKKERT:** How else would they count?

**Ms Pappas:** I cannot answer that question, Mrs Kikkert. I will need to take that on notice.

**Ms Sabellico:** It is best for us to take the question away. There are a few component parts of the data. I know the last piece of data you talked about was 44 and seven, but we will need—

**MRS KIKKERT:** Forty-four kids, not a percentage. I gave you the percentage earlier—it has crashed from 81.8 per cent in 2015 down to 15.9 per cent in 2019-20. That means only seven of 44 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people successfully completed their community based orders in 2019-20. What went wrong?

**Ms Sabellico:** We need to look at the data elements and look at what was happening at that time in the context of the circumstances to be able to provide you with some response to that. The data in and of itself only tells you one part—we need to look at other information that might be available to appropriately answer that question. So we are happy to take it on notice.

**MRS KIKKERT:** What support do you offer kids who have community based orders?

**Ms Wood:** This goes back to some of the things Ms Pappas was speaking about earlier.

**THE CHAIR:** Yes, if memory serves, that question was answered a little while ago.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Yes, but I want to know, if only seven successfully completed it, what happened to the rest of them? You say you are offering the support but in reality

the majority of them are falling behind and breaching court orders. Are they going back to court to receive a new community based order or are they going to Bimberi?

**Ms Pappas:** I cannot go to the data that you are referring to. We will take that on notice. I can talk about what we talked about earlier—the system’s response generally in terms of young people who are on community based orders, around accessing support, functional family therapy, community providers like Gugan, the PCYC, schools, and all of those supports and services.

**MRS KIKKERT:** But most of these kids are not finishing their community based orders. So what happens to them?

**Ms Pappas:** Sometimes kids would be breached for not completing their orders: say they have reoffended or there has been a situation that means they go back before the courts. Police would ordinarily do that and the courts make their decisions about what they do. Some kids will end up back on other community based orders with different reasonable directions, so courts make decisions around that. Depending on the circumstances of a breach, some kids might find themselves in Bimberi and being dealt with differently. The response depends on the circumstances of those individual young people you are talking about.

**MRS KIKKERT:** Is the Narrabundah house just available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young men?

**Ms Pappas:** Yes, for young men aged 15 to 18 years. We use Narrabundah as a diversionary bed. When Aboriginal young men are picked up by police or if there is a circumstance which means they are unsafe they can come into Narrabundah until a plan can be developed. For some young men transitioning out of Bimberi, Narrabundah is a pathway for those young people into full support.

**MRS KIKKERT:** The Official Visitor said that is not operational.

**Ms Pappas:** Narrabundah was damaged during the hailstorm and had to be shut down because it was not safe. But it is up and running now and is taking referrals. We have staff and young people in that home.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Could I get an update on the Canberra Relief Network?

**Ms Wood:** I will invite Mrs Summerrell to speak to that.

**Ms Davidson:** That program is a really good example of community organisations and government working together to try and meet community needs in a very rapidly changing situation. One of the things that I am looking forward to coming out of the work that was done on the Canberra Relief Network is some longer term work on food security in the ACT for people who are living on very low incomes, and how we can better coordinate and work together to make sure that that is happening.

**Mrs Summerrell:** The Canberra Relief Network has been operational since March 2020, with the first hamper going out on 1 April 2020. It operates out of Exhibition Park in Mitchell, in one of the large warehouses there. As the minister said, it has

been an incredible experience of seeing a collaborative response to a community need.

It is important to remember that when it was established it was at the peak of our food insecurity in the ACT. We literally had shelves that were bare in supermarkets. Even though we have extended beyond that time, when it was established it was when people logistically could not access anything in supermarkets.

In order to run the CRN, we developed a partnership with Woolworths to provide the stock. That has been a really great partnership that we have had with them to provide consistent stock into the warehouse, which they do via their route from Victoria through to Sydney. It has been very generous of them.

We also have the Connect Centre which operates as part of the CRN. That is where we receive the incoming and outgoing calls from community members in need. One of the great things around the Connect Centre is that it is something that has been provided by our community partners and community organisations. It provides that wraparound support for people who ring in and declare that they need some help. It is a first point of contact for people. They get to speak to highly trained individuals who take that phone call and maybe identify whether there are other aspects of that person's life that they need additional assistance with, which has been really great.

I have some updated figures from the annual report which I thought you might be interested in. As at 29 January, more than 2,800 households have received the support of the CRN. We have a range of hampers that are available through the CRN. There is a standard hamper—the standard food items like flour, pasta, pasta sauce, long-life milk, rice, and meal kits like taco kits. We have provided 11,806 standard hampers. We also provide gluten-free hampers, which are designed to sustain a family and for them to be able to cook and feed their family with the contents of that hamper box. We have provided 537 of those hampers.

We also provide hygiene hampers. We have received incredible feedback from the community on these. These contain dishwashing soap, shampoos, conditioners and body soaps—items that are usually quite a lot more expensive for people to purchase. When you are comparing, “This is the money I have for the week, and I can either buy food or I can buy soap,” often it is those hygiene items that get missed. We have provided 3,274 hygiene hampers. We ask that question when people call through—whether they need more than just food. We have female hygiene hampers as well, which is particularly for female hygiene products. They are available to anybody who requests them. We have provided 1,411 of those hampers.

We also provide baby hampers, which is another area on which we have received significant feedback from the community. Again, those baby items are very expensive and they are not always accessible. That includes baby wipes, nappies and a whole range of things. We have provided 1,045 of those hampers as at 29 January.

In collaboration with Nutrition ACT, we had a cooking demonstration. They developed a cookbook, to make sure that the products we were providing in the hampers were of nutritional value and that families could easily feel comfortable with cooking with the products. A lot of families who received hampers disclosed to us that cooking was not something that came naturally to them. We provided some really

easy meals, using things like two-minute noodles, and made them really nutritious. Nutrition ACT did that as a collaborative piece with us.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Do you have some measure of current demand?

**Mrs Summerrell:** We normally see—and I can get exact figures for you—around 250 hampers go out a week. That is the normal standard. Over Christmas and the peak period, leading up to Christmas and around Christmas, that increased to around 250 hampers a day. We saw a significant increase at that time. It is not unusual in the food relief space that people have that additional need over Christmas. Certainly, that was very high.

Demand has gone down over the last four or so weeks. I understand that that has been reflected in other parts of the sector as well. I am not 100 per cent sure why that is the case. We are at around 100 hampers a week at this stage. That could just be reflective of the fact that people are back at school and it is not school holidays; families are not feeding kids as many meals at home, potentially. It may be an indication of what is happening in our workforce and society.

We are absolutely ready to cope with demand again, if it increases, or when it increases. We have an amazing volunteer base that supports the production of the hampers. They pack the hampers. It is an incredible vibe out there, when you are out there on a volunteer day. Everyone is incredibly committed. The fact that you are actually doing something tangible, packing something into a box that you know is going to be opened by a family in need, is an incredible thing. We get amazing feedback from our volunteers about the impact on them personally of being able to give back to our community.

**THE CHAIR:** An awesome note to end on, Mrs Summerrell. Thank you very much. On behalf of the committee I would like to thank ministers and officials that have appeared throughout the day. If witnesses have taken any questions on notice today, can you please get those answers to the committee support office within five working days of the receipt of the proof *Hansard*. If members want to lodge questions on notice, they need to get them to our committee secretary within five working days, which is close of business on Thursday, 11 March. The hearing is now adjourned.

**The committee adjourned at 12.32 pm.**