



Debates

WEEKLY HANSARD

Legislative Assembly for the ACT

TENTH ASSEMBLY

24 NOVEMBER 2021

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MADAM SPEAKER (Ms Burch) (10.01): Members:

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

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

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

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

Leave of absence

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

That leave of absence be granted to Ms Lee, Ms Berry and Dr Paterson for today for personal reasons.

Education and Community Inclusion—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi) (10.02): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion. At its private meeting on 16 November 2021, the committee discussed the inquiry into racial vilification referred to it by the Assembly on 11 November 2021.

The committee's inquiry and reporting will investigate the prevalence of incidents of vilification and threats of physical violence in the territory, based on racial, linguistic, ethnic or religious background and status as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person, and the effectiveness of mechanisms for reporting such incidents. The committee intends to hold some of its hearings out in the community for this inquiry, to enhance its reach and accessibility.

The committee's terms of reference for the inquiry are available online. Submissions for the inquiry opened on Monday, 22 November 2021 and will close on 31 January 2022. Hearings for this inquiry will be conducted across February, March and April next year. The committee will report to the Assembly before 30 September 2022.

Public Accounts—Standing Committee Statement by chair

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (10.03): Pursuant to standing order 246A, I wish to make a statement on behalf of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts relating to

statutory appointments in accordance with continuing resolution 5A. I inform the Assembly that during the period 1 January 2021 to 30 June 2021 the standing committee and its equivalent committee in the Ninth Assembly considered no statutory appointments.

Appropriation Bill 2021-2022

[Cognate bill:

Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2021-2022

Cognate papers:

Standing Committee Reports on Appropriation Bill 2021-2022 and
Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2021-2022]

Detail stage

Schedule 1—Appropriations—Proposed expenditure.

Debate resumed from 23 November 2021.

Part 1.6—Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate—Proposed expenditure.

MADAM SPEAKER: Members, I remind you all that in debating the order of the day No 1, executive business, you may also address remarks to executive business order of the day No 2. The question before us is that the proposed expenditure for the Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate, part 1.6, be agreed to.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (10.04): This Appropriation Bill is something of a milestone for the territory for it enables the government to kick off some significant new things and, as it is sometimes said in marriage vows, these could be for better or for worse. The operating statement for Transport Canberra tells us that a little over \$207 million has been appropriated for transport services. I am advised that almost \$192 million of this represents a community service obligation to operate bus and light rail services. I think it is the same as the government paying for the service without full recompense.

There is also capital funding put aside in this budget to start elevating London Circuit to get the light rail to Commonwealth Park and Woden ultimately. This will be a headline, for various reasons, for a fair while. It is fascinating that there was a social media announcement from the ACT government earlier in the week about this where they barely even mentioned light rail as a catalyst for this part of the project. It was presented as something that was being done to improve accessibility and connectivity. It was almost as though, were we not doing the light rail extension, we may be raising London Circuit just for the other reasons. I still cannot get my head around the fact that that would be the case, but I note the minister is nodding.

In his budget speech, the Chief Minister said this was a full throttle budget that will get the economy moving again. I think it is a handy analogy for there are many aspects of government services that need a bit more throttle. I think public transport would be a large contender. We should not be too negative. Measures to procure electric vehicles for public transport obviously are a very good thing, as is the

adoption of a modernised ticketing system. We will get there eventually with the ticketing system, I think, Madam Speaker; I reckon we will get there eventually. I note it has been promised in a couple of elections, and I still say there is a fair chance the new ticketing system could pop up as an election promise in 2024, if we are not careful.

The availability rate for light rail is most certainly an outstanding result, at 100 per cent, with customer satisfaction at more than 90 per cent, and further, according to the accountability indicators, almost 99 per cent of scheduled services operated to their point of completion. I think that is the same as saying that 99 per cent got to where they were supposed to be going. That has got to be positive.

I understand that running a complex network is a daunting challenge and trying to maximise public access and run on the times that you promise is always going to be complex. The performance indicators tell us that 78 per cent of services ran on time, which just about lines up with satisfaction levels communicated by passengers. Interestingly, there is a strategic objective to drive innovation and a sense of excitement about public transport, but there is little indication of how the budget will be used to improve satisfaction or get services to run on time. So I guess we have to settle for innovation and excitement. If there were a minister for excitement—there is not a minister for excitement, but I am just saying if there were—I think that portfolio would naturally go to Mr Steel.

Services to new suburbs and schools remain an issue, as do school bus services. I welcome an assurance from the minister that there will be no cuts to school bus runs. However, our new suburbs do need bus services. I am advised that requirements are still in the planning phase, despite residents having that need yesterday. In this regard I note the minister does not have any plan for procurement of additional buses for new developments, but he assures me that these are being finalised. I would have thought he would have a rough idea. I will ask again next year and see if we have a more succinct picture then.

The feedback I get is that weekend bus services—many of the words that I get in feedback I could not use in this speech because they would be distinctly unparliamentary, Madam Speaker—are a bit of a shemozzle, with weekend availability rates confirming this. For example, on Saturdays the availability rate is 41 per cent of the weekday rate and for Sundays it is 28 per cent. If you were going to engender a sense of excitement and lift performance in the public transport space, I would have thought this would be an area to look at. I am not sure of schedule conformance. Maybe one day the minister will give us some good news on that point.

While the accountability indicators in budget statements H paint a bit of a rosy picture, the minister tells me he also has, of course, a transport recovery plan that aims to restore community confidence in this area. But I have to say, Madam Speaker, we get a stack of mixed messages from the minister on this front. I was a little astounded to hear Mr Steel, during the debate recently on Ms Castley's revive the night-time economy motion, say that he did not want people in great numbers coming back to public transport just yet. I know that parts of this are contained in the plan. The minister is telling us there is just too much risk. We get from the minister one day in

the chamber that we have to socially distance and protect everyone and then I get an email yesterday from a parent who has children at Mount Stromlo. I will read part of it:

My 2 sons catch Bus 2054 from Wright to Mount Stromlo High School. In the morning, there are 2 buses. In the afternoon, prior to the August lock-down, it was a bendy bus in the afternoon. The boys tell me that even with this size bus/buses, the trip is quite crowded.

At the start of November when all years were back at school, they were only getting 1 single bus in the afternoon. After strict social distancing rules being enforced at school, it made them quite uneasy to be on a sardine like bus. One son who was particularly anxious about it has just started walking when he didn't feel comfortable about being on the bus.

He said, "No, I'm not using the bus," when he did not feel comfortable about being on the bus. This parent went on to say:

I contact the school who contacted Transport ACT and after about a week, the afternoon bendy bus returned.

Yesterday, the same day that parents were notified of a covid positive case in the school, they were back to a single bus in the afternoon.

A non-bendy, packed-in-like-sardines bus in the afternoon. The parent continued:

Even ignoring the current covid recommendations, surely there is a road safety issue of having a bus this full.

We get some mixed messages about how we are returning people to public transport. I have to say thanks to one of the minister's backbench colleagues for her hard work on the "Her Way" report. Thanks to that, we have some excellent firsthand community insights into what is actually deflating confidence levels. Just quoting some of the examples from Dr Paterson's reports, as collected through that online survey, these are some of the many negative comments in that report from constituents: "Public transport would be one and a half hours, compared with a 15-minute drive." "There is no way I can rely on public transport to get my child to school and then go to work. It would take three hours on buses and be almost as expensive as parking." "It takes 20 minutes to drive or ridiculously one hour, five minutes on the bus." "More frequent buses are needed." I could go on, because Dr Paterson's report is a bit of a gem in this area. I know that we will be debating more of the substance of the "Her Way" report tomorrow and I look forward very much to doing that.

The budget sets aside \$45 million, of course, for the elevation of London Circuit to make way for the light rail route to Commonwealth Park and eventually Woden, as we mentioned earlier. This involves blocking off most of Commonwealth Avenue as it approaches Civic. It promises to be one of the great traffic disasters of the ACT's history. I note advice went out to public servants in the parliamentary triangle earlier in the week warning them of what a disaster that will be.

The budget provides funds for the disruption task force. I certainly doubt whether this body will waive a magic wand to avoid years of commuter frustration, business impairment and unimaginable cost. But it will enable the minister to say, "We consulted. We ticked the box. We talked to people." "We consulted the prisoner before we executed him. We asked him!" I just think that Canberra deserves better than such callous treatment by this government.

The proponents for high standards of government attach a premium to transparency, accountability and efficient and effective use of public money. These principles ought to apply to the budget estimates for light rail stage 2. We know that the ACT Auditor-General has cast much doubt over the efficient and effective use of public funding for stage 2A. I think it is pretty clear that we do have a transparency problem. By this, I mean we have little insight into the real cost of stage 2B, which involves getting the tram over the lake somehow and out to Woden. I am expecting that when this government shows its hand on this issue it will take the public's breath away. In this regard it was disappointing to see that this budget did not cast any further light on what we, the community, might be up for. *(Second speaking period taken.)*

I would have expected that there would be further light shined on exactly what we, the community, will be up for.

We must not forget that at some stage we will probably have to face up to rectification of structural faults in the current light rail vehicles. I know the minister asserts that that is not the case. Based on the minister's non-answer to our questions on whether one of those light rail vehicles had had the floor removed to inspect for cracks, I can only assume that has not occurred. I am not quite sure why. There are a number of scenarios that we could paint here as to why. I dread to think of the cost involved in replacing light rail services while those carriages are out of action, should that occur.

With regard to the project as a whole, the government is super keen for us never to get a full understanding of what the project has cost us. I think that the government needs to provide details of the capital and the operational expenditure. We know that the expenditure on stage 2 includes the \$93 million contract to AECOM to obtain approvals and to manage stage 2. We know that there is more than \$9 million in this year's budget to raise London Circuit. But there are some unexplained items in the budget papers, such as capital injections, which leads us to wonder whether some light rail expenditure is being disguised.

We would like to see full details of the capital and operational expenditure to date on light rail by year, including Capital Metro. This is what people ask me: "What are the actual ACT government costs, such as those of the Capital Metro Agency, consultants, all of the relocation services and all of the associated things?" The Canberra Liberals will not be opposing this line of spending, but I think it is very clear that what we see in the budget in this space leaves us with many more questions than it provides answers.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (10.16): I speak in my capacity as ACT Greens spokesperson for transport, active travel and the circular economy. I think back to my

last budget speech seven months ago, where I thanked the hardworking staff of TCCS and the public service for their handling of COVID-19. Since then they have continued to go above and beyond. I would like to thank all those staff for their tireless commitment to the work that keeps our city moving, literally. Please look after yourselves. I know everyone is really tired. You have done a really good job and I hope most of you are anticipating a good break over Christmas.

I was pleased to see in this budget that money has been allocated for a number of projects essential to making sure Canberra's public transport network expands for our growing population. It is so important that we expand that fleet and expand our staff as our city grows so that we are delivering a good level of service to our new suburbs, without the need to cut services in our existing suburbs.

Those in existing suburbs grow to rely on their local bus service. If that network gets spread thinner by every new suburb then we risk losing existing public transport users because their level of service has dropped. This is why I was so pleased to see residents of Whitlam, just south of Belconnen, being provided with a bus service as part of this budget. It is great to see bus services running as soon as possible when people move into a new suburb. Habits are formed at the start, and it is important that residents do not feel they need to rely on private motor vehicles to get around our city. I asked Minister Steel about the provision of buses to Whitlam back in February, and I am delighted to see this funded in the budget.

There is also money allocated for planning for a north side bus depot and for completing the long-awaited Woden bus depot. These cannot come soon enough. The new depots are essential for increasing the size of our fleet. Importantly, they will also enable our transition to a 100 per cent zero emissions bus fleet, in line with our commitment to addressing the climate crisis. With 60 per cent of scope 1 and scope 2 emissions coming from transport, a high quality network of zero emissions light rail and buses is important. I look forward to seeing these projects progress as soon as possible.

Continuation of flexible bus services is a big win for the community. It is a good service, but not many people are aware of it. I would like to see more people made aware. I have spoken to a lot of eligible residents who could have gained a benefit from it but did not know it existed. I am hopeful we can continue investigating new solutions for how we can better serve our community and promote this service, and how we can help those who are too far away from their closest bus stop or who otherwise have difficulty accessing public transport.

I would also like to see more done to encourage and expand public transport in the ACT, including providing all suburbs with hourly weekend buses so people can rely on the network when they need to use it, and not just in peak hour. A lot of Canberrans have spoken to me about this. If a bus on the weekend comes once every two hours, most people will not catch it, because it is simply too infrequent to get them to the time and place they want to go. That means they are either stuck at home or they will go back to using their car.

Transport Canberra are doing a lot of work on network upgrades, and they are using their data really well. I would love to see further development to create more public transport priority measures to ensure buses, some of which can have more than 100 passengers each, are given a higher priority on our congested roads than single-occupant vehicles.

We need to make active and public transport easy and desirable. We need to make sure that it is better than driving if we are going to get serious about tackling congestion and climate change. I am delighted to see more funding for active travel. Walking, riding, scooting and skating are great ways to get around our city outside of a car. They are fun and they deal with congestion and climate change at the same time.

I am eager to see the results of the government's path audit, which will be completed later this year. I suspect the results will highlight the huge challenge we face to bring our path network up to the same condition that we expect from our roads. It is important to make sure those paths are safe and pleasant to use. The network is as important to those who use it as the roads are to those who drive. I ride to the Assembly most days—I rode today—and I have been riding around Canberra for two decades, so I really understand the need to complete that walking and cycling network and to make sure that it is maintained in good repair.

The ACT Greens want to ensure that at least \$20 million per year, or 20 per cent of our roads budget, is spent on dedicated active travel infrastructure. That is in line with the targets we have set of how many people we want using that active travel. Our footpaths, shared paths and bike paths should be built to the highest standards in the first instance. We need physical or grade separation from motor vehicles and we need priority wherever they share a space with vehicles.

During COVID our community have been exploring their local neighbourhoods and suburbs more than before, and they have realised the importance of being able to walk to their shops, their park or their oval. Ensuring that the paths, verges, trees, parks and shops are in good condition is essential to allow people to think local first and not jump straight in the car.

We would like to see some more spending on some of the ambitious cycle projects. I am glad to see a number of active travel commitments funded as part of this budget, but we can do more, I think. The cycling community really appreciate projects like the Belconnen bikeway; it is significant, it is dedicated active travel and it has met a need. We need to keep doing major projects like that to make sure we do not leave our big cycling corridor connectors as once-in-a-decade efforts.

In our parliamentary and governing agreement, the ACT Greens called for the construction of large-scale cycling corridors in key areas of demand and we have not yet seen that program fully roll out. I will continue to work with my colleague Minister Steel to make sure we get more done for the bike riders and pedestrians, scooters and skaters of our city.

I was happy to see that this budget amended reporting in line with last estimates recommendations in terms of waste and recycling. It has made it a lot easier to understand what is going on with our recycling rates. I am also pleased that the budget is starting the trial of FOGO in my electorate of Ginninderra. I am delighted to be one of the recipients of the little caddy. We are really enjoying testing that out in our house. This recycling program is going to recover food and organic waste that is currently going to landfill.

The trial in Belconnen, Bruce, Cook and Macquarie will be an excellent opportunity for us to see what works and what does not, as we lead in to the full FOGO system to deliver right across Canberra. It is a collection trial rather than a processing trial, and we are still working out what our permanent FOGO processing facility will be. I was happy to contribute to a roundtable with local organic waste processors and I am keen to do some further work on that facility to make sure we get a good solution in place.

Education is extremely important in all of this to make sure that we have low contamination rates. I am pleased to see Minister Steel has a fine appreciation for the need to properly fund and resource this. If we do it properly, the government will reduce our methane emissions from landfill and produce a rich, valuable compost product that we can use in our soils. But if we do not get it right, we are going to run the risk that we have seen in other councils where we end up with a contaminated product.

I am happy to see increased funding to upgrade our ageing materials recycling facility. All of Canberra's household recycling goes to that facility and it also processes a lot of our commercial waste. But there are a lot of standard items that cannot be processed there; it is simply too old. I am hoping the upgrades will mean we can recover most of our standard waste and that we can drive our recycling rate beyond the current plateau of around 75 per cent. We need to make sure that our new food and organic waste facility, our FOGO facility, and our materials recovery facility, the MRF, are working together so that they recover all of our standard packaging and waste.

This budget gives priority to deliver on government policy to phase out certain single-use plastics. This has been longstanding Greens policy, and it is good to see it taking effect. As we continue that phase-out, we need to make sure that any of the new substitutes can be recycled in the FOGO facility or the MRF. If those substitutes cannot be recycled there, we will have to work at the national level with industry and federal waste policy to stop designing, producing and selling those packaging substitutes. That is a much harder job and it is going to be a lot easier if we can get a local solution here.

I was glad to see our continuing transition to zero emissions government vehicles. I have called for that a few times in the Assembly and I was happy to hear Minister Rattenbury talk about it in the last sittings. I cannot wait to see the clever solutions we will be rolling out for our fleet. I am also happy to see the Age Friendly Suburbs Program delivered in Scullin and in other suburbs across Canberra. I wonder whether this initiative might be expanded to other areas in Belconnen and the rest of Canberra in future years.

We have some more spending on some of our local shops, including Evatt, Macquarie and Aranda, which is really good. I know many in west Belconnen feel like their area has fallen behind and is in need of attention. I would love to see the Charnwood shops receive some attention, including making the pavers at those shops safe for locals. A few of us have asked questions about that in the Assembly and we are all hoping for a good solution soon.

It is great to see a budget that progresses so many shared commitments on public transport, active transport and the circular economy. I look forward to seeing how our city services will improve and how we will be dealing with some of the local issues that people bring to us all the time. The ACT Greens are keen to see more jobs and more spend in these areas, to achieve these ambitious goals. I thank Minister Steel for his conscientious work on transport and city services. We look forward to another productive year.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (10.26): I am pleased to speak today about the Appropriation Bill 2021-2022 in relation to my shadow responsibility for city services. As all of us in this chamber know, city services is the bread and butter of local government here. Our parliament is unique in the way that it incorporates both territory—in some respects state equivalent—and local council responsibilities. Many members often comment that it is city services issues that their residents stop them to talk about when they are out and about. I know this has been the case for me.

People lead busy lives. They are getting on with everything that is going on with their families, their homes, their jobs, the pandemic—everything about their life. They do not often think to contact their local politician when they have an issue, but when they do, it is often because they have spent weeks, months or even years trying to get a particular issue resolved.

This may be as simple as a pothole near their house, a residential parking issue or a neighbourhood barking dog. There are so many of these local city services issues that people are so impacted by. Sometimes we refer to it as the three Rs—roads, rates and rubbish.

City services may not be the sexiest of government portfolios or the most exciting, but it is certainly one of the most important, every day, to residents. That is why I was disappointed to see that this budget is, if you like, more of the same for city services—the same initiatives, the same projects and the same promises that we have had over past years.

For example, the southern memorial park development in the city services area is potentially one of the larger infrastructure projects. \$1.6 million was allocated in this budget for design over a four-year period. This, of course, adds to the previously allocated \$804,000 in the 2020-21 budget and \$721,000 in the 2019-20 budget, both of which were also for the detailed design. Obviously, detailed design is important, but this southern memorial park has been talked about for years and years. It would be nice to see further progress on this project.

Another example where we are seeing activity without a lot of real outcomes is the government's plan to finalise the play space strategy. Not long ago, the government undertook major consultation and produced lots of glossy brochures for the Better Suburbs forum, which incorporated a dedicated playgrounds component.

We all appreciate how important it is to have safe, accessible and fun play spaces in our suburbs, but I also speak to residents regularly that tell me their local playground is in desperate need of repair or upgrade. It would be nice to get on with the job based on the feedback that we in this place get every day. Get on with the job of upgrading our neighbourhood playgrounds.

With respect to suburban maintenance and basic services, Madam Speaker, I would like to quote Charlie, aged seven, who visited Canberra. He wrote to the *Canberra Times*, saying:

The parks in Canberra are very untidy. There is too much long grass to walk through to get to the playgrounds or skate parks.

Does that resonate with you? Do you hear about that from residents? Charlie wrote this to the *Canberra Times* in 2012, and it is disappointing to see how little things have changed in the nine years since then. If Charlie came to visit Canberra again today, I wonder whether he would feel there has been any improvement regarding the points that he made.

I note that in the Planning, Transport and City Services Standing committee inquiry into the budget, there were several recommendations relating to suburban maintenance. For example, recommendation 17 states:

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government match mowing services to the prevailing weather conditions including services in very wet years.

That must ring a bell because we have had a very wet year—in fact, a very wet November—but it does not appear that we have changed our mowing patterns to meet the changing weather patterns. Recommendation 18 states:

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government investigate alternative mowing solutions.

I hope the minister decides to listen to these recommendations and act on them, not to continue to sweep under the rug these concerns that people such as Charlie, then aged seven, pointed out.

Wanting to live in a tidy suburb is not a big ask. People take pride in their suburbs, and the nicer their suburbs are, the more they take pride on them. The messier their suburbs are, the less pride they take in them and the more likely you are to see graffiti and litter. When the government plays their part, residents step up to match it.

Wanting to drive on roads that are not pocked with potholes is not a big ask. Wanting to walk on footpaths without trip hazards is not a big ask. Wanting to remove a dead tree on your street, either in the walkway next to your house or a street tree, is not a

big ask, Madam Speaker. The removal of a dead tree that you fear may fall on your house, on your carport, on your car, on your barbeque area or on your kids' swing set is not a big ask. But this government makes it feel like it is a big ask.

Canberrans deserve to and want to take pride in their neighbourhoods. It is the bush capital, not the overgrown bush capital. Make no mistake: this budget is about more of the same for city services. I would like to thank the hardworking city services staff. I saw many of them out on Monday morning. There were people out mowing; you could see them out inspecting playgrounds or cleaning barbeques. They work hard with the limited resources that they are given by this government. That is my point—the resourcing. It seems that they have to do more and more all the time with less and less. Then, all of a sudden, we might see a little boost to the budget because we have had cuts over the years, and we are expected to be grateful for it.

I hope that in future budgets we will see from this minister more resources for this area that Canberrans see as so important to their day-to-day life.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Minister for Skills, Minister for Transport and City Services and Special Minister of State) (10.35): I welcome the opportunity to speak on output class 1.6 of the 2021-22 ACT budget relating to Transport Canberra and City Services. I want to echo the comment by the Chief Minister that this is a budget which prioritises delivering on our election commitments. In particular, the budget initiatives within TCCS are all about providing new and better services to the community and making investments in new infrastructure for our growing city, as well as meeting many of our election commitments for the term.

This means investing in the strategic transport corridors which connect Canberra's regions. The budget includes more than half a billion dollars in investment in some of the ACT's key strategic transport corridors to better connect our newer suburbs, improve safety for commuters and support our public transport network.

We are supporting the growing community in the Molonglo Valley by funding the construction of the John Gorton Drive extension and by building a new bridge over the Molonglo River, just west of Coppins Crossing. We are also duplicating William Hovell Drive from John Gorton Drive to Drake Brockman Drive. Both of these projects will see construction of off-road shared paths for walking and cycling, linking with the existing shared path network.

For residents of Tuggeranong, upgrades to the Monaro Highway are on the way, with the budget delivering construction funding for the new grade separated interchange at Lanyon Drive. This will make the commute from Tuggeranong to the city safer and faster.

As members would be aware, the ACT government is undertaking significant preparation and planning to minimise the disruption associated with building light rail to Woden. This year's budget includes funding to upgrade a well-known bottleneck in the road network—the Coranderrk Street roundabout on Parkes Way. This will help to better regulate traffic flow and improve the capacity of the intersection to cope with increased congestion associated with major infrastructure projects around the city.

This year's budget also invests an additional \$45.7 million in active travel over the forward estimates. This grows our total pipeline of active travel projects to \$77 million. This will see us deliver a number of our election commitments, including commencing construction of the Sulwood Drive shared path and starting feasibility work on the garden city cycle route through the inner north. We have also funded the expansion of the successful age-friendly suburbs program to Reid, Scullin, Chifley and O'Connor, delivering path upgrades and other accessibility upgrades for people with reduced mobility. That benefits the whole community.

Path maintenance is also a key priority to deliver better and safer opportunities for the walking and cycling that we have seen so much of during the pandemic. This year's budget delivers a \$4 million boost for shared path and community path maintenance over the next four years. This builds on the work that has been done this year to audit the state of every footpath in Canberra by our great Jobs for Canberrans initiative, which has created local employment during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The budget continues our strong track record of investment in public transport infrastructure. We have outlined our vision for Canberra's future through the ACT planning strategy and the ACT transport strategy, and now we are getting on with the job of delivering it.

Not only does this budget provide more money for light rail to Woden; it also continues to work to improve Canberra's bus network. We are building the Woden depot and procuring new low- and zero-emissions buses. We are also expanding bus services to the new suburb of Whitlam because we recognise the importance of making public transport available in new suburbs as early as possible.

We are committed to leading the way in taking real action on climate change. Our investment through this year's budget in planting 54,000 new trees by 2024 is a great example of that. Canberra's trees are one of the many things that will help make this city such a great place to live. In the years ahead, they will also help to mitigate the urban heat island effect and make our city more resilient as the climate changes.

Using up-to-date light detection and ranging analysis—LiDAR—data, we can track our planting efforts across the city. We will be focusing on planting these new trees in areas of greater vulnerability, where canopy cover is lower and in areas where existing trees are ageing and dying.

To boost this planting effort, we have also funded the popular "adopt a park" initiative for a further three years, following a successful pilot program for one year. This great program provides support for community groups so that they can get involved in planting trees and micro-forests in their neighbourhoods, particularly in parks and other open spaces. Planting tens of thousands of new trees now is a legacy that will make Canberra a more attractive, liveable and sustainable city for decades to come. This budget really delivers in that respect.

At the local level, we are undertaking a huge program of suburban infrastructure improvements across every region in our city. Canberrans love their local shops,

which are often the hubs of our communities. Over the next four years, we will upgrade 11 local shopping centres, helping to support businesses and creating local jobs in construction. Those shops are Campbell, Narrabundah, Gwydir Square at Kaleen, Duffy, Evatt, Kippax, Macquarie, Monash, Calwell, Lanyon, and Brierley Street at Cooleman Court.

Play spaces are highly valued across Canberra. Our government is investing to make sure that these are even better by providing new and upgraded play equipment and opportunities for children in our local communities, with facilities for visitors of all ages as well. Over the coming four years, we will deliver new or upgraded playgrounds in Kaleen, Ngunnawal, Chisholm, Gordon, Lyons and Aranda. This is based on direct feedback from the community and condition audits that have been undertaken, as well as the play spaces forum that Ms Lawder mentioned, which happened as part of the better suburbs initiative.

Let us not forget our four-legged friends. Dogs will benefit from new play opportunities through the delivery of two new dog parks, in Franklin and Lanyon, as well as upgrades to the existing dog parks in Casey and O'Connor. And that is not all. We are building two new public toilets, 10 new drinking fountains, and new stormwater infrastructure in Mawson, Civic and Narrabundah to help reduce the risk of flooding.

Every single one of these suburban infrastructure projects meets the commitments we made during the 2020 election. I present the following paper:

Better Suburbs—Progress Update 2021-22.

This document provides a full update on everything we have been doing, particularly in response to the recommendations and feedback provided by the community in the Better Suburbs initiative, demonstrating that we have, in fact—contrary to what Ms Lawder was saying—directly responded to the issues raised by the community through that. We have now done several updates on that, and I am very pleased to do that in each budget to make sure that we continue to deliver better suburbs in Canberra.

We are also doing plenty of early works now to plan for the future of our city. This includes funding for the feasibility and design of a new home for the RSPCA, providing a dedicated facility to improve animal welfare outcomes in our city.

We are progressing with design for the first stage of southern memorial park—a new cemetery on Canberra's south side that will service community need for the next 100 years. This project shows real progress is being made regarding that detailed design; this is what we need to do in order to get construction started. We have undertaken extensive community consultation on that project, and that was really worthwhile to inform the first stage of that project.

We are now planning for a new FOGO collection service for every Canberra household, which will help to cut the amount of waste going to landfill, where it turns into methane gas, which is a very potent greenhouse gas. This will help to reduce our

climate emissions by about a third for the waste sector. A FOGO service will also support Canberrans to take everyday action on climate change. Right now, 5,000 households across Belconnen are participating in their first week of the FOGO collection trial, which will inform a city-wide rollout of these services in the next few years. I would like to thank those four Belconnen suburbs that are really leading the way.

This budget is all about delivering on our election commitments as we support Canberra to build back stronger after COVID-19. As is clear from the range and diversity of projects I have outlined, we are delivering a substantial infrastructure pipeline right now and in the years ahead. By delivering these projects, we will be creating thousands of local jobs whilst providing new suburbs and better infrastructure across our city—better city services and better transport services. That is the power of government investment—delivering jobs today and an even better Canberra tomorrow.

MS ORR (Yerrabi) (10.45): I rise to speak about some of the wonderful improvements to Yerrabi in relation to the city services directorate section of the budget. The first thing that I am excited to see is the inclusion of a dog park in Franklin. This is a wonderful addition to the facilities already available, and complements the accessible walking connections throughout the suburb.

One thing I have noticed while living in Franklin is the number of residents who walk their dog daily. I am confident that this park will be well received and used by the community. It provides dog owners with a place to let their dog run free and meet others in the area. I know that Harrison K9 Capers and the Little Paws club are particularly excited, and I am sure our four-legged friends will not mind it, either!

It is great to see the ACT government taking the initiative to provide more dog parks. More dog parks mean residents will not have to travel as far. The inclusion of a dog park in Franklin means many Franklin and Harrison residents can now access a dog park on foot, without the need to drive.

Next up we have the Casey community recreation park. I am sure Casey residents are very much looking forward to the Casey park coming to fruition. In a suburb that is brimming with life and many young families, a park that provides a space with families in mind is terrific. The Casey park will be the hub of the suburb's outdoor and family activities. Young families will be able to take their little ones to the park to play, people will be able to meet there with friends, and anyone wanting to exercise and enjoy the sun will be able to do so there. The Casey park will further provide the suburb with a sense of community and improve the suburb as a whole. The park will provide something for everyone and, with the dog park close by, will ensure that no-one in the household misses out.

Lastly, it is important to acknowledge our government's commitment to improving local roads and community infrastructure for Yerrabi residents. The addition of light rail has been very beneficial for our area, especially for those who travel in to the city. Building the recent park and ride along Well Station Drive and Flemington Road allows Yerrabi residents who do not live within walking distance of the light rail to

have the ability to park their car for free and catch the light rail—perfect for those who work in the city.

The continued efforts to improve our transport facilities are greatly appreciated by all Canberrans. I very much look forward to seeing these improvements to Yerrabi come to life, and the positive impact these will have on Yerrabi residents.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Justice and Community Safety Directorate—Part 1.7.

MR HANSON (Murrumbidgee) (10.47): I rise to speak about ACT Policing as a line item in the budget. Once again, though, this is an area where this government is failing to deliver—not only failing to deliver for the community but also failing to deliver for our dedicated police and their support staff.

It is particularly critical because of the last couple of years and the difficulties that have been faced by our police through the bushfires and COVID. Our police force are hardworking—those in uniform and the support staff—and they deserve better support.

Certainly, this has been the case since this government cut \$15 million from the police budget back in 2013 when, I believe, Madam Speaker, you were the minister. Of course, Mr Gentleman, back then, voted for those cuts. He likes to deny that he voted for those cuts. Mr Rattenbury voted for those cuts; he was here then. Madam Speaker, you actually instigated those cuts. Mr Gentleman supported those cuts and voted for them, I imagine.

This government tries to deny that. I have quoted an ABC article. Let me go to the *Canberra Times* in April 2015. In an article headed “Fears local police positions will go as funding cuts begin to bite”, it states:

The ACT government has been urged to reinstate \$15million—

Madam Speaker, \$15.3 million, to be exact, as you would recall—

in savings to the territory’s police force, amid growing fears that positions will be cut in coming months.

The \$15.36 million is being stripped from ACT Policing’s budget over four years from 2013-14.

The force is trying to focus the savings on supplier expenses to avoid a direct impact on the employee budget.

But Chief Police Officer Rudy Lammers conceded that some support positions may be “closely examined”, saying the tight fiscal environment was presenting a challenge in delivering high quality police services.

There you go. As much as Mr Gentleman denies it, as much as he puts a myth out there that these cuts never happened, the ABC reported on it, the Australian Federal Police Association reported on it, as did the *Canberra Times* and the Chief Police Officer, and it is in the budget: \$15.3 million was taken out of the police budget.

Mr Parton: We probably voted against it.

MR HANSON: There you go; with good reason. Here he comes. Mr Gentleman has arrived to defend the fact that he voted for the \$15.3 million in cuts. I will repeat what was said, because Mr Gentleman is in the chamber now:

But Chief Police Officer Rudy Lammers conceded that some support positions may be “closely examined”, saying the tight fiscal environment was presenting a challenge in delivering high quality police services.

As I said before, that was because of the \$15.3 million that you, Madam Speaker, as police minister, ripped out of their budget, and Mr Gentleman cheered along. In the article Mr Lammers said:

“At this stage our focus of savings ...

The Chief Police Officer acknowledged that there were savings to be made. He knew that that was what had happened. He continued:

... is on areas that support front-line policing in ACT Policing and not front-line policing itself,” he said.

“While supplier budgets will continue to be scrutinised it is inevitable that to meet the savings efficiency ...

We know what that is—the razor gang from the government that imposed those cuts. It was politely described by the Chief Police Officer as “savings efficiency”. He continued:

... some police support positions will need to be closely examined.”

Mr Parton: And who voted for that?

MR HANSON: Who voted for those cuts that Rudy Lammers, the Chief Police Officer, acknowledged were in the budget—that the *Canberra Times* reported on, the ABC reported on and the AFPA reported on, but denied by this government? It is bizarre, isn't it? The article continues:

There are unconfirmed reports that 18 police positions could be cut in the short-term, and more could go in the last stages of the four-year budget cycle.

When news of the decision broke in 2013, the Australian Federal Police Association said more ... positions could be lost.

The AFPA said the pressure on positions would be compounded in the last two years of the measure.

Back then, as was reported in the *Canberra Times*, I—and I quote:

... urged the government to reinstate the money, saying it was “inconceivable” such cuts—

such as the \$15.3 million that Mick Gentleman supported—

would not hurt front-line policing.

“There’s no question these cuts will affect front-line services.

“It is inconceivable to cut an organisation by \$15 million and to reduce staff, without that then impacting on police on the beat ...

Mr Gentleman will say, “Yes, the budget went up.” That is because they were asked to do more. They were asked to do more that year, so they put the budget up a little. But \$15 million was then robbed, so they robbed Peter to pay Paul. But when you remove the smoke and mirrors, the reality, as the Chief Police Officer of the day acknowledged, is that these cuts hurt ACT Policing. We are still paying the price today for the cuts that were made by Madam Speaker and supported by Mick Gentleman.

I will go to the reports of the day. Going back to the *Canberra Times* in 2013, it stated:

The government will rip more than \$15 million in savings from the territory’s police force, prompting union fears ...

The \$15.36 million, which the government assures will not affect the ... front line, will be deducted from ACT Policing’s annual budget ...

It is important that we understand, as we confront the problems that are facing ACT Policing today in terms of resourcing, why that is the case. It is because this government—the minister at the time, currently Madam Speaker, and Mr Gentleman, the current minister for police, aided and abetted at all stages by Mr Rattenbury, the leader of the Greens—ripped \$15.36 million from ACT Policing.

We now know from the AFPA, and when you talk to police officers, that they are struggling. The Australian Federal Police Association’s budget submission stated that “the association has been continuously drawing the government’s attention to under-resourcing—both for staff and infrastructure—for a number of years”. “For a number of years”: probably, members, going back to 2013, when \$15 million was ripped out of the budget! Specifically of police numbers, an Assembly committee was told:

We have some of the fastest growing jurisdictions anywhere in Australia—and I will use Gungahlin as an example of that—yet we have the lowest police densities to any police jurisdiction in Australia.

It has been stated many times that the ACT has the lowest per capita numbers of police officers in Australia.

Yet the government have failed to act. In any budget that we have seen, the government have not brought those numbers up to where they need to be. They have not invested in the infrastructure to keep pace with our growing city, either. It has been a long haul to get improvements in Gungahlin, which has been described as being “in a state of disrepair and not fit for purpose”. The AFPA have been calling for a new, dedicated facility, but they got improvements in accommodation in the Joint Emergency Services Centre, and very little detail being provided by the minister as to how that will all play out.

Indeed, with respect to the Winchester police station, it is stated that it is “similarly outdated and quickly falling below standard”. I refer also to Woden—and, as we have said in this place before, Molonglo. Where is the police station for Molonglo? Where is it? We have called for it repeatedly. The police have called for it. Where is it? This government refuses to build a police station in a growing area. It is not surprising, I suppose, because it will not even build shops for them. It will not even let Molonglo have shops. If you are not allowed to go shopping, I suppose police are well down on the list for the poor people of Molonglo!

Those opposite will promise it, as they did in the lead-up to the last election. They will say, “We’re going to fast track it.” What happens when you get to the other side of the election? They will say, “When we said fast track, what we actually meant was delay it by two years.” The poor people of Molonglo are left without resources, and I feel sorry for the police. It is a busy, growing area, and they have to go from Woden or Belconnen to get out there and respond. As Mrs Jones pointed out, there is a very small shopping centre at the Coombs shops. *(Second speaking period taken.)*

They have said they have called on police when they get broken into, when they get robbed, and the police do not respond in the time frames that you would expect. It is not the police’s fault; they are stretched too thin. We know they are stretched too thin because the police officers tell us, and the people on the ground being robbed tell us that is what is happening to them.

I commend our police; I really do. They are out there loyally doing their jobs when they are spread too thin across the town, and they are trying to deal with so many problems across our community whilst having one hand tied behind their back. That has been exacerbated by what we have seen over the last few years in terms of the fires and the pandemic. As the AFPA president said, when talking to the committee:

We do not have the bodies or the depth to be able to support an ongoing crime team or an investigation team and the pandemic or anything else that may flow out of it—whether it is another bushfire, because we are coming into that season ...

They do not have the numbers, and that is the problem. Even in a best-case scenario, where nothing is happening, the police do not have enough numbers. But the best-case scenario seldom happens. We know that, in Australia, we will get floods and fires. We have now been dealing with a pandemic. That means we have seen people taken off investigations and, because they are spread too thin, they are then put on the COVID task force. The AFPA said:

We are quite thin, and members are suffering mentally and physically because of it.

The mob opposite are always talking about workers—how they will stand up for workers, how they will do what they can for workers—but in the two portfolios that I have, police and education, both unions, the Australian Education Union and the Australian Federal Police Association, are saying the opposite. I spoke yesterday about teachers, and how they are spread so thin. I read out a whole bunch of quotes which were quite devastating about the impact on teachers.

We hear from police, again, how thinly spread they are. As their association says:

We are quite thin, and members are suffering mentally and physically because of it.

Our teachers and our police are suffering, mentally and physically, because of you, because of your failure to provide sufficient police across this territory to deal with the very difficult job that they have to do.

In the committee report on estimates from JACS, recommendation 26 goes to this point, in part. The recommendation is:

The Committee recommends that ACT Government explore the feasibility of presumptive legislation to accept and treat a mental health injury for police and emergency services workers without requiring an element of proof of injury in the workplace.

This is something that the police want to see. We would be aware of the case of Sergeant Jason Taylor. He has been in this place, and I have spoken about him before. Sometimes police officers break down. They have problems with their mental health as a result of their service. This happens in other areas of service delivery as well. With respect to the Defence Force, it does not ask for a detailed explanation or justification that you have a mental health condition arising from a particular incident, because often it involves a series of incidents, and re-litigating it all is not necessarily helpful. You should just say, “We accept that you do a difficult and dangerous job.” If you think about the job that police do, often, their interaction with you, with the public, with our community, is when that person is having their worst day. The police, every day, are dealing with people having their worst day. They could be cleaning up after a traffic accident or dealing with someone who has committed a violent crime. We all know that they have a dangerous, difficult job.

I am encouraged that the government have responded positively to that in their response to the report. I would say to Mr Gentleman: you certainly have our bipartisan support on that issue. I accept that, with ACT Policing, it is complicated, because they come under commonwealth employment law, because they are AFP officers. I would encourage the minister to continue pursuing that issue both for Emergency Services, which falls under the remit of the ACT government, and for ACT Policing. He should continue to work with the commonwealth to achieve that goal; certainly, we on this side support it.

It is important as well that we provide the police with the legislative backup to do their job. Certainly, there are a couple of issues. One is the issue of anti-consorting laws that police have called for; we have had chief police officers calling for those laws for years. I note that the Chief Police Officer has been silent on that, as I understand it, but that has been a call so that they can fight the bikie war happening in this town without having one hand tied behind their back. That bikie war occurred because we were seen as a safe haven for bikie gangs whilst New South Wales and every other state and territory in Australia have introduced those laws.

It was clear from the legal advice that was provided to the bikies, from memory, that that created a safe haven and created a bikie war, and the government did not give the police the power that they needed to deal with it. Again, it caused further problems as they were, through Taskforce Nemesis, then stretched even thinner on the ground than they ever should have been.

The other legislative backup that I was really disappointed was not supported was the bail law reform, which was rejected by this government through the Attorney-General. I have a quote from our frontline police, from the AFPA:

It's clear that the Attorney-General values the rights of recidivist and dangerous offenders over community safety and those hard-working first responders who protect and administer health outcomes in the ACT.

All this draft bill was trying to achieve was a fair and balanced judicial process, once a matter went to court. Instead, the Attorney-General has sided with those who assault first responders.

It is a pretty extensive press release that expresses disappointment. It states:

Over the last few months, four ACT Policing officers have been hospitalised due to assaults. Three of these officers were attacked and seriously injured by an alleged offender on bail for assaulting first responders on a previous occasion.

As it stands right now, Director of Public Prosecutions prosecutors have to fight to remand someone who assaults a first responder with one hand tied behind their back.

Whether it is effectively resourcing the police, whether it is making sure that our police have the right facilities from which to operate, in terms of both the condition of those facilities and the location of those facilities, or whether it is in terms of providing to them the legislative backup that they are calling for, they have every right to feel let down by this government. They need more from the minister than some tricky, ridiculous comment, saying, "You voted against the police budget; therefore you don't like the police."

It is a bit like the motion yesterday on the Greens' Defence policy, and the Greens amendment. The police are not stupid. Our police are smart people. They know what is going on because they live it every day. They are not going to be conned by those glib, smart-arse responses that you get from the minister.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER (Mr Davis): Mr Hanson, I think you know “smart-arse” is unparliamentary, and I would ask you to withdraw.

MR HANSON: I withdraw, Mr Assistant Speaker. I make it clear that I am referring to the comments, not to any individual. I am talking about comments.

Mr Steel: Bullshit.

MR HANSON: Did someone just say “bullshit”? If someone would like to express who said “bullshit” and withdraw? Mr Assistant Speaker, I draw it to your attention that I think there was a—

Mr Steel: I withdraw.

MR ASSISTANT SPEAKER: Thank you, Mr Steel, for withdrawing. Mr Hanson, you may continue.

MR HANSON: There you go. It looks like they are a bit niggly, doesn't it, Mr Assistant Speaker? They are a bit sensitive, and so they should be. We will stand up for police. We will continue to fight for the numbers, for their facilities and for the legislative backup, even if those opposite will not.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Manager of Government Business, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (11.07): As minister, I am proud of the hardworking staff across the government, and thanks and appreciation go to all of the staff who work in Emergency Services, Policing and Corrective Services, and across the Justice and Community Safety Directorate. They exemplify some of the best in the public service, and they are committed to helping and protecting Canberrans.

I am pleased to be able to support this through the appropriation that is before us today. Funding is being provided to support important work across these areas. New initiatives being supported include \$15.2 million over four years to boost the capability of the ACT Ambulance Service to respond to emergencies and support our growing city into the future.

This funding will continue the transformation of ACTAS, helping to modernise and sustain the service, with additional behind-the-scenes capability to support growing frontline demand. This includes new paramedic duty officers and staff resources for the triple-0 emergency communications centre, an infection control officer, research and data management officer, ICT connectivity support officer, and a transformation and capability development team.

There is \$12.8 million over four years to support ESA's vehicle replacement program through the purchase of standard and low emissions vehicles. In addition, the ACT government has provisioned \$675,000 over three years to establish a network of ESA charging stations throughout the ACT. With this initiative, the government is

supplementing its support to the vehicle replacement program to commence the transition to low carbon emitting vehicles—once again, leading in climate action.

There is \$9.8 million over four years to expand the current ACT police station at the Gungahlin Joint Emergency Services Centre, relocate State Emergency Service and Rural Fire Service to a new site in Gungahlin and initiate design work for a new Gungahlin region ACT Ambulance and ACT Fire & Rescue station.

There is \$1.7 million over two years to develop a master implementation plan of critical infrastructure and accommodation requirements across ACT Policing, Emergency Services Agency and ACT Corrective Services. There is \$2.5 million over four years to upgrade ESA's critical ICT systems to increase the capacity of the emergency triple-0 communications centre and the incident management room, including enhancing the functionality of the computer-aided dispatch mobile data system, radio management consoles and servers.

There is \$27.6 million over four years to fund the salary increases for ACT Policing staff, as part of the Australian Federal Police Enterprise Agreement 2020. There is \$11.1 million over four years to address expanded enabling services provided to ACT police by the Australian Federal Police. There is \$6.6 million over four years to replace ACT Policing's radio core communications system, along with providing ongoing maintenance support for the new system.

There is \$4.3 million over four years to meet the growing and more complex workload associated with ACT Policing's forensic medical services, including the requests that are made. This includes support for services such as the medical assessment of people in custody, the documenting of evidence for injuries from assault and assisting with the coronial process.

There is \$2.4 million in the 2021-22 budget to continue the COVID-19 public health response. There is \$21.8 million over three years to invest in reintegration and wellbeing initiatives to enhance services and support available to detainees at the AMC. Critical repair and improvements to the AMC will be facilitated in addition to the strategic assessment of the long-term future accommodation needs of the facility. This will address the long-term accommodation needs of women at the facility. Funding will also be used to develop and enhance wellbeing and reintegration programs.

There is \$8.2 million over four years to continue the assessment and supervision of offenders considered for intensive corrections orders, ICOs, which allow suitable offenders, generally those serving short sentences, to serve their sentence or full-time imprisonment in the community under the supervision of ACT Community Corrections. There is \$800,000 in 2021-22 for the continuation of Winnunga's holistic model of health service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander detainees at AMC.

Through the strategic investments in this bill, the government will enhance the overall community safety and wellbeing of all Canberrans. I am pleased that, throughout my

time as minister, each budget has delivered an increase in the amount appropriated to ACT Policing and the ESA.

I invite those opposite to support our hardworking staff across the Emergency Services, Policing and Corrective Services by voting for this boost in funding. I commend the budget to the Assembly.

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (11.13): During the last appropriations debate, I spoke about the state of our corrections system. I spoke about the staff shortages, the consequent overtime, the assaults, the riot and the fires. Today, in response to the bill, I rise to speak about the future of our corrections system.

Modern prisons serve two primary functions: to protect the public and to rehabilitate the people within their walls. Good things can be brought to pass by people who have made serious mistakes in their past, but they need help in getting themselves on a better path to becoming contributing members of society on release. As things stand, the government is not doing enough to help these people, and it is well past the time they started doing so.

There is much to improve at the AMC. Better conditions for the staff and increased investment in rehabilitation tools for detainees are just a couple of areas where we can do better. In the ACT we have a prison that lags years behind other jurisdictions. And according to the October 2021 report from the Productivity Commission, the ACT has the highest recidivism rate in the entire country, at 78 per cent. This is a damning condemnation of the government's performance and says something about its commitment—or, rather, its non-commitment—to the people in it.

When it comes to improving the prison and being forward-thinking about how we do things at the AMC, the Labor-Greens government have been all over the place. For example, in 2010 the AMC had a body scanner which was regarded as quite forward-thinking at that time. Other jurisdictions, such as New South Wales, only started implementing them in 2018. As New South Wales was phasing them in, the government were phasing them out and turning them off. They are only now bringing them back because they realised what a dumb and time-wasting move taking them offline was.

In the justice reinvestment space, a capstone investment of more than \$30 million to support the reintegration of detainees was announced in last year's budget and then quietly put on hold not long after. This is a sign of a government that is unstable and unfit to govern. How is it acceptable that a \$30 million reintegration centre can be written into a budget and less than 12 months later be put on hold and its future put in doubt? Putting this centre on hold is a huge step back in the push to provide proper and effective rehabilitation for our detainees. It is a sign that the government does not care.

The delay is made even more unfortunate when considering the limited use that the existing transitional release centre, or TRC, has seen. Detainees have complained that it is almost impossible to be accepted into that program. Last year, only 12 detainees were able to use it, and since December 2020 only one application to get into the

program was approved. The TRC policy has been revised to make it more clear to detainees how to access the program; however, there is still a catch. One of the criteria that detainees must meet is a certain level under the incentives and earned privileges policy. This policy does not even exist! How are detainees able to be properly rehabilitated when the policy they need to enter the TRC is a ghost policy? This is unacceptable.

Further evidence that this government is squandering the program is found in the 2021 report on government services, which reveals that just 0.1 per cent of detainees were able to access work release programs. The TRC was a much needed investment for rehabilitation and changing the lives of detainees, but it is barely being used. Sometimes in life, you need to take a step back and see where all the pieces fall. At that time, you should do everything in your power to see things and implement change where it needs to change. The government have been stepping back like an ostrich, thrusting their heads into the sand.

Programs, skills development and education are severely lacking at our prison. The opportunities provided to detainees to engage in further education and training are few and far between. In this city, we have a golden opportunity to improve the delivery of education and programs to better help our detainees reform their lives and succeed outside the prison walls. I believe that all detainees should have the chance to utilise these. Effective education and programs are vital tools for helping to reduce recidivism and change the lives of detainees.

The people who are being released should be leaving their bad habits, bad influences and negative outlooks in the shadows of the prison walls. Instead, over three-quarters of offenders in the ACT are reoffending. This puts public safety at risk, it puts families' and children's safety at risk, and it is a disgrace. Inmates need a proper rehabilitation facility for their benefit and for the benefit and safety of all Canberrans.

The future of our prison and those behind its walls is the responsibility of this government. Corrections officers and other staff at the AMC need all the support they can get. This is difficult work that the community does not always see, but it keeps the community safe and I want to thank them for all that they do.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Assistant Minister for Economic Development, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Business and Better Regulation, Minister for Human Rights and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (11.20): As Minister for Human Rights, I am proud that this budget protects, promotes and strengthens human rights in the ACT. With a robust human rights system, this budget continues to support some of the most vulnerable members of our community. This budget continues to make sure that there is accessible, respectful and empowering assistance available when it is needed.

There are four initiatives that I am particularly pleased to speak about in this budget. Firstly, we are providing more support for victims of crime, with over \$7 million in additional funding over four years. By investing in Victim Support ACT, we will make sure that victims of family violence and other violent crimes can access therapeutic support so that they can actively pursue recovery.

The government will also make an actuarial and economic assessment of the recommendations of the Projects Assisting Victims' Experience and Recovery (PAVER) Review, and scope an ICT solution to provide information and services available to victims under the charter of rights for victims of crime, which members all know was released at the beginning of this year. These initiatives build on the government's past investments in the Victim Service Scheme and the victims of crime financial assistance scheme, and recognise the importance of victims being able to access timely financial assistance and tailored therapeutic support.

We are also committing over \$1 million over four years to increase staff at the Human Rights Commission. Canberrans have been able to turn to the commission for support when they have experienced a range of issues, including racism and other forms of discrimination. As we have expanded the commission's jurisdictions—to enable people to bring complaints about sexuality and gender identity conversion practices; elder abuse and neglect; or the exploitation of people with a disability—the range and number of complaints have grown. This investment includes boosting the senior capacity in the team to undertake conciliation processes, systemic investigations, training and education. With this investment, Canberrans will continue to have access to a timely, effective and supportive complaints process when they need it.

This budget is also providing \$576,000 over four years to increase the level of base funding and meet the growth in demand for the Official Visitor Scheme. Members might be aware that the scheme is the most comprehensive of its kind in Australia and covers the corrections, mental health, disability, homelessness and children and young people disciplines. The scheme provides a necessary safeguard for entitled persons who are amongst the most vulnerable in the ACT. Official visitors are appointed to visit entitled persons at visitable places and resolve grievances or complaints. This initiative provides additional funding to address an increased demand for the services of official visitors. That increased demand is, in turn, associated with increases in the number of visitable places and the requirements of entitled persons and stakeholders.

Finally, \$311,000 will fund a temporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families advocate, with a support staff member. Establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's commissioner was a key recommendation of the Our Booris, Our Way review. The recommendation was for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's commissioner to undertake individual and systemic advocacy and monitoring in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system as well as other areas where Indigenous children and their families are disproportionately represented. This is a government commitment. The co-design process, I am proud to say, is well underway for the commissioner position; members may wish to engage with that process with the Jumbunna institute online. While that work is underway, the community has asked for an interim role. I am pleased to say that we are delivering. While the advocate will not have the full powers of the permanent commissioner, I am very pleased that this advocate position will be filled early next year to provide that immediate advocacy for the community.

Human rights are universal, and they are enjoyed by everyone in the ACT regardless of gender, religious belief, nationality, race or any other point of difference. These

budget initiatives mean that Canberrans can access timely support and advocacy when they need it. I commend the budget initiatives for the Justice and Community Safety Directorate to the Assembly.

MR CAIN (Ginninderra) (11.26): We will be supporting the appropriation. I will mention a significant disappointment on my part but also a positive achievement.

As we saw through this budget, \$40 million of funding for the reintegration centre was withdrawn from the budget. Knowing how important restorative justice is to the Attorney-General, this must be a disappointment. The reintegration centre is a pillar of the government's plan to reduce recidivism. The future of this is now uncertain, given the government's budget position. I commend a review of this approach.

On the bright side, there is something the Canberra Liberals have been advocating for in both this Assembly and the previous Assembly. We now have funding approved for a full-time coroner. This is a very sensible measure and something I know the legal community has been calling for, for some time. It needs to be implemented as soon as possible. One thing I will be particularly mindful of is ensuring that the new coroner is not diverted from coronial duties to assist with Magistrates Court listings, as tempting as that may be.

It would be negligent of me to not talk about some of the legislative proposals put forward by the Canberra Liberals during this term. While we do not have a share of the appropriation, we have done a darn good job in bringing legislative reform to this Assembly, some of which, it is pleasing to say, has been successful. Of particular note is the shadow Attorney-General's stealthing legislation, an Australian first. I am glad that the members of this Assembly were unanimous in supporting this to ensure that stealthing would be considered by the courts to negate consent.

It was also pleasing to see from the Canberra Liberals the release of an exposure draft for legislation to strengthen domestic violence laws. And it seems that we have provoked the government into consumer protection legislation regarding unfair rescissions of off-the-plan contracts. There was a unique occasion on 9 November when two bills with exactly the same titles were introduced, one by me and one by the Attorney-General. Rumour has it that the fact that I had announced in the media a few weeks before that my bill would be introduced provoked the government to do something about this unfair practice in our community. I take that as a contribution by the Canberra Liberals.

One thing that has concerned me is the disregard of a vital component of the rule of law in this Assembly by this Labor-Greens government. I have spoken on at least one occasion about the fact that ACT laws should not be passed if they conflict with commonwealth legislation. It leaves the members of the ACT community in doubt about which laws actually apply to them. This is especially challenging, I would suggest, for ACT government lawyers tasked with providing full, frank and fully informed legal advice to ministers and decision-makers, which should include an indication of whether a particular decision under an ACT law would conflict with either commonwealth legislation or Supreme Court precedence. It is a disturbing trend. I would encourage individual MLAs to consider that the rule of law, including not having inconsistent laws, is a vital component of our parliamentary democracy.

Sadly, I have had to speak on ministerial overreach. It was extraordinary to see that temporary and emergency COVID powers, some of which were never actually used, were enshrined into ACT legislation. I speak in particular of the ability of the minister, now under law, to exempt an individual, business or other entity from an ACT tax. This was introduced as a COVID emergency measure to assist with relief to the business community in particular and to ratepayers in the territory. To take such power and enshrine it in legislation is extremely concerning and a sign of ministerial overreach. It would be shocking, for example, to see a Dan Andrews extraordinary powers bill introduced in the territory. But knowing how the ACT and Victoria seem to compete for the title of socialist republic state in Australia, who knows what is next?

I would like to commend other Canberra Liberals shadow ministers. Mr Hanson has mentioned the bail reform law, which was foolishly, and shamefully, defeated by MLAs in this house—apart from the Canberra Liberals, of course. It was designed to give comfort to frontline community service providers like police, emergency service workers, corrections officers, ambulance officers and others—to give them the comfort that someone who has assaulted one of them should not have the presumption of bail when they are next in court. That was shamefully defeated by the Labor-Greens MLAs in this place.

I also commend the Canberra Liberals for calling for changes to the *Age-friendly city plan 2020-2024* to improve accessibility for those living with dementia. And there are many other achievements I can present. I am pleased to be part of a team of people who punch above their weight in this Assembly, who have brought laws forward, some of which have been successful and some of which should have been successful. That is a commitment we will continue to bring to this place.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (11.33): As the Greens spokesperson for corrections, I would like to say that the Greens want to create a safe, healthy, connected community by building communities, not prisons. I am glad to see these values put into practice in this budget, and I am proud of the measures which associated ministers have announced.

Whilst there is much to be applauded, there is also still a lot of work to do. Firstly, I would like to see a culture that puts human rights at the centre of correctional services, so that staff at every level incorporate consideration of human rights into every decision, and so that the human rights of detainees are upheld in a vulnerable environment such as the prison.

We also want to see the root causes of crime addressed. We want to see the underlying reasons for crime—such as mental health, socioeconomic status, trauma and poverty—addressed in a holistic response to crime. We acknowledge that the justice system is flawed and we still have work to do in this space.

I also want to reaffirm our commitment to justice reinvestment and reducing recidivism. I want to see the transitional release centre being used to its full capacity. It is designed to help detainees reintegrate with the community and therefore reduce

their chances of returning into incarceration. It is an essential way of ensuring that our justice system is restorative rather than a web that people cannot untangle themselves from. The transitional release centre has only had 13 applications, and to date only one has been approved. We would like to see eligibility for the program expanded and the centre being used to its full capacity as soon as possible.

Like Mr Cain, I am looking forward to certainty and transparency about the proposed reintegration centre, an initiative which was assessed and proposed as being one of the most effective ways to increase the capacity of the AMC whilst reducing recidivism.

Another policy I would like to see is further consideration of the needle exchange program in the AMC. We know that drug use is happening and that unsafe needle use can lead to the spread of bloodborne diseases. We know that needle exchange programs can keep drug users and those around them safe. A program that keeps both detainees and staff safe and acknowledges the reality of the complex entanglement of drug use and crime would be welcome.

Let me move to police and emergency services. On behalf of the ACT Greens, I would like to thank our first responders and everyone in the police and emergency services who contribute to making Canberra a safer community. The challenges of the past two years have been extreme. If it was not for their efforts, Canberra would be in a much worse place.

We have seen how a different policing approach can lead to radically different outcomes in different jurisdictions. I am grateful for the ACT Policing approach, working in collaboration with the community. I also welcome the investment in emergency services to help the ACT better prepare and respond to the more frequent and more extreme natural disasters that will accompany climate change. It is somewhat circular that emergency services, who will be so hard-pressed by climate change, are investing in nine low-emissions vehicles.

As a parochial local member, I welcome the investment in the Gungahlin Joint Emergency Services Centre to provide space for those services to operate and meet the rapidly increasing demand in the Gungahlin district due to its booming population.

We all know that ambulance fees are an issue that warrants further inquiry. Financial consideration should not apply when a purely medical decision is required—the decision as to whether one does or does not need an ambulance. There are significant parts of our community who do not have to worry about the cost of an ambulance, such as those lucky enough to have private health insurance or those who have met the range of circumstances where the fee is waived. But there is a significant proportion of our population who do. Any outlay on an ambulance weighs heavily on their minds when deciding whether to call—possibly wasting valuable time in which their condition may deteriorate, worsening their medical prognosis, prolonging recovery time, causing more stress when the bill arrives, and, eventually, costing the health system more in the long run.

Whilst it has not happened in Canberra, thank god, in other jurisdictions we have heard that COVID sufferers have died at home in isolation. I cannot help but wonder

whether any of them considered calling an ambulance and, if so, why they did not. Unfortunately, we will never know. But I do know that no-one in our society should be fearful about calling help when they need it.

COVID has demonstrated that financial penalties have a negative impact on public health. If we want our community to be a healthy one, we need to ensure that our medical system does not put barriers in people's way but ensures that people can do what they medically must: seek out medical attention.

MR PETTERSSON (Yerrabi) (11.39): I rise briefly to highlight a project much-awaited by the Gungahlin community; the commitments in this budget to upgrade Gungahlin's emergency services facilities and plan new premises have been welcomed enthusiastically by the community. The Gungahlin community has called for these upgrades for a long time and it is good to see them come to fruition.

The Joint Emergency Services Centre was built at a time when the Gungahlin community was much smaller and much younger. The centre opened in 1998. In the years since, we have seen Gungahlin grow exponentially. With this growth, the community has changed and so have its needs. It is beyond time that our emergency service workers in Gungahlin are given the space and resources they need to operate efficiently.

Funding has been allocated for the fit-out of new premises for the SES and Rural Fire Service and for the design of new premises for the ACT Ambulance Service in the area. This will clear some much-needed space within the existing Joint Emergency Services Centre to ensure that ACT Policing have adequate space to operate efficiently. Funding has also been allocated to upgrade the facilities at the existing emergency centre to ensure that the facility is properly equipped for police officers to perform their duties safely.

These investments in emergency services in Gungahlin will ensure that all members of the community are kept safe and well, long into the future.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (11.41): I want to speak as both the shadow minister for emergency services and also a member for Yerrabi in Gungahlin.

According to the government's own estimates, Gungahlin is expected to grow to around 90,000 people. This is an increase of 12,000 over the current numbers. Some data suggest that this may go as high as 108,000. This is quite a significant increase, which is why it is surprising that there is such little foresight shown in this budget for providing amenities and services for the community.

The Gungahlin Joint Emergency Services Centre was built in the 1990s, and it is well overdue for an urgent complete refurbishment. It is not equipped to house all five services; it is overcrowded and no longer fit for purpose. Why this was not a priority in the budget, I do not know. For remedial action to be allocated only half a million dollars this year—and it is not clear what that will actually cover—is an insult to our hardworking emergency responders in the centre.

Gungahlin's population has more than tripled since the opening of the centre. This under-resourcing continues the appalling lack of appropriate infrastructure, meaning poor response times to outlying areas of Gungahlin and increased crime. It could mean the difference between life and death in some circumstances. Every other district in the ACT has its own police station, but Gungahlin, one of the fastest-growing areas, must continue to manage with outdated services.

It is not just Gungahlin that is waiting on improved services. Who knows when Molonglo will get its own emergency services? As my colleague Mr Hanson has already indicated, Molonglo is expected to reach a population of over 62,000, but the promised emergency services for this area are not even mentioned in this budget. The new areas of Coombs, Denman Prospect and Wright continue to suffer from the lack of planning by this government. Residents and businesses in these areas continue to pay their fire and emergency services levy at increasing rates—there is a 1.75 per cent increase this year—but no dedicated and localised services have been identified.

The Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety has requested a comprehensive breakdown of these funds. I look forward to hearing from the minister where the money from this program goes. Much more detail on how this is spent is required. This would provide the people of Canberra with some confidence that their increasing costs are going to the right place, providing much-needed services even if they are some considerable distance from their homes.

This was a disappointing budget for all concerned, especially emergency services. Environmental conditions are changing and the threats to our community are increasing. The lack of funding is disappointing, particularly for Gungahlin. There is a slight investment of \$8.3 million over the forward estimates, yet the government cannot guarantee that there will be additional police provided for the area. It is crucial that police are provided for the area, due to the increasing crime that is occurring. We are calling on this government to invest in frontline police officers, which Mr Gentleman has not done. As Mr Hanson has indicated, the government cut over \$15 million from the budget many years ago. This needs to be reinvested in the police force, and we need more police on the beat.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong—Attorney-General, Minister for Consumer Affairs, Minister for Gaming and Minister for Water, Energy and Emissions Reduction) (11.45): I am pleased to support the 2021-22 appropriation bill, particularly this part of it under the output class that we are discussing.

As our city continues to grow, it is essential that we have a responsive, fair and accessible justice system. In relation to the Justice and Community Safety line item, it is a budget about doing justice differently and doing it better. The appropriation bill builds on and progresses key commitments which aim to make our justice system even more progressive, accessible and equitable. Funding is also being provided to further support the welfare of Canberrans interacting with the justice system.

The budget includes measures to boost the operations of the ACT courts and tribunals. There are a number of particular initiatives that I will speak to that highlight that point.

Firstly, there is an allocation of \$13.3 million to continue supporting the Drug and Alcohol Court for a further two years, including funding staff in the Justice and Community Safety Directorate, ACT Health, ACT Policing, Legal Aid and the Community Services Directorate.

The Drug and Alcohol Court deals with offending related to serious drug and alcohol use. It aims to rehabilitate high-risk and high-need offenders and to protect the community by providing health and justice interventions while holding people to account for their behaviour. This is a very positive initiative designed to give people intensive support through a detailed interaction with a particular judge and also with a range of support services. As it happens, yesterday I was speaking with Justice Refshauge, who leads this court. He was very positive about the impacts. Not every person makes it through this program—not everyone graduates—but those who are graduating from the program are very positive about the impact it is having on their lives and the opportunities that it is presenting to them. I am very pleased that this budget continues the funding for that innovative court system.

The second area is \$6.8 million to enhance the ICT infrastructure of the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal, ACAT, including supplying specialised recording, transcription and audio-visual equipment to the hearing rooms at the tribunal's new premises at Allara House.

The next area is the \$3.8 million to support the establishment of a dedicated coroner function, including a coroner and associated staff. I am really pleased that we as a government have taken this very positive step to promote healing for families and to do more to prevent deaths. The government will also provide additional resourcing for a special magistrate to help clear the backlog of cases in the Magistrates Court. In these two commitments, we are providing resources which the courts need to deal with the standard business that goes on in the courts.

We are seeing increased demand on the Magistrates Court, but particularly there is this commitment to a dedicated coroner; this is something that we Greens took to the election; we were very clear that we saw it as a really important reform. For some time now, I have been talking to family groups about a range of reforms in the Coroner's Court. This is the first of them that is needed, in my view. It is about having a specialised and dedicated resource that will both speed up the progress of matters through the coronial system and also develop an area of practice and an area of expertise that will see our coroners system become a much better one.

The current system, where each of the magistrates is the coroner on a cyclical basis, is very challenging. The magistrates need to take on the coronial responsibilities in addition to the work they already do as a busy magistrate. Whilst they do it with great conviction, the obvious strength in having a dedicated coroner who will think about building the practices of that area of the court will necessarily offer more consistency than having magistrates cycling through the process. It can only benefit this area of jurisprudence in the ACT.

The recruitment is now underway. The budget initiative begins immediately. We are now in the process of recruiting. Mindful of the separation of powers, I look forward

to seeking out a candidate who is committed, as the government is, to improving the practice in this area of the courts. I look forward to having candidates come forward who have a real passion for improving the coronial system.

A further area of investment is \$1.3 million over two years to support the continuation of the therapeutic care court which was established within the ACT Children's Court in 2019-20. This initiative aims to provide intensive management and therapeutic support to parents involved in care and protection matters, to achieve outcomes in the best interests of children and young people.

There was also \$700,000 in this budget to upgrade the Galambany circle sentencing courtroom, including providing round table and technology capability in line with all other courtrooms. The government has been supporting the Galambany circle sentencing court since its inception in 2004, to provide restorative support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander defendants.

The budget includes \$350,000 to undertake works to improve building safety at ACT law courts facilities and improve security by extending the perimeter fence and installing additional security cameras.

There is \$300,000 to improve the probate system in the ACT, including allowing applicants to advertise their intention to apply for probate on a website built and managed by the ACT courts and tribunal.

Finally, in the court space, there is \$200,000 to support the ACT Supreme Court to provide criminal case conferencing, which encourages negotiated settlements and improves the overall efficacy of the criminal justice process. This measure will also support Legal Aid to participate in criminal case conferencing.

This budget provides an additional \$7.6 million to enhance the capacity of the ACT Government Solicitor and the Legislation, Policy and Programs—LPP—division of the Justice and Community Safety Directorate. This initiative will enable the Government Solicitor to respond to an increased demand for legal services, and further assist the LPP to drive the government's legislative reform agenda. Both of these functions are critical to the government's effectiveness. The talented people delivering them work hard every day to deliver on the government's legal and legislative priorities. Providing longer term funding means that we provide job security to a great many of these diligent employees.

The government will spend \$800,000 to support the development of reforms required to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility. This is a key government priority, and the additional money will mean that the necessary planning is in place to make the transition to a higher age, as we have flagged.

This budget also invests in initiatives to provide support to vulnerable members of the community. We have listened to the community and heard where it is necessary for us to provide these supports. Such measures include \$4.6 million to continue to deliver on the ACT's obligations under the National Redress Scheme for People who have

Experienced Institutional Child Sexual Abuse, which provides redress payments, counselling and psychological care to eligible survivors of child sexual abuse.

There is \$3.5 million over two years to continue the ACT intermediary program for vulnerable witnesses, which commenced in January 2020 as part of the ACT government's response to key criminal justice recommendations of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. This is still at a relatively early stage, but the feedback from those involved in this program is incredibly positive. It is all about enabling witnesses to give their evidence in a way where they feel safe and comfortable and, therefore, can give the best possible evidence in the proceedings before the courts.

The positive feedback from the Human Rights Commission, ACT Policing and the intermediaries themselves on the impact it has in making witnesses feel more comfortable and, therefore, more capable in giving their evidence in an accurate way is very encouraging. Seeing it from all the different stakeholders in the discussions I have had with them gives us great confidence that this is a really worthwhile investment from a whole range of perspectives in the justice system. Sometimes one part of the community will be really positive about something, but in this case, all the stakeholders really see the value in this program. I am pleased that we were able to provide this additional funding to enable the program to continue.

There is \$2 million to provide funding to community-based organisations operating in the legal assistance sector, including the Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT), Canberra Community Law, CARE Inc and the Environmental Defenders Office. This funding will ensure that these organisations can continue to deliver their really important services.

There is a range of funding options in this budget. For example, the Environmental Defenders Office has been given four years of funding certainty. For groups like Canberra Community Law, we find ourselves in a more challenging situation. They have seen a significant increase in demand through the pandemic period. We saw funding from the commonwealth for one year; that funding ran out at the end of the preceding financial year, yet the community legal centres were saying to us that they were still seeing significant demand flowing from the pandemic. Of course, with the ACT going into lockdown in this financial year, those pressures have not abated.

The ACT was left in a position where, if we had not been able to step in, the cessation of that commonwealth funding would have left those community legal centres in the lurch. This put the ACT government in a very difficult position. We cannot be in a place where every time the commonwealth decides to chuck some money in for something and then backs out a year later, the ACT government is expected to pick up the tab. It puts us in an invidious position. Canberra Community Law were very forthright in saying that if that funding was not continued, they would not be able to meet the service demands arising from the pandemic.

We have been able to find the funding for this year. I know that there is already nervousness about what will happen next financial year; we will need to continue to work with the community legal centres to ensure that we think through the

consequences of the withdrawal of commonwealth funding and what role the ACT can play.

It is no secret that I value highly the contribution that our community legal centres make. Many years ago, I campaigned very heavily in this place to get them all put into a single hub. They now have that hub on Barry Drive in Turner, and I know that has been very beneficial to them. We will need to continue to work with the community legal centres to support them, where we can, to continue to deliver the services they do.

In that vein, I would like to speak about the funding for the Legal Aid Commission. This budget provides an additional \$2.5 million over four years to support Legal Aid here in the territory. Legal Aid is a vital community support, serving the needs of vulnerable Canberrans at the times they need it most. As most people know, Legal Aid provides support for people charged with criminal offences, to ensure that they are treated fairly, but its service provision extends far beyond this. Legal Aid lawyers provide lifesaving assistance to people needing family violence protection; and they support people through family dispute resolution, employment, discrimination, and residential tenancy matters, just to name a few. The team at Legal Aid are incredibly dedicated. The breadth of what they do is not fully appreciated by those in the community who do not seek out their services.

Legal Aid has been reporting a sustained increase in demand for services since the start of the pandemic, with no signs of that slowing yet—just as we are seeing with the community legal centres. This funding will help meet that demand for the commission's services, including its telephone advice service and services to support victims of family violence and elder abuse. This funding also supports Legal Aid's ongoing involvement in the intermediary scheme, which I spoke about earlier. In that capacity, Legal Aid supports vulnerable people engaged in the criminal justice system.

Finally, as I mentioned in the context of additional funding for our courts, part of the criminal case conferencing funding goes to supporting Legal Aid in facilitating that process.

In terms of other matters that were raised today, let me speak briefly on the issue of justice reinvestment. It is a core focus of the government's justice policy and there have been a number of observations in the debate about it.

I remain deeply committed to a justice reinvestment agenda for this government. It is government policy that we go down this path—that we continue to seek to spend money up-front to avoid people ending up in jail; that we spend our resources in a way that is more preventative than, to use the old expression, being the only ambulance at the bottom of the cliff. We want to make investments that make this community safer but also provide support to those at risk of being involved in the criminal justice system, so that we intervene at an earlier point. That makes everybody safer. People are not involved in those criminal activities and, therefore, our community is not subject to those incidents of crime.

A particular topic of discussion has been the reintegration centre. Mr Cain made the inaccurate observation that it had been withdrawn from the budget. It is very clear in

the budget papers that it has been postponed. This was a discussion through the budget process. Following the damage done to the Alexander Maconochie Centre, both through the unrest we saw late last year and through the hailstorm, there are significant capital repair works that need to be done at the AMC.

As members will appreciate, in a custodial environment, it is not easy to have tradespeople just wandering around and doing all that work at once. So the government took a very deliberate decision to prioritise those urgent repairs this year. It is disappointing that that has seen a delay to the funding for the reintegration centre. But the reintegration centre remains in the budget. Those funds are there; they have simply been deferred while those urgent works take place. I agree with Minister Gentleman about the necessity of doing those urgent repairs, but we remain committed to the reintegration centre. It is an important part of providing a range of responses to those who are in the criminal justice system.

We need to equip our corrections system with a range of response capabilities—from maximum security, for those who need that, through to lower security and rehabilitative environments. We know that most people in the AMC will get out. There are very few who will spend the balance of their natural lives in custody. People will return to the community. Therefore, we need to do everything we can while they are in custody to give them skills and deal with some of the underlying issues that led to their criminal behaviour, so that when they come back into the community, the community is safer and the people returning to our community become Canberrans who participate in the community, have better lives, and are not committing further crime.

It is inaccurate for Mr Cain to describe the funding as having been withdrawn from the budget. We have seen other commentators in the public domain make similarly inaccurate comments. It is simply not the case.

Overall, this budget makes important investments for the justice system in this territory. I commend this output class to the Assembly.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

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

Sitting suspended from 12.03 to 2.00 pm.

Ministerial arrangements

MR BARR: The Deputy Chief Minister will be absent from question time. I will endeavour to assist members with questions in the DCM's portfolios.

Questions without notice **COVID-19—testing centre fees**

MRS JONES: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, this morning on ABC radio you confirmed that Canberrans are being charged \$112 if they require a

certificate for COVID testing. You also said that Canberrans are being turned away if they are there for domestic travel. The national partnerships agreement clearly states that the federal and territory governments will foot the bill fifty-fifty if Canberrans are required to have a COVID test for state or government reasons. Why is the government profiteering from this by charging Canberrans \$112 for tests that are meant to be free?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: We are not. What they have been charging for is the provision of a certificate. That has all been clarified. In fact, it was clarified in the interview this morning that Mrs Jones refers to. I talked through the fact that the \$112 charge was for the certificate, but also the fact that there had been some confusion. I was very clear in the advice that was provided to me by health officials yesterday, and which I relied on yesterday, that requiring a test for interstate travel was not part of the criteria for testing. This had been unclear to staff, and therefore some people had been turned away from testing facilities while others had not been. This was a statement of fact, not a statement of policy.

MRS JONES: Minister, why have Canberrans been turned away when they turn up for a COVID test that they are required to have to travel?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: There has been some level of confusion about what it means to be required to have a COVID test. One of the things that has been clarified in the last 48 hours, particularly in relation to Queensland, is that they are accepting, as proof of a negative PCR COVID test, a text message. It was most people's understanding—indeed, up until yesterday morning, it was Minister Hunt's understanding—that in order to prove the negative PCR COVID test for interstate travel people required a certificate. Minister Hunt has been very clear in his comments that the national partnership agreement does not cover free testing in a circumstance where people are required to have a certificate to support interstate or, indeed, international travel. He has been clear that in his view the national partnership agreement covers a circumstance where people are required to get tested as part of a public health order, but not where people are required to produce a certificate for various purposes relating to travel.

So there has been a lot of confusion over the last 48 hours, not least on the part of Minister Hunt, who has now clarified his position. In a press conference just at lunch time, one of the journalists pointed out to me that it is still unclear on a number of jurisdictions' websites, what evidence is required of a negative PCR test. This is one of the things that has caused considerable—

Mrs Jones: Point of order. The question was about why people are being turned away; it was not about the certificates. The Minister has still not answered. The whole question is about why they were being turned away when they needed a test.

MADAM SPEAKER: My understanding—I am not paraphrasing you, Minister—was that it is related to some confusion within the centres.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Indeed, Madam Speaker. In fact, I answered that specific question in my first answer, if Mrs Jones had been listening.

MR PARTON: Who changed the rules in relation to charging people for tests and/or certificates and turning them away?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: We have had a clarification of the rules over the last 24 hours. I would not necessarily describe it as a change in the rules or the practice in relation to Canberra Health Services. I think it is really important to understand that COVID-19 testing is undertaken in multiple sites, some of which are provided by the ACT government through Canberra Health Services, and for some the service itself is provided by a private pathology provider. Where the ACT government Canberra Health Services provides the service, it is funded under the national partnership agreement. Where Capital Pathology provides the service that funding is through Medicare, under the Medicare Benefits Schedule.

Mrs Jones: Point of order. The question was about who made the decision in relation to the rule change. This is a point of order on relevance. Who made the decision—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Jones, please sit down. There is no point of order. The minister made reference to it not being a change; it is just a clarification.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: There has been some change. I was getting to that, if Mrs Jones had been given me another minute. We have had consistency across our ACT government testing sites, despite these different funding arrangements, and it has consistently been the case that these testing sites were available for people who were symptomatic, those identified as close or casual contacts and a person who was directed to get tested for a public health purpose. The status of being directed to get tested for the purpose of travel has been somewhat unclear. There are also issues around the fact that the funding arrangements are different. We have determined—this morning I have, in conversation with the ACT Health Directorate and Canberra Health Services, determined that we will have consistent rules across all of our sites, no matter whether they are provided by Canberra Health Services or Capital Pathology to enable this testing to be provided.

COVID-19—testing centre fees

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, speaking on ABC radio this morning, you confirmed that Canberrans had been charged \$112 for a COVID test which they were required to have if they asked for a certificate. You also said that people were being turned away if they were there for domestic travel. Minister, where does it state in the national partnership agreement that the ACT government can charge Canberrans \$112 for a COVID test that they are required to have?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Mr Hanson is really demonstrating his agility there, given that all of those issues have been covered in response to the previous question. There is nothing in the national partnership agreement about certificates. I have been clear that people were being charged when they required a certificate. It has not been Canberra Health Services' practice to charge people for the test. It has been Canberra Health Services' practice, however, to charge people, through an invoice from ACT Pathology, if they required a certificate.

There has been—as I said in response to Mrs Jones’s very first question, if Mr Hanson had been listening—some confusion as a result of this. Some of the staff understood that you were not eligible for testing—indeed, some of the officials understood, and I was advised, that you were not eligible for testing—if you were going to get tested as a result of needing to be tested under a Queensland, South Australian or Tasmanian public health order for the purposes of travel. That was partly around the fact that this was something that we understood required a certificate, not just a text message. So people were either being turned away or might have been tested without a charge or might have been charged by ACT Pathology for that certificate.

That is why it has been so confusing. There have been multiple layers of information in relation to this. If Mr Hanson had been listening to the response to the first question, he would not have bothered asking that one, because it has already been answered.

MR HANSON: Minister, where does it say in the national partnership agreement that the ACT government has the authority to turn away Canberrans from a required COVID test if it relates to domestic travel?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: In the national partnership agreement we have agreed that there is a fifty-fifty funding arrangement for tests that are required under public health orders. That is why yesterday, in my responses to questions in question time and in my response, I indicated that my wording was around the fact testing that was not required in relation to a public health order. There was very clearly some uncertainty around domestic testing, but that uncertainty largely related to the fact that it was not about the test; it was about the certificate. That uncertainty also was around the question about people being charged at the testing centres.

I have been advised that there was no capacity for people to be charged at testing centres. I have been through them a number of times. But that charging was being done by ACT Pathology when people were asking for and requiring a certificate, which has been what has generally been required for travel up until very recently, in my understanding.

MRS JONES: Minister, how did you arrive at the \$112 figure for these tests with certificates?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: There is a schedule of fees for a wide range of services that ACT Pathology provided, and it would have been in line with that.

Mrs Jones: How did you arrive at this figure? No idea.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: There is a schedule of fees. It is a notifiable instrument. Look it up.

Legislation—religious discrimination

MR DAVIS: My question is to the Minister for Human Rights and it relates to religious discrimination protections in the ACT. The religious discrimination bill has

today been put before the federal parliament and this has caused genuine and considerable concern among human rights advocates. In 2016, my colleague Shane Rattenbury amended the ACT Discrimination Act to protect people of religious faith here in the ACT. Can the minister describe how the ACT currently protects people of religious faith while also ensuring the rights of other minorities are safeguarded?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Davis for the very timely question, noting that the religious discrimination bill federally looks to be introduced tomorrow. Discrimination of any type is unacceptable, and I am proud that the ACT has a robust human rights framework where the protected attributes, of which there are a number, are equally protected. Religious discrimination is prohibited under the ACT's Discrimination Act in areas of public life including education, employment and in receiving goods and services. The Discrimination Act also prohibits discrimination on the basis of other protected attributes including race, sex, disability, sexual orientation, immigration status, pregnancy, parental or caring responsibility, and gender identity.

As Mr Davis flagged, the government has had a history of strengthening our discrimination law—in 2016, 2018 and last year. Notably in 2018 we strengthened protections including in educational institutions by repealing what was then section 33, limiting the ability of religious schools to take certain actions in relation to students and employees on the basis of protected attributes such as suspending or expelling a student because of their sexuality or gender identity, causing any other detriment to students on those grounds or terminating a teacher, for example, who enters a de facto relationship, but it retained the important protection for freedom of religion and religious education.

MR DAVIS: Minister, how will the ACT government ensure that the currently proposed reforms to the ACT Discrimination Act will continue to guarantee everybody in our community has security in their jobs and in their access to public services?

MS CHEYNE: I thank Mr Davis for the question and his interest in our reform work. We are continuing to strengthen our anti-discrimination laws. We are progressing our public consultation on the reforms to the Discrimination Act, and this is delivering on a commitment that was made as part of the Capital of Equality strategy. We have a discussion paper out right now seeking views from the public on a range of reform options including a proposal to extend the coverage of the Discrimination Act and those protected attributes potentially to all areas of public life. We are seeking views on the merits of placing a positive duty on public authorities and potentially businesses to eliminate discrimination. We are also looking at refining the exceptions in the Discrimination Act, just like we have done in the past.

Public consultations will take place during this month and will extend into next month as well, including with LGBTIQ+ advocacy groups, clubs, employer and employee groups, the ACT Law Society and the ACT Bar Association. I encourage all members to check out the YourSay website and to view the discussion papers.

MS CLAY: Minister, can you tell us any concerns you have about how this bill might impact on our status as a human rights jurisdiction?

MS CHEYNE: I assume Ms Clay is referring to the federal bill, not our own legislation. The latest draft version was released, as I understand it, last night. We have not had a detailed read of the bill yet and thus we have not formed a government view on the detail. But I can say that the bill appears to be drafted with some complexity and I am concerned that there is potentially an approach of reducing protections for people under our own Discrimination Act, and that would be concerning.

We are aware that the draft commonwealth bill—I understand it could still be amended again before it is introduced tomorrow—contains provisions on statements of belief. These are defined as statements of a religious belief held by a person that is made by the person in good faith and is of a belief that may be reasonably regarded as being in accordance with the doctrines, tenets beliefs or teachings of a religion. The bill specifies—at the moment at least—that a statement of belief cannot constitute discrimination under state or territory anti-discrimination law, including our own. So at the moment it looks as if it is expressly overriding protections that are afforded in our own legislation. It also sets out that actions taken in accordance with a faith belief cannot be considered discriminatory. Given the reforms that we made in 2018 I am concerned about how this might impact it, but we understand the bill will be referred to a parliamentary inquiry, which we will participate in.

COVID-19—testing centre fees

MR PARTON: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, on 13 March 2020 the Chief Minister signed an agreement, which we have already alluded to in question time, that the federal, state and territory governments would foot the bill fifty-fifty for all COVID tests if Canberrans are required to have one. The national partnership agreement lists four categories under which COVID activities will be funded, including tests. Minister, are you aware that the Chief Minister signed this document?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Parton for the question. Yes, I am.

MR PARTON: Minister, what part of this agreement don't you understand, given that you have been charging Canberrans for tests?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I think I have been very clear in my earlier answers that we have not been charging Canberrans for tests—and I recognise that that information has been confusing and inaccurate over the last couple of days—but we have been charging people for the certificates that indicate their negative PCR status that were understood to be required for travel purposes. Pathology has been charging people for that.

MRS JONES: Minister, when did you approve this charge of \$112 required for COVID testing with certificates?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mrs Jones for the opportunity. I did interject earlier and say there is a schedule of fees, but I have now looked it up and I cannot find a relevant fee, so I will take on notice how that fee was determined by Canberra Health Services as being the appropriate charge in relation to this. This is a fairly standard matter in terms of how ACT Pathology operates.

I would also clarify, in relation to Mr Parton's earlier question on the national partnership agreement, that Minister Hunt has indicated that he does not believe that the national partnership agreement covers testing where a certificate is required. He has been quite explicit in his own comments that he considers that the national partnership agreement covers testing where it is required under a public health order, where the satisfactory evidence of that test having been conducted and a negative result having been received is via the standard mechanism of a text message. He has himself said he does not believe the national partnership agreement covers that requirement for the provision of a certificate.

COVID-19—testing centre fees

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, on 13 March 2020 the Chief Minister signed the national partnership agreement that the federal and ACT government would foot the bill 50-50 for all COVID tests Canberrans are required to have. In other words, the Chief Minister signed up to the tests being free. Now Canberrans learn that your government is charging people for tests they are required to have. Minister, is your government not in breach of the national partnership agreement?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: No, we are not in breach of the national partnership agreement. I am going to take the opportunity here to advocate that maybe the opposition should be turning their attention to the commonwealth because, while Minister Hunt has indicated that he believes that the national partnership agreement should cover COVID-19 tests that are required under a public health order for people who are travelling interstate, so another jurisdiction's public health order—and that should be covered where it is 50-50 funded, where the state and territory is picking up half the bill—where it is through a private pathology and fully commonwealth-funded, no, no, no, no. Australians should not be eligible for free COVID-19 tests that are required under a public health order if the only place they can go is a place that is run by a private pathology provider.

Maybe the Canberra Liberals would like to turn their attention to their colleague up in Parliament House and advocate that the same rules should apply to free COVID-19 testing whether you are getting it in a state or territory-run clinic—our clinic is run by Canberra Health Services—or whether you are getting it in a clinic that is run by a private pathology provider. For the ACT government's part, we will be working with the private pathology providers—Capital Pathology provides the service at Kambah and Nicholls—to ensure that Canberrans will be able to access this service free of charge at whichever facility they go to, whether it is run by a state or territory government or whether it is run by a private pathology provider. That potentially means we will foot the bill for that because the commonwealth will not.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Milligan, a supplementary.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, how much revenue have you precisely received from the \$112 charges?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Canberra Health Services is working through a process regarding identifying how many people have been charged and for what exactly they have been charged through this process. We are also working through a process regarding refunds. Information on that will be available on the COVID-19 website when we have worked through that. We will probably be doing that on a case-by-case basis. If people believe that they were actually charged for a test rather than a certificate, which remains an item that a charge is likely to apply to, then we will consider refunds on a case-by-case basis.

MRS JONES: A supplementary.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Is your government still receiving 50 per cent payments from the federal government for the tests that you are charging Canberrans \$112 for?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Oh my goodness, Madam Speaker, I am just not sure how many times I have to say we are not charging people for the tests, but they are not happy.

Health—digital health records

MS ORR: My question is to the Minister for Health and has a different theme. Can the minister update the Assembly on the digital health innovations the ACT government has implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Orr for the question and for the fact it is not a repeat of a previous one. The ACT government's new Digital Health Record is delivering safer and better connected health care for Canberrans with patients now using the security MyDHR system to monitor their COVID-19 symptoms in the community in addition to the use of the Epic platform to support our vaccination rollout. The ACT government's innovation in the Digital Health Record has already made a significant difference across the entire Canberra community by helping manage the COVID-19 vaccination rollout.

MyDHR has been used more than 214,000 times for Canberrans and those from our surrounding region to book or change their vaccination appointments. The hard-working ACT Health team brought this technology online early to enable the community to easily book appointments, to guide nurses through easy-to-use pre-vaccination checklists, record vaccination details, report to the Australian Immunisation Register and provide digital confirmation to consumers about their vaccination status. My question is to the Minister for Health and has a different theme. Can the minister update the Assembly on the digital health innovations the ACT government has implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic?

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MyDHR has been used more than 214,000 times for Canberrans and those from our surrounding region to book or change their vaccination appointments. The hard-working ACT Health team brought this technology online early to enable the community to easily book appointments, to guide nurses through easy-to-use pre-vaccination checklists, record vaccination details, report to the Australian Immunisation Register and provide digital confirmation to consumers about their vaccination status. The ability to bring MyDHR online has contributed to our nation-leading 97.4 per cent vaccination rate in those aged 12 and over.

More recently, the new MyDHR mobile app has been rolled out to provide Covid-positive patients who are isolating and receiving support through the COVID-19 care at home program with the ability to connect with their care team in real time. Having the capability for patients to remotely manage their COVID-19 symptoms in their own homes is an important person-centred digital health innovation for Canberrans.

It is really great to see these elements of the new Digital Health Record fast-tracked to bolster our COVID-19 response and to provide our community with the most innovative healthcare solutions at their fingertips.

MS ORR: Minister, what benefits has the introduction of MyDHR provided to the Canberra community during the COVID-19 pandemic?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary question. Of course, the vaccination rollout has been an absolutely nation-leading effort. The entire digital health record program is an ambitious piece of work but one the ACT government is committed to delivering to connect health care across ACT public health services for the Canberra community.

As I have mentioned, we have already seen significant benefits to introducing elements of the Digital Health Record early to assist with the ACT's COVID-19 response. Through the MyDHR mobile app that I mentioned earlier multidisciplinary clinical care teams watch can watch for deterioration while also minimising unnecessary risks related to hospital admission for those who do not require it. Since this functionality became available, 82 Canberrans have successfully used the MyDHR mobile app to track their heart rate, oxygen saturations and temperature from home alongside their care at home team.

Through the introduction of the MyDHR mobile app the ACT COVID-19 care at home team has been able to transition away from paper-based forms to an enhanced monitoring system that works together with telehealth. Using the MyDHR app, patients enter twice-daily updates that are immediately escalated to the clinical team to flag any action that might need to be taken.

The ability for patients to enter their data digitally is very valuable and means the COVID-19 care at home team have more time to keep in touch with patients while they are at home. The use of the MyDHR system in this way is in the early stages, but it is already proving beneficial to clinicians and consumers alike. So having seen a small amount of the functionality in MyDHR, Canberrans and health services clinicians should be really excited about the opportunities ahead for the broader digital health record rollout in late 2022, which of course is all about delivering better care closer to home.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, can you please update the Assembly on the rollout of the digital health record?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Pettersson for the supplementary. A fully functional Digital Health Record will transform the way health care is provided in the ACT with a one-record system that enables safe, efficient and reliable care at any public health service location in the ACT. The ACT government funded this important project in the 2018-19 budget by committing more than \$150 million to building and implementing the digital health record. The 135-strong digital health record team is made up of clinical, technical and administrative staff who are working to critical time frames to configure the system based on many decisions made by health service subject matter experts.

Phase 1 of the digital health record project concluded on 1 July with key milestones achieved including identifying more than 500 subject matter experts to provide key clinical guidance to the team ensuring that the program remains clinically led; posting 115 directions-setting sessions for the subject matter experts in the public health system; and reaching agreements on the governance structure that incorporates four steering committees, 10 advisory committees and 52 working groups with meetings for all of them having commenced.

On 2 July 2021 phase 2—work flow adoption and configuration—commenced, which is expected to be completed by 14 January 2022. Once the system is fully configured and tested a significant amount of end-user engagement and training will occur across our health workforce with the full digital health record to go live in late 2022.

We are learning from global best practice and trust in the experience that has been built in the Epic system by other healthcare organisations around the world. This includes leading hospitals in Victoria—the Royal Melbourne Hospital, the Royal Children’s Hospital, the Royal Women’s Hospital and the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, which are already seeing incredibly benefits to implementing the Digital Health Record.

Planning—ACT Planning System Review and Reform Project update

MS CLAY: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Land Management. Minister, I was really pleased yesterday to hear the update on the consultation you had been doing on the planning review, and to hear that community and stakeholders were being consulted. A lot of us are very keen to get the detail of what the new legislation might look like. Can you tell me when the exposure draft will be released?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Clay for the question. Yes, we are looking at releasing that as soon as that work has been done. I would imagine it will be a full consideration early next year, so there is some work that cabinet and EPSDD are doing at the moment to ensure that it is on track for February next year.

MS CLAY: Can you tell me what the length of time will be for community and stakeholder consultation on that exposure draft if it is released in February next year?

MR GENTLEMAN: There will be quite a bit of consultation on that exposure draft for the community. I do not have the details of the timelines with me at the moment. I will take that on notice and come back to Ms Clay.

MR BRADDOCK: I have a supplementary question. Minister, what do you hope to have achieved with the planning review by the end of this term in 2024?

MR GENTLEMAN: What we want to see at the end of this is a strategic change away from the current planning system. We want to be more efficient. We want to be outcomes focused and deliver on a planning system for the ACT that brings us an opportunity for Canberrans to choose the way they want to live into the future—whether they want to live in denser accommodation close to town centres along transport corridors, or live in RZ1 zones with larger backyards, as Mr Parton is after, in suburbs. I think it will give us not only some flexibility in planning but some certainty for the industry into the future. It will certainly be outcomes focused.

ACT Corrective Services—detainee transfers

MRS KIKKERT: My question is to the Minister for Corrections. In July 2021, a detainee escaped from corrections custody when their car was rammed by an accomplice helping the detainee escape. Thankfully, the professional actions of the officers in the car prevented any bystanders being hurt. The former senior director at the AMC has said that the practice of supplying detainees with their appointment details created a safety risk for officers and that it was not the first time there had been an incident in relation to hospital escorts. I note that I am not asking about the court case, as I know the minister cannot comment on it. Minister, what other incidents have occurred in relation to hospital escorts?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mrs Kikkert for the question. It is a matter that is being investigated at the moment by the Inspector of Correctional Services, and that will be available to us very shortly, I think. I will be happy to table that and report on the government's response in due course.

In regard to other incidents, there have been some that have been advised to me in briefings. I will take the detail of the question on notice.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, how long has JACS had the report from the inspector on this incident, and when can we expect it to be tabled, as you mentioned?

MR GENTLEMAN: I do not believe that JACS has the report to date. It is due any moment. As soon as it comes to me, I will be able to forward it to JACS.

MR HANSON: Minister, what risks have officers identified with current AMC practices in relation to hospital escorts, and what has been done to address and resolve them?

MR GENTLEMAN: There has been some advice to me in regard to concerns from COs about hospital escorts. They have been around vehicles, for example, and there have already been some changes in operational controls around how those escorts run. I am pleased that Acting Commissioner Ray Johnson has been at the forefront in making those changes where he has seen the responses from COs to make them necessary. We will continue to make those changes when COs come to us with these particular issues or where the inspector of corrections makes those recommendations to us.

Canberra—cost of living

MS LAWDER: My question is to the Chief Minister: at the last election you promised Canberrans that a re-elected Labor-Greens government would lower the cost of doing business and lower the cost of living. In the June quarter 2021 Canberra house prices rose 8.2 per cent, the highest in the country. Inflation in the ACT has risen 3.7 per cent in the 12 months to September 2021, the second highest in the country. On 7 June 2021 the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission allowed an increase of electricity prices of 11.95 per cent from 1 July 2021, and in your own 2021-22 budget papers you say that rates revenue will increase 28 per cent between 2019-20 and 2023-24. Canberrans are now paying higher rates, higher electricity, highest rental costs of any city in Australia, and higher water and sewerage. Chief Minister, is this lowering the cost of doing business and cost of living?

MR BARR: In each of the instances that Ms Lawder has outlined where there have been increases there were preceding falls in the regulatory period before, particularly as that relates to electricity, inflation and water and sewerage charges. There have certainly been movements up and down within the regulatory frameworks associated with the independent price setting in those areas. I note I did not get any questions from the opposition when the prices were falling. We will, given what is happening in the various energy markets and otherwise, see as we come out of the pandemic that the ACT's contract for difference and price hedging in terms of a fixed price for the security of our renewable energy contract, for example, will again protect Canberrans from prices rising as they have been in the case of petrol prices when demand recovers and/or supply is impacted.

I note that the Canberra Liberals, of course, have signed up to many of these commitments, or at least they say they have and then decide for the purpose of trying to score a cheap political point at one point in the price cycle or the regulatory cycle that this somehow constitutes a breach of an election commitment.

I also draw Ms Lawder's attention to the fact that this government is subsidising the interest on a loan scheme to support households to lower their cost of living, a policy that you guys opposed in the election because you are opposed to that transition. You are opposed to effective action on climate change and you are opposed to supporting households to make the change to reduce their cost of living. (*Time expired.*)

MS LAWDER: Chief Minister, what modelling have you done to assess households' capacity to pay for the increasing cost of living in the ACT, including your escalating rates, fees and charges, and what factor for wage growth and inflation have you allowed for in that modelling?

MR BARR: The cost of living analysis is undertaken and published in the budget each year. Wage price index and inflation projections are contained within the budget papers. The Reserve Bank has outlined that it is targeting for monetary policy between two and three 3 per cent for inflation. It is still sitting below that once you take out the extraordinary impact, for example, of child care becoming free in one quarter and then the fees going back on in another, which has distorted the figures Ms Lawder has deemed to bring into this debate in either a perverse or malicious way to attempt to make her political point. But a deeper analysis of underlying inflation would see that it is going to land between 2 and 3 per cent, which is where the Reserve Bank is mandated to seek to maintain it.

And for the Liberal Party to be complaining about wages is amongst the most outrageous of claims, because it is your party that has presided over nearly a decade of stagnant wages, of real wages going backwards, attacking penalty rates, seeking to reduce the incomes of the most vulnerable in this community because they do not have secure work. It is your party's policy position—stated by Mathias Cormann, former Liberal finance minister—to suppress wages and to suppress wage growth. That is why we are in the position we are in, because wages have not been growing in real terms. But fortunately in the ACT, as I outlined yesterday, GST has been growing per capita. (*Time expired.*)

MRS KIKKERT: Chief Minister, why should Canberra families trust anything you say when key election promises have already been broken in the first year of this term?

MR BARR: Again, the irony of questions from the Liberal Party on matters of trust in light of everything that is going on in this nation! You can definitely trust this government to deliver on the commitments that we have taken to the people of Canberra because we are delivering them. I will contrast our approach and my approach on matters of trust with the Liberal Party locally and the Prime Minister and Leader of the Liberal Party nationally.

If you want to have a debate about trust, I will tell you what I will not do—I will tell you what I will not be part of—that is the sort of lying, bald-faced misrepresentations and devious behaviour that we have been seeing from the Prime Minister, which has been drawn to the attention of the Australian public day after day after day, from the French President—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson!

MR BARR: to the Leader of the Opposition, to denying that he said 11 times—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson! Stop.

MR BARR: that he had never sought to utilise slang terms against former Senator Dastyari in relation to some alleged connections to China.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: You are warned, Mr Hanson.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: You will join him soon, Mr Parton.

MR BARR: All of these things are clearly on the public record. So if you want to have a debate about trust and who this community trusts to lead this city, look at the last few election results and look at the contrast between this government's record of delivery and what we see from those opposite in those parts of the nation that they are in government.

COVID-19—testing centre fees

MS CASTLEY: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, on radio today you referred to a conversation you had with Greg Hunt this morning and said, “There is an inconsistency with what can be funded under the national partnership agreement.” You also said, “We continue with the fifty-fifty payments; there is no change at our end.” Minister, given that the agreement clearly states that tests that are required will be paid for by the federal and ACT governments, where is the inconsistency in the agreement?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Castley for the question and the opportunity to talk about this again. I have just opened the national partnership agreement, to refresh my mind. In the national partnership agreement, under “roles and responsibilities”, it says:

The Commonwealth will, through programs separate from this agreement, provide 100 per cent of the funding for the following COVID-19 related activities ...

On that list, among others, are MBS items for telehealth and private pathology testing. It then goes on to say that we will share, fifty-fifty, responsibility for hospital-related activities, including testing and diagnostics, and a range of other health activities which do not include testing for people to undertake interstate travel.

My argument, in response to Ms Castley, would be that there is an inconsistency. We are continuing to maintain our responsibility under the national partnership agreement, where we are both providing and undertaking testing through ACT government managed clinics and in partnership with private pathology. We are maintaining our share of funding for that. The commonwealth are maintaining 50 per cent funding for the clinics that are run by the ACT government, by Canberra Health Services, but they are not meeting their responsibility of 100 per cent MBS funding for private pathology funding under the same circumstances in clinics that are run by private pathology, and they should be.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, if there is no change at our end, at what point did these fees appear?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: As I indicated earlier in question time, there has been a general expectation, as there is when proof of vaccination is required for travel, that there is a certificate, a piece of paper, that is required to be produced for that. A text message is not sufficient. When ACT Pathology has been providing those, that is something that has been charged for since 2020, the whole way through. If you required that certificate, there was a charge associated with that, as there would be in private pathology as well. The testing itself has not been charged for, and there has not been any change the whole way through.

What there has been a change and a clarification around—and this has come from my conversations with ACT Health and Canberra Health services—is that a public health order in Queensland or another jurisdiction that requires people to show proof of a negative PCR COVID-19 test is a public health order for the purposes of us providing that free testing. Where a certificate is not required, in line with what Greg Hunt announced that we would do, without talking to any state or territory health minister about it, we will be able to undertake that testing. That was absolutely clarified in my meeting with Canberra Health Services and ACT Health this morning, and the website is being updated to ensure that Canberrans have clarity around that. We are also working with private pathology providers to ensure that that is consistent across all of the ACT government testing facilities.

MRS JONES: Is the government receiving a 50 per cent repayment from the federal government for the tests which include the provision of a certificate, for which Canberrans have been charged \$112 each?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will have to take that question on notice. It may be that it was previously considered that those tests themselves did not meet the requirement of the national partnership agreement, so it may be that we have not actually been seeking funding from the commonwealth for those. We now have that clarification from Minister Hunt. I would say that there is nothing specific in the national partnership agreement that goes to this level of detail. There was a change of tune by Mr Hunt yesterday. In the morning he was saying, “This requirement doesn’t meet the principles set out by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee; shouldn’t be required, shouldn’t be done”—

Mrs Jones: A point of order, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: A point of order?

Mrs Jones: The question was purely about the 50 per cent refund from the federal government. The minister does not know the answer to that question. If she cannot be relevant, she should sit down.

MADAM SPEAKER: There is no point of order. The minister has 56 seconds to continue, should she want to. Thank you.

Municipal services—Yerrabi Pond and Lake Tuggeranong

MR BRADDOCK: My question is for the Minister for Transport and City Services. Minister, I welcome the investment in the Yerrabi Pond surrounds and was delighted to see the map of proposed feasibility and design studies for further works. I just noted, with the path lighting, that it only extended part-way around the pond. What is the plan there for that lighting?

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Braddock for his question. I am also very pleased that we are getting on with what we said we would do at the election—to upgrade Yerrabi Pond. That is what trust is all about. We have got work underway on \$300,000 worth of upgrades to the Yerrabi Pond and in the budget we also announced \$600,000 in feasibility studies to deliver on the community’s priorities following extensive consultation that we have undertaken with them that has identified lighting around the pond as being a priority. We will be undertaking that work over the next year.

We have released a program map. It is indicative at this stage and is subject to the feasibility study. We are looking forward to seeing the results of that feasibility study to inform exactly where the lighting should be provided. We are aware that some parts of Yerrabi Pond do not have as great electricity connections, so we are going to explore, as part of this process, whether we can use technology like solar lights in those particular locations.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Braddock.

MR BRADDOCK: Thank you, Minister. Is it possible that the feasibility study can look at extending lighting all the way around the pond so users can engage in a loop around the pond at all times?

MR STEEL: We will be looking at lighting opportunities right around the pond to enhance the recreational opportunities for Gungahlin residents. In addition to that we will also be looking at parking access, which was a key part of our election commitment, as well as improved toilet facilities—not only upgraded toilets on the eastern side of the pond but also new toilets and other improvements on the western side of the pond. We are hoping that that will provide more recreational benefit to the community.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Davis, a supplementary.

MR DAVIS: Minister, will additional lighting be considered in the government's planned investments around the Lake Tuggeranong foreshore?

MR STEEL: Yes, Madam Speaker, and I know you have been actively out there as well consulting with the community on what they would like to see as part of Labor's other election commitment to upgrade the Lake Tuggeranong foreshore and, indeed, we have invested \$4.8 million in the budget to do just that. We are anticipating that early in the new year we will be able to get out and start ACT government consultations to seek the community's feedback about what improvements they would like to see around the foreshore, particularly between Reed Street and Soward Way and areas around Lake Tuggeranong town park as well.

That will include things like landscaping, lighting, street furniture, potential improvements to the skate park and play spaces around the area, trees, vegetation—those sorts of things. But it really is up to the community to let us know what they would like to see to make Lake Tuggeranong a fantastic place to visit, to undertake recreation and a range of other activities.

ACT Insurance Authority—actuarial staff

MR CAIN: My question is to the Special Minister of State: during the recent estimates hearing the General Manager of the ACT Insurance Authority confirmed that they have no member of staff with actuarial qualifications or expertise and that actuarial advice is contracted from outside the ACT. Minister, how did ACTIA properly assess actuarial advice before making very significant determinations?

MR STEEL: ACTIA sits within the broader CMTEDD portfolio and we have extensive expertise particularly in Treasury and other parts of the ACT government that oversee ACTIA. ACTIA itself has the opportunity to seek any guidance and outside consultants as necessary to make sure they are properly covering the risk of the territory.

MR CAIN: Minister, which other ACT government entities are in the situation where they receive specialist advice but have no staff or resources suitably qualified to assess this advice and make informed decisions?

MR STEEL: It is not uncommon for agencies to go outside of government for specialist advice, particularly in relation to actuarial advice. Indeed, during estimates

we had that discussion around the motor accidents insurance scheme and going out for actuarial advice and other advice where necessary to be able to review the filings of insurers. It happens right across the board to make sure that we have the best advice possible to make decisions about a range of different issues that impact the territory.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, as a risk mitigation measure will you commit to providing proper resources to government entities?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for his question. Of course the ACT government ensures that all of our agencies are properly resourced to undertake the functions of government.

Planning—housing choices

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Land Management. Minister, how is the planning system helping Canberrans remain in their local communities?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Pettersson for his interest in looking after the local community. The population of the ACT is the second youngest in Australia, but is also ageing. As people get older, they seek options to downsize, and the ACT government is committed to ensuring that older Canberrans can move to a smaller property but stay in the communities that they have called home for so long.

The demonstration housing project includes several projects that assist older Canberrans to remain in their communities. I recently tabled a variation to the Territory Plan that will allow a small group of retirees to share a co-housing space in Ainslie. The group will have a common space with a meals area and guest bedroom, but couples will be able to keep their own private villas as well. This co-housing development is proposed for O'Connor, and I understand that the people behind the project will be starting consultations soon.

The ACT government is ensuring that Canberrans have a wide range of housing options that suit their needs at different life stages. We are responding to community demand for innovative ideas in housing by testing these ageing-in-place ideas through the demonstration housing project.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, how is the planning system helping younger Canberrans?

MR GENTLEMAN: With a release of a mix of different housing at different price points, allowing young people to—

Mr Parton interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Parton, no more.

MR GENTLEMAN: It will enable younger people to get a foot in the door, or upgrade, depending on what their needs are. Providing options for older Canberrans to

age in place frees up established housing for younger Canberrans. We understand that individuals and families do not have static needs, so what is appropriate when you are raising a young family might not be with you as you get a little bit older and perhaps become an empty nester.

I have also listened to young people who have told me, through consultation on the statement of planning intent—which was for young people—that they really want to have a valued lifestyle. They want to have the opportunity to live somewhere that is close to where they want to shop, or close to public transport and close to their friends.

Younger Canberrans have told us that they do not want Canberra to have urban sprawl and congestion problems that plague other cities. Canberra is still a relatively young city, and we still have the opportunity to make sure that we prioritise density rather than endlessly building outwards. We have very clearly seen and heard that the one-size-fits-all approach is no longer appropriate for our growing and changing city.

MS ORR: Minister, how does the ACT government's land release program, which is guided by the planning, accord with recent commentary from experts regarding land supply?

MR GENTLEMAN: I am very aware of recent commentary on land supply and the housing market, and I want to be very clear that the ACT government is committed to using the levers that we control to help younger people to get into the housing market.

In the planning system this includes releasing dwellings that will cater for more than double our projected population growth. As I outlined yesterday, the ACT government is releasing enough housing for 41,000 Canberrans, where forecast population growth is only 17,500 across that period. We also reasonably expect the private sector to contribute dwellings of an additional 18,000 for Canberrans at this time. This is through a mixture of rezoning and lease variations in areas identified for increased density in brown field areas.

But land supply is only one issue affecting housing affordability. As we heard from the Reserve Bank of Australia, and as I outlined yesterday, the main issues are in the tax and transfer system. So the ACT government continues to monitor trends in Canberra's housing market, and we are certainly committed to continue to release land in excess of forecast population demand to ensure there are no supply constraints affecting the current market.

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

Supplementary answers to questions without notice

ACT Corrective Services—detainee transfers

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Manager of Government Business, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (3.00): To add to my answers to Mrs Kikkert and Mr Hanson and for some

clarity, section 30(1) of the Inspector of Corrections Services Act 2017 obligates the inspector to provide a copy of his report to you, Madam Speaker. I understand it is your practice to table those reports the next sitting day after you receive the report.

I am advised that the report in question is being finalised. The government will respond formally to the inspector and table a response in this place in line with the obligations of the act, as is my practice where an independent review is being undertaken and/or matters are before the court; so I do not provide any commentary on that.

Planning—ACT Planning System Review and Reform Project update

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Manager of Government Business, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (3.01): If I could respond to Ms Clay's question on the planning act review and the consultation time line, we believe it will be about 30 days.

COVID-19—testing centre fees

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health) (3.01): I was asked during question time how the \$112 fee for testing certificates was calculated. I can advise that the \$112.40 fee for COVID-19 testing certificates is based on the Medicare Benefits Schedule item 69479 for COVID testing of \$50; so that answers the question around whether it includes the price of testing. There is a \$50 handling fee which includes processing certificate, issuing et cetera, which is a very manual process, and a \$2.40 initiation fee which is a standard charge for all ACT pathology tests, and 10 per cent GST.

I have a note here that private labs can claim 69480, which is \$100 instead of the \$58 for the COVID-19 MBS testing item. So that answers the question that I was asked, I think.

Planning—ACT Planning System Review and Reform Project update

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Manager of Government Business, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (3.03): On the planning and consultation, it is three months, not 30 days.

Papers

Mr Gentlemen presented the following papers:

Subordinate legislation (including explanatory statements unless otherwise stated)

Legislation Act, pursuant to section 64—

Construction Occupations (Licensing) Act—Construction Occupations (Licensing) (Fees) Determination 2021 (No 2)—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-253 (LR, 4 November 2021).

Environment Protection Act—Environment Protection Amendment Regulation 2021 (No 1), including a regulatory impact statement—Subordinate Law SL2021-26 (LR, 28 October 2021).

Magistrates Court Act—

Magistrates Court (Environment Protection Infringement Notices) Amendment Regulation 2021 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2021-27 (LR, 28 October 2021).

Magistrates Court (Waste Management and Resource Recovery Infringement Notices) Amendment Regulation 2021 (No 1)—Subordinate Law SL2021-25 (LR, 25 October 2021).

Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Act—Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Amendment Regulation 2021 (No 2)—Subordinate Law SL2021-28 (LR, 4 November 2021).

Motor Accident Injuries Act—

Motor Accident Injuries (Business Plan) Guidelines 2021—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-252 (LR, 21 October 2021).

Motor Accident Injuries (Lawyer Information Collection) Regulation 2021—Subordinate Law SL2021-23 (LR, 19 October 2021).

Motor Accident Injuries (Premiums) Guidelines 2021 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-251 (LR, 21 October 2021).

Nature Conservation Act—Nature Conservation (Fees) Determination 2021 (No 3)—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-254 (LR, 11 November 2021).

Territory Records Act—Territory Records (Advisory Council) Appointment 2021 (No 1)—Disallowable Instrument DI2021-255 (LR, 11 November 2021).

Waste Management and Resource Recovery Act—Waste Management and Resource Recovery Amendment Regulation 2021 (No 1), including a regulatory impact statement—Subordinate Law SL2021-24 (LR, 22 October 2021).

Pregnancy and infant loss—paid leave scheme

Upon notice No 1, Private Members' business, being called on and the Member not being present, pursuant to standing order 127, it was withdrawn from the Notice Paper.

Pregnancy and infant loss—paid leave scheme

MRS JONES (Murrumbidgee) (3.03), by leave: I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) recognises that:

- (a) on 8 October 2021, the Assembly passed a motion with tri-partisan support recognising 15 October as Pregnancy and Infant Loss Remembrance Day; and

- (b) losing a child is not an illness, it is a loss that should be appropriately recognised;
- (2) notes that:
 - (a) approximately one in four pregnancies result in miscarriage—103 000 every year, 282 each day;
 - (b) on 10 September 2021, the Commonwealth Government amended the *Fair Work Act 2009* to provide specific leave entitlements for miscarriage;
 - (c) the New South Wales Government became the first Australian jurisdiction to introduce paid leave for public sector employees after the miscarriage of a child; and
 - (d) the ACT Government has clarified in the enterprise agreements being balloted that a paid leave scheme is available for public sector employees—in full-time or part-time, permanent or temporary work—for an employee or the spouse of an employee who experiences a miscarriage or stillbirth. This includes:
 - (i) up to five days compassionate leave to all employees and their domestic partners who experience miscarriage; and
 - (ii) 18 weeks of birth leave for stillborn babies; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to:
 - (a) implement the agreement once agreed by employees and approved by the Fair Work Commission; and
 - (b) continue supporting all employees and protecting their workplace rights through enterprise bargaining.

On 8 October this Assembly passed a motion with tripartite support recognising 15 October as Pregnancy and Infant Loss Remembrance Day. This was an important and moving day for many people in our community, including those of us in the Assembly who have experienced the pain and loss of pregnancy and infant loss. Ms Lee noted, with the passing of the motion, the important message that it sent to families around the world. The message that it sent to Canberrans was that they are not alone.

In Australia approximately one in four pregnancies result in miscarriage, accounting for 282 per day or 103,000 every year. We also know that this is probably a conservative estimate. Some miscarriages occur early in the term before people realise or register that they are pregnant. I know that around the world today there are many families grieving the loss of a child. The social stigma associated with the loss of unborn infant children is real.

Today the Canberra Liberals are calling on the ACT government to introduce a paid leave scheme for public sector employees in full-time, part-time, permanent or temporary work for five days if they or their partner experience a miscarriage. It is the

unique grief for someone you have never met but it is a painful reality that affects many families. It is because of the thousands of Canberra families that have experienced miscarriage, including some of our own families, that we are today calling for paid miscarriage leave for every ACT public servant.

The grief and devastation that are felt by families following the loss of a child is immense. The stigma, guilt and loneliness that come with experiencing a loss like this are all too common in our society and, for families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, the added shame makes it yet another reason that people often do not speak up.

Women have shared their stories of experiencing a miscarriage with the Pink Elephant Support Network, with one saying, “I returned to work the day after my D&C still bleeding and cramping heavily. I had used up all my sick leave for fertility treatments.” Another said, “I sat at my desk, bleeding, losing my baby, too terrified to take leave.” A third said, “I returned two days after my D&C. I was anxious, overwhelmed and scared. I had been a blubbing mess and unable to keep focus. I was in pain and Panadol was doing nothing. In the end I chose me. I told my boss I was going home and by the time I reached my car I could not even breathe through my tears.”

Earlier this year the federal government amended the Fair Work Act to include a provision for paid miscarriage leave and the then New South Wales Treasurer, Dominic Perrottet, became the first Australian politician to lead a jurisdiction to offer formal and paid miscarriage leave to public sector employees. We thank both the federal and the New South Wales governments for these courageous moves. We must recognise the magnitude of this loss as we do other forms of bereavement—not with pity or inconvenience but with compassion.

The ACT government employs almost 25,000 Canberrans and, as the second largest employer in our city, we should be leading the way when it comes to supporting those who need support in our community. We are proud that the ACT government recently introduced pregnancy loss commemorative certificates recognising the life that is lost. But there is more we can do. We can support mothers, fathers and families through it.

According to the Pink Elephant Support Network, 74 per cent of women who suffer a miscarriage report feeling unsupported by those around them. This includes workplaces. It is heartening to see organisations such as MinterEllison, PwC, Tabcorp, Commonwealth Bank of Australia, Westpac, QBE and Zip sign up to the Pink Elephant Support Network’s program to educate their workplaces on the impact of pregnancy loss and provide them with the resources and information to support their employees through these challenges. Many of these organisations have introduced paid leave entitlements for miscarriage in excess of the five days we are calling for in this motion, and I think that is to be commended.

As a government, it is important that the ACT lead the way and adopt this important reform which will touch the lives of most Canberrans. The introduction of miscarriage leave is an important and measured step towards showing public servants that the government and their employer have their back.

I want to thank the offices of Minister Gentleman and Mr Braddock for their willingness to work with our office to make sure that we can get the best outcome for Canberra families who experience a miscarriage. As Donna said to the press today, “We need to learn to talk about this more and we need to learn to support women better. When someone has lost a child, let us not ignore it; let us talk about it. And let us appropriately support these families.” I commend the motion to the Assembly.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health) (3.11): I thank Mrs Jones for bringing forward this motion in Ms Lee’s absence and for the collaborative way in which these changes have been negotiated between Minister Gentleman’s office, Mrs Jones and Mr Braddock. The government absolutely acknowledges the intent of Ms Lee’s motion and recognises the devastating impact the loss of a child, through miscarriage or stillbirth, can have on individuals and families who are affected by it.

When government employees experience pregnancy loss, they absolutely should be supported by appropriate leave provisions. And it is exactly because we support the intent of Ms Lee’s motion that existing leave entitlements for employees who experience pregnancy loss are being further clarified through the current round of bargaining for the ACT public sector enterprise agreements.

Through the current enterprise bargaining process, there has been a thorough review of parental leave provisions for employees who experience, or whose partner experiences, a miscarriage or the loss of a baby through stillbirth. Working groups were established to examine the current provisions compared with those in other jurisdictions and consider the contemporary values and expectations of the wider community.

Existing provisions within ACT public sector enterprise agreements do provide a range of leave options for employees who experience miscarriage, which is defined for this purpose as pregnancy loss before 20 weeks gestation. There is a separate range of provisions available for parents who experience stillbirth or pregnancy loss after 20 weeks gestation.

In August this year, as the motion notes, the federal parliament passed amendments to the Fair Work Act which provide two days of paid compassionate leave to parents who experience a miscarriage. The proposed new enterprise agreements for the ACT public sector go beyond that, clarifying that five days of paid compassionate leave can be accessed where an employee experiences miscarriage. This is making explicit something that may have been enabled under the compassionate leave provisions but was not explicit previously and was, therefore, at the discretion of delegates and managers. Employees whose domestic partner experiences a miscarriage can also access this leave entitlement.

If an employee does not meet the eligibility criteria for paid leave, they will still be able to access unpaid compassionate leave. The clarified provisions under the

proposed new enterprise agreements for ACT public sector workers are the same as those now offered in New South Wales. In addition to these compassionate leave entitlements, employees will continue to be able to access unpaid, special birth leave until they are fit to return to work.

Pregnancy loss through miscarriage can be a significantly traumatic event—we all know that—and the government supports the validation of early pregnancy loss as bereavement. The government acknowledges the stigma that has often been felt by those who experience miscarriage and I think the examples and the stories that Mrs Jones gave in her speech speak to the uncertainty and fear, and even sometimes the shame, that women can feel in these circumstances and how alone they can be if they are not actively supported through both policy and practice in the workplace.

We hope that the provision of clear leave entitlements allows ACT government employees to not only take the time that they need to grieve their loss but also sends a very clear message that their experience of grief is valid and is acknowledged by their employer.

Of course, the same stigma experienced by those who experience miscarriage can be also often associated with stillbirth, and it is such a significant change over the last few years that we have started speaking publicly about both miscarriage and stillbirth. I think I have been surprised, as many others have been, to understand just how frequently this does occur because people speak about it so little.

There are, of course, existing entitlements available to ACT public sector employees to access birth leave following a pregnancy that ends after 20 weeks gestation, including a pregnancy that ends in stillbirth. This means that an employee whose pregnancy ends in stillbirth can access 18 weeks of paid birth leave. Additionally, under the existing agreement, employees who experience pregnancy loss after 20 weeks gestation can access compassionate leave. However, this has not previously been specifically stated within the enterprise agreements.

The new enterprise agreements remove ambiguity about this entitlement by referring specifically to stillbirth within the compassionate leave provisions. In other words, the death of a member of an employee's immediate household will include a child that is stillborn, which is logical when you think about it. This also means that the partner or another member of the household who is an employee can access compassionate leave under these provisions. These entitlements have been extensively negotiated with public sector employees and represent a genuine strengthening of leave entitlements for those who experience pregnancy loss.

Ms Lee's motion, as originally drafted, called for five days of leave following stillbirth but the current entitlement for birth parents is 18 weeks leave. I am sure that there was no intention at all to change that or to reduce that. The motion that has been moved today by Mrs Jones makes clear the options that are available to grieving families, and it is a testament to the efforts and attention of our public sector workers and their unions that these strong entitlements already apply across the entire ACT public service.

The additional access to paid leave proposed under the new enterprise agreements will allow the birth parent and their domestic partner time to grieve and to access appropriate supports, including offering counselling services through the government's employee assistance provider. This will assist in mitigating the risk of poor mental health outcomes such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder that can be associated with pregnancy loss or the death of a baby.

A total of 16 enterprise agreements, all including the updated leave provisions for miscarriage and stillbirth, are in the process of being balloted for agreement. The first three agreements have already been overwhelmingly supported by a yes vote. Voting for the other agreements will conclude in December and all agreements, if upheld, are expected to be sent to the Fair Work Commissioner for approval prior to Christmas. The provisions in the proposed enterprise agreements will, in many instances, provide more generous provisions than those offered by the New South Wales government, as was indicated in Ms Lee's original motion, for employees who experience a pregnancy loss or stillbirth.

I think what we are seeing here is the ACT government again leading the nation in the provisions available to our public service employees. But we are committed to ongoing monitoring of the progress in other jurisdictions and continuing to review, every time we renegotiate our enterprise agreements, what more we can do to support our staff to ensure that they have the most up-to-date provisions through their enterprise agreements and that their rights at work are genuinely upheld at all times.

I commend Mrs Jones's motion and I thank Ms Lee and Mrs Jones for bringing it to the Assembly.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (3.20): I rise today as both the Greens spokesperson on industrial relations but also as a father to Peanut and Connor Jack Braddock—two pregnancies that, for my wife and I, ended in a miscarriage and a stillbirth. I would like to thank both Ms Lee and Mrs Jones for bringing forward this motion. I wish Ms Lee could have been here today.

The motion builds on a tripartisan motion earlier this year to recognise Pregnancy and Infant Loss Remembrance Day. That motion was a very beautiful moment in this Assembly, with members of all political stripes coming together to share their stories and sorrows—some fresh, some many years in the past.

The sharing of our stories is necessary because for too long miscarriage and stillbirth have been swept under the carpet, spoken about only in whispers. This blanket of silence does not help those going through these difficult and traumatic times. I know, because my wife, Deb, and I have railed against this blanket of silence—to be open, to share our stories, and to publicly declare that this is our lived experience—and, in doing so, we have helped so many who have felt they could not share their stories. But we have also helped ourselves as well.

I use this story to demonstrate why we, as a society, need to become more supportive, more understanding and more aware in this space. And that is what this motion

contributes to. All too often miscarriage is described as a medical condition, a description that does not capture the emotional impact that such an event brings, a description that does not capture the invasive medical procedures that are sometimes required.

I do not blame the friendly doctors who write this on the medical certificates. They are trying to help in any way that they can to enable the mother and their partner to access personal leave, to take some time to recover physically and emotionally, time to heal in response to the cruel odds of chance. That is what employees require to get through these traumatic and life-changing events: time.

But not all employees have access to this time. They may not have sufficient personal leave balances, particularly as this life stage is often full of other medical appointments and absences. Those employees without time must return to work, hiding their emotional wounds as they return to the workplace. I will leave it to you to imagine what their productivity must be like as they do so, as they consider the nature of life, death, chance and what could have been—the cutting short of dreams and hopes. Employees are not robots or automatons; they are people with physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs. And during events of this nature they need time.

The Greens aspire for the ACT government to lead Australia in best practices when it comes to the legislation, implementation and enforcement of workplace laws. We want our industrial relations policies and practices to offer conditions that attract and retain quality staff and respect and support staff in their times of grief and difficulty. This is about creating human workplaces, caring and generous workplaces. This means making sure that all proposed enterprise agreements are reviewed to ensure these provisions for stillbirth and miscarriage are clear and consistent and also meet international best practice. We also want to see the conversation extended beyond just the ACT government.

I was glad Mrs Jones referred to the Pink Elephant initiatives earlier, because we want to see other employers here in the ACT provide this time to their employees—private sector employers, non-government organisations, anyone who says they value their employees. Here is an opportunity to provide the critical support they can to their employees during what is a very difficult part of their lives, and that is time.

MR GENTLEMAN (Brindabella—Manager of Government Business, Minister for Corrections, Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, Minister for Planning and Land Management and Minister for Police and Emergency Services) (3.25): I thank Mrs Jones for bringing this motion to the Assembly today. I acknowledge Ms Lee's advocacy on this matter and her personal experience of loss. I am sure that she would have liked to be in the chamber today to formally move the motion. I wish her a speedy return.

The ACT government understands the importance of supporting parents in tragic circumstances of stillbirth and miscarriage. As Minister Stephen-Smith has outlined, compassionate leave for miscarriage and stillbirth already exists within the ACT public sector and this entitlement is being clarified in the current enterprise

bargaining process. The birth parent of a stillborn child is also entitled to take a full 18 weeks of birth leave available to the ACT public sector. Our employees are important to us and we want to ensure that this is reflected in our conditions of employment and the additional supports that we offer employees, especially during traumatic times in their lives.

I was sorry to read this morning that Ms Lee felt that she could not take leave following the loss of her child. Through our enterprise agreements we are fostering a culture within the ACT public service where people feel comfortable taking leave and feel supported during difficult times in their lives. All of us, of course, in this chamber have a duty to foster this culture of support in our workplaces. This is an issue for all of us.

I acknowledge the discussions in this place today and those who have spoken so well and so passionately about the issue. But this loss is universal and devastating.

I am proud to be part of a government that has provided entitlements that recognise the impact of the loss of a pregnancy and I am also proud to be a part of a union movement that continues to fight for better entitlements for working people and their families. The government is committed to ensuring that all our entitlements and arrangements are in place and reflect the support required for our employees to recover physically and emotionally when coping with stillbirth or miscarriage.

I commend Ellen Pinkas from my office for the work that she has done today with other members' offices to allow this motion to go through.

MRS JONES (Murrumbidgee) (3.27), in reply: I thank all members for their contributions to this debate. I want to acknowledge the babies that you have lost. I want to acknowledge the pregnancies that have ended in sadness and the births that have been of a baby that has passed away. I want to take this moment to remember the suffering and the distress in that experience, sometimes over many weeks as the process unfolds.

I want to acknowledge that it is a turning point for the Assembly that we can discuss these things openly and for all those in the community who are listening or who look back on this debate to know that today we have been thinking about you and about how it would be better for you to have an appropriate paid break which does not require personal negotiations.

We in the Canberra Liberals would clearly be happier if this change was able to be brought immediately; but we understand the EBA negotiation process. But a word of warning: I hope that the EBA negotiations are concluded by December. I have seen them stretch out in this place for some time, sometimes years in the past.

I hope to see this entitlement clearly enunciated so that it is simply a matter of notification to an employer that this is the leave that needs to be taken. I do not want anybody sitting at their desk wishing that they could leave. That is not the modern

workforce. I am glad to see that all members of this place agree that, moving forward, we need to do better in this space. I commend the motion.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Health—autism spectrum disorder

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (3.30): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) early diagnosis and early interventions are more effective in improving long-term outcomes for people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD);
- (b) delayed diagnosis has been linked to poor mental health in young people and can result in huge costs to children and young people, their families, and the systems that serve them; and
- (c) several factors may influence delayed diagnosis, including:
 - (i) statistically significant misdiagnosis in females and children from culturally and linguistically diverse background;
 - (ii) the presence of comorbid disorders;
 - (iii) failure of detection in the school system;
 - (iv) failure of detection by health professionals;
 - (v) lack of awareness by parents; and
 - (vi) late manifestation of symptoms in “high-functioning” or “mild” cases;

(2) also notes that:

- (a) the ACT Government provides free access to ASD screening through the Child Development Service, but only to children who have been referred before age 12;
- (b) Tasmania, Western Australia, South Australia, Queensland, and the Northern Territory provide free or subsidised assessments for young people up to age 16, age 18, or even older;
- (c) stakeholders report a large increase in low-income Canberra families seeking autism assessments for young people age 12 and above; and
- (d) the high cost of private assessments may further delay, or even prevent, diagnosis and interventions for some families; and

(3) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) increase the likelihood of early diagnosis of ASD by taking steps to increase awareness amongst both parents and professionals; and
- (b) extend access for public autism assessments to young people under the age of 18.

I am pleased to bring this motion before the Assembly today. Autism spectrum disorder is a persistent developmental disorder, characterised by symptoms evident from early childhood. These symptoms include difficulty in social interaction, restricted or repetitive patterns of behaviour and impaired communication skills.

According to the 2018 disability ageing and carers survey conducted by the ABS, there were more than 205,000 Australians with autism—1.3 per cent of all males and 0.4 per cent of all females. Whilst autism is a lifelong condition, the social, communication and sensory deficits that some experience may be remediated with the use of intervention therapies and structured support.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme provides tailored funding for personalised therapies and supports for anyone with autism who experiences reduced capacity in communication, social interaction, mobility, learning and/or self-care. For school-aged children, educational supports are also available.

Unsurprisingly, experts acknowledge that the earlier these therapies and supports can be put in place, the better. That is because the younger we are, the more adaptable our brains are. In the case of autism, it is believed that intensive therapy early on may encourage the young brain to reroute itself around the faulty neuropathways.

Early intervention can teach children with milder forms of autism how to relate better to others and potentially lessen their sense of alienation throughout life. Even the most severely affected children who may never develop the ability to speak can possibly learn alternative ways of communicating.

Research clearly shows that children who receive early intervention demonstrate improved cognitive developmental and adaptive functioning, enhanced language and social skills, as well as a decrease in symptom severity, cognitive impairment and behaviours compared to children who are treated later. In some cases, early interventions may even eliminate the need for autism-specific educational supports when a child starts school.

In contrast, undetected autism has been linked to poor mental health in adolescence, including depression, anxiety and even psychosis. In every case, however, access to intervention therapies and structured supports is dependent on first having received a professional diagnosis.

There are two pathways for accessing an autism assessment. Private assessments are available for families who can afford them. In the ACT this will cost approximately \$2,000. If the child being assessed is aged 12 or younger, Medicare will pay about \$340 of this. In addition, some private health insurance with specific kinds of extras may help cover the cost of a private assessment, making it even more affordable. Waiting times for a private assessment are typically shorter.

Families who are not in a position to access a private autism assessment may access a public one through the territory's Child Development Service or CDS. There is no cost for this service but the wait can be long.

During estimates hearings in February, Minister Berry noted that Canberra families were waiting eight to 10 months for an assessment. Families unwilling to wait this long are referred to private providers by the CDS. For families who cannot afford the private option, a public assessment is an essential service and I am grateful for that option existing, despite the wait.

In the ACT, however, a child must be referred to the CDS before the age of 12 to qualify for a public autism assessment. When I asked about this age limit in budget estimates hearings last month, Minister Berry's response was to assure me that the goal is to detect and diagnose autism early. I get that; it is absolutely the right goal. As I noted above, early diagnosis allows for early interventions, and early interventions are very clearly linked to better life-long outcomes. Ideally, detections should be occurring before a child begins school, at the latest.

But the question remains: what happens when this goal is not achieved? In other words, what happens when autism spectrum disorder is not picked up in a child before the age of 12? I asked this question of the minister as part of the hearings and was given a simple answer:

The CDS refers children 12 years and older to private psychologists.

This is fine for families who can afford a \$2,000 private assessment without any Medicare rebate and possibly with assistance from private health cover.

But what happens to families with children too old for public autism assessments who cannot afford to pay for a private assessment by a private psychologist? The answer from Autism Spectrum Australia is that sometimes these families just do the best they can without a diagnosis and the interventions that follow, with much poorer life outcomes for the person involved.

Another important question is: how many families in Canberra fall into this category? I asked the minister this question during hearings last month. In response, I was told that the ACT government has no data on this. I predicted this response and so I asked:

How many school students in Canberra above the age of 12 have provided a new diagnosis of autism to their schools?

Again, I was told that the ACT government does not track this.

In summary, the Labor-Greens government has a goal of detecting autism early, with an upper limit of age 12. This is a fine goal. Early detection can dramatically improve life outcomes. At the same time the government knows that this is not always happening because, as the minister informed me last month, the CDS is referring families with children aged 12 and above to private psychologists for assessment.

What the government does not know is how many families are in this situation or why. Therefore, the government also does not know what could be done differently to improve the early detection of autism spectrum disorder in the territory. This is a

textbook example of ignorance being bliss. It allows the minister to say that everything is fine because she has no data at hand to tell her otherwise.

In stark contrast, stakeholders have informed me that not only are many cases of autism not detected early but the number of low income families seeking autism assessments for children aged 12 and above has recently spiked here in the ACT, reaching levels never seen before.

Research identifies several factors that may contribute to the delayed diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder, for a variety of possible reasons—some biological and some cultural. Autism is regularly diagnosed at a significantly higher age in females. Children from migrant and refugee backgrounds often experience delayed diagnosis as well, with symptoms masked by learning to speak English as a second language or misinterpreted as cultural differences. Similarly, the presence of comorbid disorders such as ADHD, OCD or social anxiety disorder can leave the underlying autism undetected until later.

Research by psychologists Shilpa Aggarwal and Beth Angus found that, in Australia, one primary factor is that symptoms are regularly not picked up by school systems or primary care physicians even after concerns are raised by their parents. In other cases, parents are unaware of symptoms or what they mean, especially in high-functioning or milder cases, and sometimes such cases do not manifest until later as well.

The reality of delayed diagnosis requires two different approaches, which are both addressed directly in this motion. First, acknowledge that girls, children with migrant and refugee backgrounds and others are statistically likely to experience late diagnosis, and then have mechanisms in place to support that diagnosis to occur, especially for families who cannot afford a private assessment. This is the approach taken by several Australian jurisdictions.

Tasmania provides free public assessments to children and young people below the age of 18. Western Australia provides free public assessments to young people under the age of 16 in the Perth region and under the age of 18 in the rest of the state. In addition to this, the Western Australian government provides grants that allow a limited number of residents to access free private assessments up to the age of 30. In Queensland, a child can be referred to that state's child development program if they are under nine years of age. Otherwise, referral is made to local general paediatric services which accept new patients up to the age of 16.

South Australia takes a different approach and provides government-subsidised autism assessments through a private provider. These assessments cost \$1,000 for children and young people under the age of 18, with those under the age of 13 being eligible for a Medicare rebate. Assessments for those aged 18 and over cost \$600. In the Northern Territory, children can be referred to the Children's Development Team for assessment but autism assessments for adolescents can also be performed by school psychologists.

I am calling on the ACT government to do something similar: extend access to public autism assessment to young people under the age of 18. The main goal of this change

is to support the low income families in Canberra who need an assessment for an older child and simply cannot afford one. Stakeholders have shared with me an estimate that about 50 families each year find themselves in this situation.

Clearly, there will be some cost involved. I was told, as part of budget estimates hearings, that the average cost for a public autism assessment is between \$1,900 and \$2,200. If we take that top figure and multiply it by 50 young people, we arrive at \$110,000 per annum—not very much. I remind those opposite, however, that there are also costs associated with delayed diagnosis.

As in so many cases, early intervention can be much, much cheaper than dealing with the complexity of late intervention. Aggarwal and Angus in fact found that the delayed assessment of those with autism spectrum disorder can result in huge costs not only to the people with autism and their families but also to the public systems that serve them.

Extending access to public autism assessment will also accomplish something else, something quite important. It will give us the data we need to improve early detection in this territory. As Australian researchers have found:

In order to develop targeted education strategies and policy aimed at facilitating early diagnosis in a particular community, it is important to understand what factors are associated with age of diagnosis in that community and where any delays are occurring in the pathway to diagnosis for children.

The only way to obtain such data is to capture those families that experience delayed diagnosis and start to analyse what went wrong.

There will inevitably always be some cases of autism spectrum disorder that experience delayed diagnosis, but we can increase the likelihood of early diagnosis by taking steps to address failings that we discover in our existing systems. That requires data but, as we obtain data, I likewise call on the ACT government to use what we learn as it follows the clear recommendations of Australian researchers Aggarwal, Angus, Gibbs, Aldridge, Sburlati, Chandler, Smith, Cheng and others. This includes improving what is already being done to increase awareness amongst both parents and professionals. It will also include fixing any other gaps that the data may reveal.

On behalf of Canberra families and those who serve them, I commend this motion to the Assembly.

MS DAVIDSON (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Seniors, Veterans, Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health and Minister for Mental Health) (3.45): I move:

Omit all text after “notes that” (first occurring), substitute:

- “(a) early diagnosis and early interventions are more effective in improving long-term outcomes for people with autism spectrum disorder (ASD);
- (b) delayed diagnosis has been linked to poor mental health in young people and can result in huge costs to children and young people, their families, and the systems that serve them; and

- (c) several factors may influence delayed diagnosis, including:
 - (i) statistically significant misdiagnosis in females, gender diverse children, and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds;
 - (ii) the presence of comorbidities;
 - (iii) lack of awareness by parents; and
 - (iv) different autism presentations;
- (2) also notes that:
 - (a) the ACT Government provides free access to ASD screening through the Child Development Service to children who have been referred before age 12;
 - (b) Tasmania, Western Australia, South Australia, Queensland, and the Northern Territory provide free or subsidised assessments for young people up to age 16, age 18, or even older;
 - (c) there is a nation-wide skills shortage of allied health professionals required to make an autism diagnosis;
 - (d) the Child Development Service has introduced a telehealth service that has reduced the wait times for autism assessments for those who access it;
 - (e) stakeholders report a large increase in low-income Canberra families seeking autism assessments for young people age 12 and above;
 - (f) the high cost of private assessments may further delay, or even prevent, diagnosis and interventions for some families; and
 - (g) diagnosis has an important impact on NDIS eligibility, however, NDIS supports can be difficult for people to access regardless of diagnosis; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to:
 - (a) increase the likelihood of early diagnosis of ASD by taking steps to increase awareness amongst both parents and professionals; and
 - (b) continue to explore innovative ways to provide autism assessments to more families with children up to 12 through the Child Development Service;
 - (c) continue to make reasonable adjustments to support public school students with their learning, whether or not they have an autism diagnosis; and
 - (d) continue working with the Commonwealth Government to ensure that NDIA work on thin markets addresses the increased need for allied health professionals for autism diagnosis in the ACT.”.

Early support through diagnosis can improve the long-term outcomes for people with autism. The ACT government is addressing the issue of diagnosis and access to allied health professionals, and I commend the important work of the Child Development Service. It is important to recognise that diagnosis is only the tip of the iceberg. Further, diagnosis does not guarantee that people with autism will be able to access NDIS services that are appropriate to their level of need.

An important issue in discussions about NDIS reforms is thin markets, in which there are not enough allied health professionals with certain skills to meet demands. There are significant allied health workforce issues related to delays in autism diagnosis in the ACT. Extending access to the service when there are not enough workers to meet demand increases wait times for assessment and reduces access to early intervention. As Minister for Disability, I am advocating strongly for the ACT in discussions with the commonwealth about these workforce issues within the NDIS.

We have a very engaged disability community in the ACT who clearly communicate their concerns and needs to my office. Overwhelmingly, I hear how difficult it is to access NDIS plans, that NDIS plans often do not adequately assess a person's needs, and the difficulty in ensuring that a participant's plan is not unnecessarily cut, especially if the participant requests a plan review. If Minister Reynolds' amendments go through, the CEO of the NDIA will be able to do this even more easily and without the participant's consent.

For people with autism who have complex needs or co-occurring disabilities, this process of navigating the NDIS and safeguarding support can be particularly difficult. In their 2021 submission to the NDIA's proposed reforms to NDIS access and planning policies, the Australian Autism Alliance noted that the NDIS presents a particular challenge to people with autism, as autism is multifaceted, nuanced and highly variable in how it affects the functional capacity of each autistic person in each situation. As a scheme, the NDIS does not respond well to this level of nuance or need for flexibility.

For children, there is no national guideline on good-practice autism supports for children. Issues like this are at the heart of why the ACT is committed to ensuring that the NDIS returns to its intent of choice and control for people with disability. The NDIS frames everything in terms of financial cost. What the NDIS fails to do is value people.

The ACT government has repeatedly asked the National Disability Insurance Agency to undertake a codesign process with people with disability, to maintain the intent of the NDIS. This codesign project must involve people with autism to ensure that the agency better includes strengths-based approaches for people with autism. I will continue working with the commonwealth to achieve these goals.

In consulting with autism advocates this week, one stakeholder noted that, in only discussing diagnosis, there is a risk that we medicalise this issue and divert from the importance of the social model of disability. The social model of disability tells us that the idea of disability is socially constructed. As such, we do not need to change people with disability; we need to ensure that our society changes to enable the equal participation and genuine inclusion of people with disability.

The ACT has further work to do to realise this change for all people with disability, including autism. We have work to do to ensure that our attitudes, workplaces, built environment and community activities are inclusive and welcoming to people with autism, to become a community that celebrates and takes pride in neurodiversity.

Human bodies and minds come in an amazing and beautiful diversity of shapes and ways of functioning. This diversity gives our collective humanity a broader range of perspectives on every aspect of life, assists us in adapting to our changing world and makes our community more than just the sum of our individual member's abilities. Disability is a fundamental and necessary facet of human diversity. If we are to practise radical love and to be a truly inclusive society, then we must see disability not simply as a cost to the economy but as a valued aspect of who we are as human beings.

I am glad to note that, in addition to the work undertaken by Minister Berry for a more inclusive public education system, the ACT is also undertaking several pieces of work to realise a vision for the ACT of equality and inclusion across our justice and health systems.

In February 2021, I tabled the 2020 *Annual Progress report on the Disability Justice Strategy*, noting that it has commenced work on a cultural shift in our justice agencies to increase awareness of the needs of people with disability and identify and implement reasonable adjustments. This has included actions such as adjusting meeting rooms to be suitable for people with sensory needs; reviewing processes and policies through a disability lens; and linking people with advocacy agencies. I am proud that this work has also been undertaken in Youth Justice to contribute to better outcomes for children and young people.

Work is also progressing well on an ACT government disability health strategy, which was developed with people with lived experience of disability, to improve the health system for people with disability and to provide better support to navigate the interface between health and disability service systems. This was an election commitment by both Labor and the Greens.

Inclusion for people with autism benefits all of us. As has been discussed today, there is no doubt that people with autism experience barriers to accessing services in our community. As such, I am glad that the ACT government is progressing important work to ensure that services become more responsive, appropriate and accessible.

Thank you to Mrs Kikkert for raising this issue in the Assembly and for the opportunity to speak about the importance of ensuring better services and support for people with autism in our community. I am always glad to be able to talk about the importance of celebrating diversity.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health) (3.51): I rise on behalf of the Deputy Chief Minister, Minister Berry, to speak in support of Ms Davidson's amendment. Like Ms Davidson, I thank Mrs Kikkert for bringing this important conversation to the chamber; but I can advise that the government will not be supporting Mrs Kikkert's proposed amendment to Ms Davidson's amendment.

As Mrs Kikkert's own speech has highlighted, we know that earlier diagnosis allows for earlier intervention, and early support can make an enormous difference in the life

opportunities of children with autism. That is why the government has prioritised children up to 12 years old, as has the commonwealth.

The Child Development Service works hard to make families and professionals aware of the importance of the early diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder by providing parents with detailed information on autism spectrum disorder and the treatment options available to them. There are support options. The Child Development Service also maintains a close relationship with ACT Health and Canberra Health Services staff, including community paediatricians and private psychologists, to ensure that a multifaceted, multidisciplinary response is in place for families.

The ACT government understands that autism can also be linked with other conditions that affect a person's quality of life, including physical, developmental or mental health conditions. This means that individuals and families need to have respect, understanding and supports that allow them to be comfortable as they navigate our systems and services.

In October last year, the Child Development Service commenced a telehealth service for conducting autism assessments. While more complex multidisciplinary assessments still need to be done in person, a telehealth option means that more families can access assessments earlier. To date, 177 children have been referred for a telehealth autism assessment. I have been receiving really positive feedback about this new way of doing things, and the government will continue exploring innovative ways to deliver more autism assessments for children up to 12 years old at the Child Development Service.

While a diagnosis is important, Ms Berry really wanted to emphasise that local public schools also provide reasonable adjustments to support children's learning in the absence of a formal diagnosis. Public schools develop individual learning plans in collaboration with families and other support staff that include goals and strategies that support students to learn alongside their peers. This is where those individual learning plans are needed. These plans are based on the needs of individual students. While diagnosis and assessments can support the development of these plans, children do not need a diagnosis for reasonable adjustments to be made.

The government's commitment to rolling out free early learning for three-year-olds is a once-in-a-generation social reform that will see more Canberra families engaging in early learning. We have begun rolling out this program to those three-year-olds who need it most: those who are experiencing vulnerability, developmental delay or who have other complexities in their lives.

We know that two years of early learning before school really increases children's chances of success over their lifetime and it gives families an opportunity to engage with learning professionals one year earlier than they might have previously. This also gives us a greater opportunity to catch any learning or socio-emotional disabilities that a child may be expressing.

There are also challenging issues for government, including a national shortage of allied health professionals to conduct autism assessments. Within Canberra Health

Services, neurodevelopmental and behavioural paediatricians operate in the community paediatrics and child health service, one arm of the Women, Youth and Children's Community Health program. Referrals to this service have grown significantly over recent years, in line with Australia-wide trends.

Data from the Australian Paediatric Research Network shows that six in every 10 children will be seen by paediatricians in outpatient clinics for neurodevelopmental or behavioural concerns at some point. The most common conditions are autism spectrum disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, sleep disturbance, learning difficulty and behavioural concerns.

The reasons for these rising numbers include increased awareness of neurodevelopmental and behavioural conditions, leading to increased rates of referral and funding systems that drive a demand for specific diagnoses, particularly autism spectrum disorder, to attract particular disability support services. I reference Minister Davidson's comments in relation to the NDIS and disability support. The complex interrelations between these factors have led to significantly increased demand for autism spectrum disorder assessments and increased rates of diagnosis.

The Child Development Service, of course, continues to actively pursue the engagement of psychologists to conduct ASDS assessments. Unfortunately, workforce challenges, including an extremely competitive job market and many psychologists in the ACT having to close their books over the past 18 months due to COVID-19—with all of that—mean that this remains a very significant issue.

In relation to Mrs Kikkert's proposed amendment to Ms Davidson's amendment, I would also note that, while I acknowledge the intent behind Mrs Kikkert's amendment and her original motion, it is telling that, despite noting in her speech that there was not an MBS item associated with autism assessment for children aged 13 and older—like our ACT government service, the only MBS items that are available are for children that have a plan by the time they turn 13—Mrs Kikkert's amendment does not call on the commonwealth government to introduce MBS items in this space.

She spoke eloquently—and I think with justification—about the cost to families of going private, particularly those who do not have private health insurance. But never once did she call on her federal Liberal counterparts to address this issue. Perhaps she will do so in moving her proposed amendment.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who works at the Child Development Service and, indeed, the Canberra Health Services community paediatrics and child health service for the work that they do every day supporting children and their families, and all of those who work across other government and non-government organisations to support individuals and families in the Canberra community. Indeed, there are many teams of health professionals and support staff who do incredible work every day.

In the Child Development Service, in addition to autism assessment, our allied health professionals provide drop-in clinics for children up to six years old, for speech pathology, physiotherapy and occupational therapy. And social workers provide

wraparound support for families who are going through the process of a diagnosis and can assist families to access support services.

The entire team at the Child Development Service is committed to working with children and their families to better understand their needs and to get them started on finding supports that will work for them. Going through that process of diagnosis, whether it is for autism or for something else, can be very challenging for families, which is why it is our priority to provide this autism assessment service for children up to 12 years of age and to ensure that early diagnosis is available wherever possible and early identification of need through a range of services is available wherever possible.

We have not even talked about the fabulous Child and Family Centre network that we have and the programs that sit within that, including the incredible Prep for Pre Program which Ms Berry is now responsible for as well.

In closing, I also want to thank the disability advocates in this space, as Ms Davidson also did. There are a number of autism groups in the ACT who advocate very strongly for children with autism, for adults with autism and for the families and carers who care for loved ones with autism. And they are loud and effective voices for the community. I thank them very much for their advocacy and again thank Mrs Kikkert for bringing this motion to the Assembly. I commend Ms Davidson's amendment.

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (4.00): I move:

Add:

“(e) extend access for public autism assessments to young people under the age of 18.”.

How disappointed I am about the results of this great motion that would have been fantastic to support low income families in Canberra. The government amendment has completely missed the point. The entire purpose of the motion is to spur movement or change or improvement. There is no real change in the minister's amendment. There is not even any movement towards a possible future improvement.

What they currently remind me of is ministers who are, at the moment, quokka watchers. Quokka watchers are people, especially politicians, who seek instructions from a third party rather than actually seeking instructions from their constituents. We have 50 families who actually went to a stakeholder asking for assistance to support them, in their case, with autism assessments for teenagers.

We are currently calling on the government to support those families. They are not listening to their constituents. I wonder what you will say to your constituents after today's mess that you have created. Importantly, those opposite who support these amendments have publicly and formally acknowledged that we have a real problem here in the ACT.

An important statement in my motion, as originally drafted, calls on this body to note that, according to stakeholders, there has been a large increase in low income families

seeking autism assessments for young people aged 12 and above. This statement has not been amended in any way by Minister Davidson because she knows that it is true. Families and their children are falling through the cracks and their numbers are growing. In fact, what Ms Davidson has demonstrated today is a slap in the face. She knows that this problem exists in the community. However, she does not want to help them at all, whatsoever.

What is her solution to these, often desperate, low income families and their children? She does not have one. If you look at her last three paragraphs to section (3), each one is a request for the government to just continue doing things it is already doing. This is very clearly an admission of their complete failure. Of course, the minister does not like to admit failure. Instead, she blames a nation-wide skills shortage. Nonsense! As still noted in the motion, other jurisdictions are successfully providing this service, despite any skills shortage.

The Northern Territory uses school psychologists to do autism assessments for secondary students. When I asked the minister during estimates hearings if any of the school psychologists in the ACT are qualified to do autism assessment, she confirmed that some of them are. But unlike the Northern Territory government, this government lacks the will to use school psychologists to help low income families.

Western Australia could fall back on the excuse of a nation-wide skills shortage as well. Instead, it provides public autism assessments to all young people under the age of 16 or 18 and then turns around and helps fund private assessments for anyone who has been missed.

Queensland is able to provide public assessments to young people up to the age of 16. South Australia successfully provides a mixture of free and subsidised assessment to children, young people and even adults, despite the skills shortage. Tasmania, which is only slightly larger than the ACT in population, currently has three full-time psychologists on staff to provide public autism assessments to children and young people up to the age of 18.

It would appear that Minister Davidson's nation-wide skills shortage excuse is not stopping other jurisdictions from providing assessments to young people with delayed diagnosis. This Labor government just lacks the will to make it happen. What that tells us very clearly is that this is a government that does not care and is very ignorant. The plight of these families means nothing to them.

Finally, I note that Minister Davidson's amendment commits the government to continue making reasonable adjustments to support school students with their learning, whether they have an autism diagnosis or not. This sounds nice on the surface but it is just more nonsense. Learning supports need to be personalised and individualised to be effective, based on a child's unique needs. How does this happen without an assessment ever taking place in the first place? Clearly it does not. This is more evidence of a government that does not care and does not know what they are doing.

I have circulated an amendment to Ms Davidson's amendment to restore the call and the plea from families to extend access to public autism assessments to young people under the age of 18, and I commit this amendment to the government's amendment.

Question put:

That **Mrs Kikkert's** amendment to **Ms Davidson's** proposed amendment be agreed to.

The Assembly voted—

Ayes 7

Noes 14

Mr Cain
Ms Castley
Mr Hanson
Mrs Jones
Mrs Kikkert
Mr Milligan
Mr Parton

Mr Barr
Mr Braddock
Ms Burch
Ms Cheyne
Ms Clay
Ms Davidson
Mr Davis

Mr Gentleman
Ms Orr
Mr Pettersson
Mr Rattenbury
Mr Steel
Ms Stephen-Smith
Ms Vassarotti

Amendment negatived.

Ms Davidson's amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Personal explanation

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health) (4.12): I believe that I may have indicated in question time that the ACT had not been charging people for tests, but for the certificate that was required for those who were getting tested in order to support travel arrangements. It is clear from the information that I provided after question time that the \$112.40 charge included \$50 for the testing, based on the relevant MBS item. I just wanted to formally correct the record to ensure that I brought those things together. I can also advise the Assembly that ACT Pathology will be reversing all invoices for testing for domestic travel and issuing refunds to those who have already paid, and that that process is now underway.

Appropriation Bill 2021-2022

[Cognate bill:

Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2021-2022

Cognate papers:

Standing Committee Reports on Appropriation Bill 2021-2022 and
Appropriation (Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2021-2022]

Detail stage

Schedule 1—Appropriations—Proposed expenditure.

Debate resumed.

Community Services Directorate—Part 1.8

MRS JONES (Murrumbidgee) (4.13): In section 1.8 of the budget, we discuss multicultural affairs. Canberra is, as we all know, a wonderful multicultural city. But this Assembly—as it did when it agreed to refer the issue of serious racist attacks to the Education and Community Inclusion Committee for inquiry and report—recognises that not everything is rosy within our community. Nonetheless, we have all pulled together during the COVID-19 pandemic to support one another as best we can.

The cancellation of the National Multicultural Festival is extremely disappointing to the whole Canberra community, and many members of the multicultural community have been in contact with me to say so. Not only is it a wonderful celebration of our diverse community, it is also a really important fundraising opportunity for many of Canberra's multicultural groups. I welcome Minister Cheyne's commitment to allow fundraising at ACT government events throughout the year via multicultural showcases. I genuinely hope this is achieved and it proves to be a big plus for these community organisations, who do vital work in promoting wellbeing and social cohesion in our community.

The cancellation of the festival also sheds a light on the fact that the Office for Multicultural Affairs is not heavily staffed. In fact, it has been my view for some years, even since I previously held this portfolio, that the staffing in that area is probably not enough. It has long amazed me how much work is done by such a small team. The team, certainly in the past, has worked across veterans, disability and women portfolio areas too. It is a heavy load for a small team, and I encourage the minister and the government to bolster this team so that we can deliver all the support that the multicultural community and the festival need every year, going forward, without fail.

The building promised at the last election for the multicultural community's events has not yet been built, nor is it even really underway. Every year there are numerous events across the whole multicultural community, and many groups have trouble finding an appropriate venue. I will continue to press the minister and the government to keep the Assembly updated on this election promise. I hope that this facility is designed to be what it needs to be for the multicultural community: big enough, flexible enough, and available enough for the many great cultural groups and the events that they need it to be built for.

The pandemic has affected some sections of the multicultural community more strongly than others. This year, I took the unusual step of personally supporting some of the larger families in long quarantine via big food boxes of culturally appropriate foods. As a mum of six, I happen to know a lot about feeding big households and how this can be achieved. But this help would not have been possible without the many donors who came on board. Our charity partner is Picking Up The Peaces, with Kate Tonacia AO and her husband and veteran AFP officer who served in the Solomon Islands, David Tonacia. They run a great mental health charity which also assists stressed communities.

An amazing local hero is Andrew Dale of the G Spot food van in Gungahlin. He has a big heart and a deep knowledge of the great suppliers and businesses of the ACT, including our supporter Frank Comisso and his family from Go Troppo Fruit and Vegetables, who supplied fruit and veggies at cost. The Longpark Meat Company supplied meat at cost. Go Troppo and Longpark Meat are both great longstanding Canberra businesses that we should support. Without these Canberra people, the assistance to multicultural families—which I was a small part of—would not have been possible, and it was our help in this vital multicultural portfolio area. Regarding the COVID-19 response for multicultural communities, I would also like to acknowledge Glenn Keys AO, who offered, and is delivering, training seminars about the vaccine to some newly arrived community members—how important it is and how it works. The seminars are very welcome and have been enjoyed by attendees.

The multicultural policy area is a policy area that receives bipartisan support. We take our roles here as MLAs and party representatives seriously, and as an opposition we need to look at the use of power and resources by the government. Looking at matters and pointing out flaws does create tension, but ultimately, we hope, it improves the lives and experiences of all Canberrans. However, that does not mean we cannot work together, and in this area we do.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Health) (4.18): I rise to support part 1.8 for the Community Services Directorate. It is always a great pleasure to talk about the amazing work that the Community Services Directorate does, and the investments that we are continuing to make in this work.

Labor took an ambitious social policy agenda to the 2020 election. This included a significant focus on investing in stronger protection and support for children, young people and their families, and a firm commitment to self-determination and closing the gap in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This budget represents substantial progress in delivering Labor's social policy agenda. It demonstrates a government that partners with the community and listens to those with lived experience and expertise.

Many of the significant measures in this budget represent partnerships. The Healing and Reconciliation Fund is a partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to invest in their priorities. The new facility for Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation is an investment in a respected and trusted community-controlled organisation to do more of what it does best for Aboriginal families and young people.

The Safe and Connected Youth project is a partnership with the community sector to address an area of need that they have identified, with solutions that they have developed with the engagement of young people with lived experience for a try, test and learn approach. We know that to deliver improvements in people's lives, we must work with people, with communities and with the organisations that are on the ground. The 2021-22 budget demonstrates our commitment to this way of working. The budget provides targeted investment in our public service and in our community

sector partners to ensure that we can deliver our ambitious social reform agenda, and this includes funding the full review and modernisation of the Children and Young People Act, enabling a significant suite of reforms; and investing in the completion and ongoing maintenance and improvement of the Child and Youth Record Information System, known as CYRIS, to support the work of our frontline child protection workforce and to enable reporters, community partners, young people and carers to connect more easily with Child and Youth Protection Services.

The budget includes increasing the rate of indexation for funded non-government organisations and supporting the wage increase for community sector workers, as determined by the Fair Work Commission. We continue to work with the sector to better understand what is required to deliver true sector sustainability, a process commenced by my colleague Suzanne Orr. This budget does not ignore the important, albeit less flashy, investments that are needed to strengthen the way that we support the most vulnerable members of our community.

The Healing and Reconciliation Fund will invest \$20 million over 10 years to support priorities identified by the community. The Healing and Reconciliation Fund is intended to fund projects and processes identified and administered in partnership with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The budget includes \$362,000 from the fund to support the establishment of a Ngunnawal Language Centre, an identified community priority. This builds on our commitment in the last budget to support a facilitated conversation with Ngunnawal traditional custodians about a treaty and what a treaty process could mean for them. Labor promised the Healing and Reconciliation Fund at the 2020 election. In delivering the fund, we will advance the government's commitment under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, specifically priority reform area 2, strengthening the community-controlled sector, and the government's commitment to achieving the outcomes of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028.

I acknowledge that these commitments sit alongside an array of other measures, including—I know that this was spoken about earlier in relation to the Justice and Community Safety portfolio—the establishment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner. My colleague Minister Cheyne is leading that work, and I am very pleased to see that work reaching some practical fruition.

This budget, as I have indicated, includes funding to deliver a purpose-built facility for Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation. Through this budget, the government will fund the construction of a purpose-built facility for Gugan at its existing site in Wanniasa. The budget commits \$14.8 million to the construction of this new facility, with most of the funding beyond 2021-22 being provisioned but allocated for this purpose. This initiative builds on \$150,000 in the 2018-19 budget for a feasibility study into this project, and \$568,000 in the August 2020 economic and fiscal update and the 2021-22 budget, for early planning work and structural and services design work.

Gugan has been involved in every step of this project, and we will continue to partner with and be led by them. This project reflects our commitment to support the growth of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector and helps to

meet our obligations under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander procurement policy. This initiative aligns with our commitments under the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028, particularly in the significant area of connecting the community.

Delivering a purpose-built facility for and with Gugan Gulwan was a Labor election commitment in the 2020 election, and we are proud to be delivering that through this budget. It builds on the amazing new facility that we worked with Winnunga Nimmityjah to deliver and the ACT government investment of \$13.5 million, but with Winnunga leading that work and delivering that project. I was also pleased to be able to secure from my colleague Minister Hunt an additional \$4.5 million for that project a couple of years ago to ensure that it could be fully fitted out. Anyone who visits now can see what an enormous difference it is making to Winnunga's capacity to deliver their vitally important services that are funded across a range of ACT government directorates, as well as primarily by the Commonwealth government.

The Safe and Connected Youth project is very close to my heart. This budget allocates \$7 million over four years for the Safe and Connected Youth coordinated service response program, including \$4.1 million for the operational costs of therapeutic respite accommodation; \$2.6 million for early preservation outreach services, including mediation and case work; \$157,000 for post-exit outreach services; and \$185,000 for work to establish the program. This funding continues and expands the Safe and Connected Youth program to include therapeutic respite accommodation, building a coordinated service response for children and young people and their families. This funding will help to reduce youth homelessness and supports the reunification of children and young people with their families by resolving family conflict before it is too late, particularly for those young people who are not old enough to be supported by our existing youth homelessness services, which are restricted to those 16 and older.

It will enable a 24-hour therapeutic accommodation response for children and young people who need some time away from their families. The expanded ongoing Safe and Connected Youth program fills a gap in the service system by providing more services for children and young people in the middle years. Expanding and providing ongoing funding for Safe and Connected Youth delivers Labor's election commitment to provide an ongoing coordinated service response for young people aged eight to 15 years who are at risk of homelessness or engagement with the child protection or youth justice systems.

I have mentioned that the revised indexation rate for the community sector in this budget includes \$4 million over four years to support an increased indexation rate for community-sector funding. This reflects the government's commitment to increase the community-sector indexation rate to assist community organisations to meet the higher wage costs following the recent Fair Work Commission decision to increase the national minimum wage and associated awards by 2.5 per cent—something that, of course, is greatly welcomed by Labor members. Eligible organisations will receive an adjusted funding amount to top up the indexation component from the 1.75 per cent that was estimated in contracts, to the 2.5 per cent for the wages component of all eligible contracts.

Our frontline child protection workers deserve to be supported with really good systems, and this budget includes \$6.49 million over four years for the Child and Youth Record Information System, CYRIS. CYRIS ensures that high-quality and accessible information is available to comprehensively assess the risk experienced by vulnerable children and young people. This funding provides for a permanent team, licence and vendor costs to further develop CYRIS. The funding also provides for system technical upgrades, management of security obligations and supports.

The funding will ensure that the CYRIS system remains current, secure and stable, and that improvements can be made quickly to respond to new requirements. This funding will also allow work to continue on CYRIS project deliverables on an online reporting portal, building application program interfaces with other built business systems, including with the Education Directorate for information exchange about vulnerable children, as well as carer and young people portals.

I want to acknowledge the incredibly hardworking team behind the CYRIS project. I have said it before at committee hearings, but you do not often hear about government IT projects that are delivered pretty much on time and with a pretty tight budget being adhered to. This team has delivered a phenomenal product that has been absolutely welcomed by the frontline workforce because they have done it in partnership with the workforce. So I want to pay particular credit to that team, and I am really pleased that we have been able to secure ongoing funding to keep up this great work and ensure that it is able to be maintained in the long term.

Hundreds of recommendations have been made over the years about Child and Youth Protection Services and the broader child protection out-of-home care, and child and family services system. Many of those recommendations have gone to matters that are reflected in the Children and Young People Act. In this budget, we have committed \$1.975 million over three years to modernise the Children and Young People Act. The CYP Act has been regularly amended over recent years, but holistically reviewing and modernising the act will ensure that it is easy for frontline workers to use and that it is accessible for the community to understand and navigate.

Child protection and youth justice, which are covered in the Children and Young People Act, will always be complex areas of policy, and I am not going to pretend that we can have a two-page act that will cover everything and be really simple. But it is time—this act was first developed in 2008 and it was, at that time, a rewrite—to do this work again and to do it in partnership with the community, taking into account everything that we have heard for years, particularly since the Glanfield inquiry in 2016, but also from the Legislative Assembly inquiry into CYPS last year and everything that we have heard from people in further developing the next stage of Step Up For Our Kids. It is important that we reflect that in a modern CYP Act that will build on evidence-based frameworks and decision-making tools for improving the achievement of positive child protection outcomes in our community.

The government's significant reform agenda in this space will likely require a series of amendments to the CYP Act, and will, of course, reflect the work that was spoken about earlier today to raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility and the

development of a model of an external review of child protection decisions—something I know that Mrs Kikkert is particularly passionate about. I have shared her frustration over a number of years about how slowly this project has moved at times, but we will do it. The CYP Act will also involve the implementation of a charter of rights for families involved in the child protection system, which is a commitment through the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement. The CYP Act will be redesigned to streamline systems and practices to ensure that resources are focused on better practice casework and earlier intervention strategies, including by embedding a restorative approach across the child and family continuum.

Among the new initiatives in this budget are significant long-term investments in our community, which will in turn help to address the long-term intergenerational issues that too many parts of our community face. This is a budget that delivers on key Labor election commitments which form the backbone of our government's strong social policy agenda.

In closing, I want to thank the staff of the Community Services Directorate—the whole directorate, but particularly those who work in my areas of responsibility as Minister for Families and Community Services and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. Mrs Jones talked about the incredible work the Office for Multicultural Affairs does with a relatively small staff, and the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs also does an incredible amount of work right across government and the community. It is so engaged, and its advice is highly valued not just by me but also by other ministers and particularly by other directorates right across government.

I also want to take the opportunity to thank our community partners. The non-government sector is vital to delivering improved services across my portfolios, and particularly the Aboriginal community-controlled sector, which we will continue to work with, to grow and to strengthen. Finally, I particularly want to thank those with lived experience who have worked with us to codesign some of these initiatives, including Safe and Connected Youth, and with whom we will continue to work to empower them and to hear those voices of lived experience as we continue to improve our services.

These are complex services that we will never get 100 per cent right, but we are on an ongoing journey of improvement. When I look back over the five years that I have been minister in these portfolios—some of them consistently, some of them off and on—I see real change and I see incredible opportunity over the remainder of this term of government to really cement some of that change and drive it forward. I look forward to working with the Community Services Directorate to achieve that. With that, I commend the budget to the Assembly.

MS DAVIDSON (Murrumbidgee—Assistant Minister for Seniors, Veterans, Families and Community Services, Minister for Disability, Minister for Justice Health and Minister for Mental Health) (4.34): COVID has taught us a lot about our community. We can all be proud that Canberra is a place where people are willing to lend a hand to help others. However, COVID has also shown that the way things were before was not always the best way to create a kind, caring and connected community. It has

relentlessly demonstrated how unequal our society is. The pandemic has starkly reminded us that there are some in our city who do not have reliable access to food, who forgo things that they need to support their family.

The ACT government is leading a response to help more Canberrans live with dignity through the transition of the Canberra Relief Network to a community-led model. It will provide more support for our hardworking community sector in response to food security beyond the public health emergency of COVID-19. It will mean more meals for Canberrans in need and better connections to other social supports that people might not know how to access. The government established the Canberra Relief Network in March 2020 to ensure that Canberrans would have access to regular household and food supplies during the pandemic. I am very proud to see that the Canberra Relief Network has been announced as the winner of the 2021 Resilient Australia Award for the ACT in the government award category.

Canberra Relief Network is a collective effort between community partners, including established emergency food relief providers, other social and community welfare organisations and the ACT government, to provide more support for at-risk Canberrans through the pandemic by the provision of food and hygiene hampers and connecting people to other wraparound support services. I would particularly like to thank Community Services Directorate staff, who worked long hours and demonstrated creativity in finding solutions and commitment to the community they serve; Volunteering ACT, who rapidly set up a call centre to take calls from people experiencing very difficult circumstances and carried out their work with empathy and care; and Disaster Relief Australia, whose logistics skills and the precision with which they carried out their work is a wonderful demonstration of the ways in which veterans contribute to our resilient and supportive community.

Since the re-establishment of the Canberra Relief Network during the 2021 lockdown, the need for support has been more than double what it was in 2020. The reduction of JobSeeker and ending of JobKeeper has had a significant effect on people working in insecure casualised jobs in low-paid industries that have been impacted by the pandemic. The support provided by the ACT government, in collaboration with community sector partners, has made a very real difference to people's lives. Targeted support services and the coordination of community partners is crucial for more Canberrans to have access to food security and for the ACT to have a future where this inequality does not exist.

The ACT government is investing in a community-led model for a long-term approach to food security, supporting people to live with dignity. I am proud that the ACT government is investing \$475,000 over four years to develop a collaborative approach to food security across the territory, supporting our community sector food relief organisations and better connecting people with additional social supports. This budget's investment to develop a fit-for-purpose database will capture information which is managed by a dedicated project coordinator in the community services sector to ensure that the specific needs and demands of the community shape future decision-making.

Importantly, this initiative empowers and enables the community sector to continue to work collaboratively and to advise the ACT government on how we can tackle this issue together. The funding will also support the establishment of a food relief network, with representation from government and community service providers, to establish connections with, and pathways to, broader critical social and health wraparound supports. This increased collaboration will ensure that food relief and other community services are linked and will open more pathways for those accessing food relief to also receive support for other needs, which might include housing, employment and job seeking, health, family support or domestic and family violence.

People with disability have been adaptive and resilient in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has been particularly challenging and often isolating for those who are at increased risk of severe disease and infection. This has all occurred at a time when the disability sector is undergoing seismic national reform and faces significant challenges with the implementation of the NDIS. Members in this place will have heard me speak about the work the ACT government does to support a national disability insurance scheme that is based on choice and control.

As Minister for Disability, it has been a privilege to represent a well-informed and engaged disability community, and sector providers who are absolutely determined that the NDIS stay true to its original intent—codesigned with the community it serves. But there remains a critical need for strong, individual advocacy services which provide vital support to people with disability. The ACT has two individual advocacy services which directly support people with disability to exercise their rights to voice concerns, access information, resolve complex issues and complaints, and identify available support options: Advocacy for Inclusion, and ACT Disability, Aged and Carer Advocacy Service, ADACAS. I am proud that in this budget the ACT government has funded AFI and ADACAS \$1.648 million over four years, doubling their annual funding for individual advocacy services.

Individual advocacy can enable people to participate in supported decision-making and interact with many parts of our community that contribute to the social determinants of good health and wellbeing, such as housing, education and health. For some people, advocacy services can be invaluable and significantly improve their quality of life. Those of us outside the disability community can measure the verified value of individual advocacy through the independent cost-benefit analysis of Australia's independent disability advocacy agencies, which was commissioned by Disability Advocacy Network Australia. This found that independent advocacy delivers an estimated benefit of \$3.50 returned for each dollar spent.

ADACAS says, "As an advocacy service, ADACAS is frequently working with people who are 'falling through the cracks' in current service systems." Those current service systems include the NDIS, which is increasingly being framed by the federal government as a financially unsustainable welfare system, justifying cuts to individual plans, attempting to provide unfettered powers to the CEO of the NDIA, and reducing the range of services that participants can access without the consent of the state and territory partners in the scheme. Right now, there are people in hospital in our city who could be living more comfortably at home, except that the NDIA is too slow and

inflexible in processing their plan or review so that they can access the supports that they need. At a time when COVID is putting pressure on our hospital systems, these delays by the NDIA are unacceptable.

Many people with disability require extra support to live safely and well. This is particularly the case for people with psychosocial disability, or those with complex needs or challenging behaviours, who benefit from more intensive case management or increased interim supports. For this, I am pleased that \$4.409 million over four years has been allocated for the continued delivery of the Integrated Service Response Program to ensure that more people with disability can access support that is relevant to their needs. ISRP is run through the Office for Disability and, though small, it makes a significant difference to the lives of people with disability, their carers and their families.

The ISRP program provides short-term case coordination and emergency funding. While it is a program of last resort, referrals over time indicate that, for people with disability with highly complex needs, ISRP provides essential support that often cannot be received through the NDIS. During COVID-19, the ISRP program referrals at times increased by 100 per cent. Through the 2021-22 ACT budget, I am proud that this government has recognised the importance of ensuring people with disability in the ACT have access to an inclusive service that responds to individual needs.

It is a privilege to be Minister for Disability. A crucial part of this role is listening to the disability community in the ACT and acting on what they share with me. Over the past year, but especially over the past few months during COVID lockdown, I have met with the community regularly. What I have heard is that there is still a long way to go in the ACT to ensure that our community services and our city are inclusive and accessible to all people with disability, no matter their level or type of need.

Some of this work is being progressed through the disability justice strategy, the disability health strategy and the various disability access and inclusion plans across ACT public services. I look forward to talking more about the future for disability policy in the ACT next week when we celebrate I-Day, the International Day of People with Disability, which falls on 3 December. This funding for individual advocacy and the Integrated Service Response Program is also an integral part of achieving accessibility and inclusion. Through this funding, we are ensuring that when mainstream organisations, facilities and services do not meet the needs of people with disability, there are mechanisms in place to advocate and assist.

MRS KIKKERT (Ginninderra) (4.44): Disruptions like COVID have a way of bringing clarity, highlighting both strengths and weaknesses. This has certainly been true for many on a personal level, but it has likewise been true at the institutional level.

In the budget debate nine months ago, I reported that I had met with a group of stakeholders from the community sector. Unanimously, they had raised concerns about this government's spending priorities. Specifically, they were worried about their ability to meet current and growing demand for essential community services. For years Labor and the Greens have allowed the sector to struggle. Indexation has

demonstrably not kept pace with either inflation or population growth, effectively resulting in year-on-year funding cuts.

Meanwhile, Canberra has become a more expensive place to live. Despite our higher-than-average incomes, nine per cent of all Canberrans are now living in poverty, including 11 per cent of children. Another 24 per cent are just scraping by. One-third of adults in Canberra report that they cannot survive a financial shock. Rents in the territory are the highest in the nation, and the December 2020 rental affordability index found that single-income couples with children and dual-income couples with children both pay a higher proportion of their incomes on rent in the ACT than anywhere else in Australia. Add in skyrocketing prices for gas, electricity, health care, education and so forth, and you have a perfect recipe for increased demand as well.

Two months ago I reported to this Assembly that the head of one community organisation had told me that demand for services had increased so much that employees and volunteers had been forced not just to work longer hours but, in some cases, to work seven days a week. COVID has brought into stark relief what has happened to our important community sector after years of government neglect.

I therefore welcome the increased funding for community services in this budget. But let us not pretend that this funding boost is anything other than Labor and the Greens playing catch-up after years of neglect. My great fear is that, once the immediacy of COVID fades, those opposite will return to ignoring our community services providers. That cannot be allowed to happen.

The reality is that the pandemic has made a significant impact on our communities, and some of these impacts are long-lasting, even permanent. Community recovery is essential, and it is vital that the ACT government listens to and works alongside the community so that any policy decisions being made are made after well-informed and thorough community consultation, and that decisions are made in a timely manner with transparency and efficiency. It is important that community consultation and participation with the ACT government are made as accessible as possible.

I know that there have been community partners who have been left out of the conversation for one reason or another, and it is important that they do not fall through the gaps when it comes to paving the community recovery road map. Supporting the economic and community recovery of all of our key service providers, organisations and industry groups in the ACT will be something that I will be keeping a sharp eye on, not only in the immediate future but in the years to come.

I wish to speak now on Safer Families. Almost from the moment I was first elected, I have voiced my concerns to and asked many questions of the ACT government about domestic violence in our city. I have spoken about the need to achieve better outcomes in prevention and early intervention. I have also warned the government that frontline services were experiencing an increase in demand that would become too much to bear unless more investment was made to meet community needs.

The first phase of the safer families levy provided \$770,000 for the training of frontline staff across the community—a worthwhile initiative. Not long after that, another \$2.4 million of the levy was spent on training all 21,000 ACT government staff, at the expense of frontline service providers. This is not how we expected the safer families levy to be used. When I first learned of this change in the spending of the levy, I immediately sought clarity from the minister in hearings and continued to represent the many Canberrans who raised significant concerns about the ACT government's decision to pull much-needed funding away from better support for victims of domestic violence.

Answers to questions on notice from estimates hearings and during sitting weeks over the years confirm that about only 25 per cent of the levy was spent directly on supporting domestic violence victims and frontline domestic violence services. It was only in 2020-21, after persistently raising concerns with the ACT government, that the percentage rose to approximately 30 per cent.

We ran out of money during a time when victims of domestic violence, and the frontline workers and service providers who support them, needed it the most. I have received reports of mothers and their children fleeing violent homes and sleeping in cars because there is a lack of emergency housing.

I have received reports of men and other people who are victims of domestic violence, unable to access critical support and accommodation when they were in need; families waiting an average of 280 days to find priority housing; community legal centres at full capacity and forced to let victims down; and children who are in desperate need of trauma counselling and professional support from being invisible victims of violence in the home. The list goes on, and most of the levy was seen by many to have been squandered by the ACT government.

What is the solution? The minister announced that the solution is for Canberra ratepayers to bear the cost, by increasing the safer families levy by \$5 each year over four years, so that we will be paying \$50 instead of the original \$30 levy by the year 2024-25.

As the opposition, the Canberra Liberals and I have relentlessly scrutinised and questioned the ACT government on their decisions in this space. We have represented and advocated for the concerns of many Canberrans for safer families. We have made recommendations and provided advice on possible pathways and solutions to these concerns. Without an Assembly majority, we have no choice but to accept that under this current Labor-Greens government, increasing the levy is the only solution they can offer to remedy the crisis that we now find ourselves in, much of which was foreseen, even before COVID-19.

I know that the Canberra Liberals and I would have exercised foresight regarding the warnings given and made sure that the valuable contributions made by Canberrans as part of the safer families levy would be spent wisely to create increased safety for those directly impacted by domestic violence.

Children fleeing violence are not the only ones that I worry about. As I have mentioned many times before, our youth justice system is ripe for reform. This budget commits \$795,000 over two years to help develop service redesign to allow the minimum age of criminal responsibility in the territory to be raised. But a broad range of stakeholders, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and university researchers, have shared with me their concerns that legally changing the age before fundamentally reforming the system will just create worse outcomes for children.

In consulting with these stakeholders and others, I had compiled a list of minimum reforms needed. I was satisfied to see that the commissioned review tabled by the government in August identified almost exactly the same gaps as those on my list and likewise called for “comprehensive systems reform”. I will be carefully watching this development because the last thing we need to do is tick a box on raising the age without filling in all of the known issues in our youth justice system.

I will speak now on the topic of child protection. I took the opportunity during budget estimates hearings to seek an update on the implementation of external merits review for child protection decisions in the ACT. I first moved a motion calling for this reform 4½ years ago, and I am grateful that the Human Rights Commission then followed my lead and confirmed that our current system is not human rights-compliant without an external merits review mechanism in place.

On this point, I am reminded that ANU academic Valerie Braithwaite’s paper, published earlier this year in the *International Journal on Child Maltreatment*, relies heavily on research conducted right here in Canberra to explore resistance to reform in the child protection space. *(Second speaking period taken.)*

Nine months ago, it looked like we may actually be on the verge of finally having an external merits review mechanism. Sadly, I was informed last month that those contracted to design this system had changed circumstances, so there is more delay to come. As a major stakeholder pointed out to me earlier this year, other Australian states implemented external merits review without outside assistance, but it appears that this is too hard for this government, so we must continue to wait.

Canberra families have been waiting for far too long for this human rights necessary reform to be implemented. They are the ones who are suffering because of this government’s complete incompetence when it comes to reforming legislation.

On the topic of child protection, I raise the matter of the promised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Commissioner. This recommendation was made by the Our Booris, Our Way committee in 2018, but a commissioner is still not in place. Instead, this budget provides a bit of funding for a temporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families advocate, pending the actual implementation of a commissioner.

In hearings, I tried to find out what powers this temporary advocate will have and, importantly, what powers the new commissioner will eventually have. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have clearly insisted that the new

commissioner have “the capacity to specifically intervene and engage in child protection processes”. This specification is important. Seventeen years ago, the Vardon report recommended that the territory establish a children and young people commissioner with similar powers. The Labor government went ahead and created the Office of the Children and Young People Commissioner but, once again resistant to actual reform, did not grant to the commissioner any actual power to intervene in child protection processes.

Here we are, 17 years later, with a nearly parallel recommendation. I was told in hearings that the temporary advocate was being put in place specifically to deal with the Indigenous communities’ frustration with the delay in getting their commissioner. Indeed; but let us be honest: if Labor had given the Children and Young People Commissioner the powers that were originally recommended in the Vardon report in 2004, we may not be in this situation right now, with a child protection system that is not compliant with our own human rights law and with demands for a commissioner specifically to deal with child protection matters within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

In answer to my question in hearings, I was told that the powers for the new commissioner were “part of the conversation”. No, Mr Deputy Speaker; on this point, the conversation is well and truly over. It is absolutely vital that legislation be amended in order to provide the new commissioner with the power to intervene in child protection decisions, as demanded by the community.

MS CLAY (Ginninderra) (4.58): I would like to make a few comments on the budget in my capacity as ACT Greens spokesperson for women. For a long time, government budgets have had different impacts on men and women. The answer to this is to put a gender lens on the budget to make sure that we are not inadvertently neglecting programs and policies that women need to access true equality at home and at work.

It is especially important during COVID to apply this gendered lens. COVID has had a disproportionate impact on women. Women are less economically secure. They play a greater role in undertaking unpaid household and caring responsibilities. This has had a particularly big impact when children cannot go to school or day care. The feminisation of the frontline education and healthcare sectors has led to women working in lower paid industries and occupying lower paid positions than men.

Recent studies have shown that, as well as suffering a worldwide COVID pandemic, we are suffering a worldwide “great resignation”. Even this is unequal, though. Women are resigning from their jobs at far greater rates than men. The great resignation is not about women exercising more choice in employment. It is not a bunch of women choosing to spend quality time in other ways. It reflects the fact that women can no longer do it all. They have picked up more of the unpaid caring of children sent home from school, the mental load of the pandemic and the constant juggle of working from home, which puts more burden on them. They simply cannot balance it with their jobs.

We are seeing this in every trade, profession and sector. Women are resigning at a greater rate than men. Even those who do not resign may earn less or perform below

their usual level. One particularly stark example is academia. Women's publishing rates have declined while men are publishing more than ever before.

The impact of COVID on women extends much further than the great resignation. Domestic violence, homelessness and entrenched poverty have deepened during COVID. Carer relationships of all kinds have rebalanced, and not always for the better. We will be dealing with the fallout for years.

These are worldwide challenges, and they are cultural and economic phenomena. I do not expect any government to fix these wicked problems overnight; but in the ACT, we have a progressive government and we are a progressive jurisdiction, so we should do all that we can. We need to take greater care to consider the impacts of government spending, programs and policies on women.

In the parliamentary and governing agreement, we have a commitment to apply a gender lens to the budget. I am pleased to hear that the Office for Women has been progressing this in stages. I am also pleased to see the women's budget statement, although I note that this is a retrospective statement of what is in the budget rather than a proactive tool used to shape it.

During recent estimates, I sent out a series of gender lens questions to ministers to see how their directorates were implementing this gender lens. Gender budgeting is a new way of doing business and it requires detailed consideration of gender at the outset of policy formation, as well as at every step of program delivery. It then needs detailed review to see how policies have differently impacted women and those who are gender diverse. Unfortunately, the answers I received showed that we are still at a very early stage in this. Gender budgeting and the tools that implement it are not being collated or tracked across the ACT public sector.

We have a lot of work to do to apply the gender lens to our budget. I am concerned that we are losing ground due to COVID. Women who leave the workforce often struggle to return; and if they do, they will often do so at lower pay. Women affected by domestic violence, homelessness or poverty often enter a cycle of social and economic pain that is very hard to break. It is important that we progress this as quickly as possible. Our COVID recovery should be a gender lens recovery.

I look forward to seeing the gender lens applied at the front end for next year's budget and for all government decisions. I also hope to see the Office for Women suitably funded to support this.

MR DAVIS (Brindabella) (5.02): I rise to speak on the 2021-22 ACT budget in relation to the Community Services Directorate as the ACT Greens spokesperson for young people and the elimination of family and domestic violence.

Firstly, on behalf of the ACT Greens, I would like to thank our wonderful CSD public servants for their tireless work in the sector over the lockdown period. Supporting the community sector and the ACT government to provide support to Canberrans is an integral function of this directorate. Without the tireless work of these public servants, the last COVID lockdown would have looked very different in the ACT.

Despite the determined work of feminists and women's rights advocates, the COVID-19 crisis has laid bare the social and economic inequality still facing women in the 21st century. Whilst on a federal stage our Prime Minister is spruiking a can-do capitalism approach to these issues facing society, it is clear that this approach has subordinated women facing domestic violence to the backbenches of political interest. Global patriarchy has taken full advantage of the COVID-19 virus to reclaim power, and it will have lasting effects on the progress instituted by governments to address social and economic inequality globally.

Research by the World Economic Forum has found that the COVID-19 pandemic has added 36 years to the time remaining to close the global gender gap. To put this into perspective, we as global citizens are now estimated to need 135.6 years to properly close the gender gap—135 years. This number weighs heavily on my conscience not just as a member of this place but as a member of our global community. Now more than ever, we as a group of representatives must rise to the challenge of addressing these inequalities that those before us either left advocating for or feigned concern for.

Women during the last COVID-19 lockdown were more likely to lose their jobs, more likely to undertake unpaid work, and less likely to receive income support payments due to their over-casualised work. This has resulted in unprecedented demand for family and domestic violence services here in the ACT. This year, DVCS recorded the highest rate of calls to their 24/7 hotline since the start of the pandemic. The YWCA's domestic violence support service also peaked its capacity, assisting 136 women in the 12 months from April 2020 to April 2021. In their budget submission, the YWCA said that if resourcing were not an issue, they would have been able to service another 150 clients requiring their services every year. This number of people not receiving community support is unacceptable and it cannot continue.

For the record, domestic and family violence is a gendered issue. It is also an issue that people across the gender and sexuality spectrums, including some men, can experience. I want to put on the record that I am not only a man but a man who has experienced sexual violence. I insist on using this platform to make the point to anyone listening who is yet to fully appreciate the gendered impact of family sexual and intimate partner violence that it disproportionately impacts women. This is not to say that men do not experience violence, but I am acutely aware that services in the ACT that provide care to people who have experienced violence cater to people of all genders.

I am pleased to see the 2021-22 ACT budget begin to address these issues facing us as a society and more broadly as a global collective. The safer families levy has been flagged by community organisations as a major way that issues in the sector can be well funded. I am pleased to see the ACT government's commitment in this budget to raise the levy to \$50 per household by the financial year 2024-25. In effect, this will raise an additional \$8.8 million for domestic violence services here in the ACT.

This budget is also committed to designing an integrated domestic family violence risk assessment model which includes case tracking. This is integral to making sure that the continued response by governments and community organisations alike has a

greater focus on prevention for people who have been in situations of violence at home. This, in combination with the commitment to develop a domestic and family violence death review mechanism, gives me hope that the ACT government will have adequate resources to assess and act upon any developments in this area in the future.

As the ACT Greens spokesperson for young people, I am happy to see that these commitments will positively impact the lives of both women and children in domestic violence situations. The children of today are the adults and future of tomorrow. We owe it to them to build a healthy environment for them to grow up in. Thus, I was pleased to see a commitment by the ACT government to increase funding for the early childhood strategy program and the family and domestic violence frontline worker training program. This, in turn, will have a greater impact in preventing exposure and providing early intervention for young people in situations of family and domestic violence, with the aim of creating a brighter future for our kids.

In closing, I would like to touch on the women's budget statement for 2021-22. Issues facing women must be given proper consideration through government processes for any government policy around domestic and family violence to work. This budget statement is a step in the right direction; however, the ACT Greens believe that for the issues affecting women to be given proper reflection in the ACT budget, they must be considered in every output of every directorate.

As it stands, a woman's budget statement is better than no women's budget statement at all; but, ultimately, we need to mainstream gendered analysis of the budget. Women make up 50 per cent of our population, and they need to be a direct and integrated part of our budget framing in order for inequality to be addressed and eliminated. I look forward to advocating for this in the future.

MR MILLIGAN (Yerrabi) (5.08): Surprise, surprise, I am disappointed to see so little set aside for the development of various strategies within the disability portfolio. There was very limited additional funding for extra programs to be offered in the ACT, despite some strong budget submissions coming from key stakeholders.

Epilepsy ACT wanted support for their much-needed work in helping people with epilepsy. No money was allocated for supporting the advocacy for work of women with disability, and no funding for the work of the ACT Down Syndrome Association. Each of these organisations is doing great work supporting people with a disability here in the ACT. They sought funding beyond the smaller amounts—from anywhere between \$5,000 and \$20,000—handed out in the competitive grants rounds. Overlooked in this budget were more-than-deserving organisations who submitted requests for additional support. These organisations work tirelessly caring for individuals living with a disability here in the ACT, many of whom were doing it tough through the current ACT COVID pandemic.

Knowing that within the near future the federal government will be launching the new National Disability Strategy, it is surprising to see no forward estimates for the development of the ACT's response. You would think it is important to show it will meet the expectations of the new federal strategy while meeting its obligations

through COAG to implement it. Much information about this new strategy is already available, which the government should be very aware of.

It is particularly disappointing that no additional funding has been set aside for each of the key outcome areas covered by the current National Disability Strategy. These have not been changed under the new strategy; they include economic security, health and justice. The new strategy also includes a focus on supporting carers.

The budget does not mention a strategy for ensuring the economic security of people living with a disability. No consideration has been given for either funding or even a strategic indicator of how to support people or employ people with a disability. This would have been a fitting time for the government to have included a disability job strategy. It could have set some targets for employment of people living with a disability here in the ACT.

There was also no funding for the much-needed development of the disability health strategy. There are almost 8,000 people in the ACT living with a disability, many with multiple and profound disabilities who require additional support when accessing healthcare. There are also over 100 disability discrimination complaints received each year from persons with a disability. From these numbers, it would appear that a disability health strategy providing education for the sector and support for those living with a disability should have been part of the budget and forward estimates.

In a recent response to a question on notice the Minister for Disability said that the initial scoping work will be undertaken during 2021, with the strategy to be drafted in 2022. It is surprising not to see this either mentioned as a budget priority or funded in the current budget. Does this mean that yet again the government is forgetting its promise to deliver a strategy to the people of the ACT?

We now come to the Disability Justice Strategy, and the overriding question is: where did that money go? The strategy was launched in 2019, with the first action plan to ensure people with a disability have access to, and are treated equally before, the law, to be implemented from 2019 to 2024. Initial funding for this strategy was set at \$3.75 million, estimated, over four years. However, this money has now disappeared completely out of the budget. Revised funding sees this drop from three-quarters of a million dollars for this year to just \$360,000. Therefore there is no further forward estimates.

Considering this is a significant priority in the National Disability Strategy, both currently and for the new strategy, it is disappointing that this initiative has fallen off the budget priorities list for this government. This is yet another area where this government is failing to deliver on its promises.

Finally, we come to the Disability Carers Strategy, which at least rates a mention as an action item. Here the government is looking to implement the first three-year action plan of this strategy, another important focus of the new National Disability Strategy. But, surprise, there is no funding attached to this priority.

Despite being a robust strategy developed with those living with a disability here in the ACT currently, according to the government's own progress report only three of the 25 priorities have been fully developed. It is surprising—or perhaps not really—that no money has been appropriated for the implementation of this strategy. This is another area where the government is not delivering in a timely manner.

The vision for the new National Disability Strategy states that, as a country, we will move towards an inclusive Australian society that enables people with a disability to reach their full potential as equal members of the community. It is vital for those in the ACT living with a disability to have their needs considered in each of the areas mentioned today. It is surprising then for the government not to include further funding for organisations supporting those living with a disability to enable this to happen.

It is also surprising that the government failed to provide funding for each of the overarching strategies to guide how these will be realised and to prioritise their implementation. This is another example of this government's failing to deliver its promises and provide for the community in a timely manner.

MS ORR (Yerrabi) (5.15): I rise today to speak to this year's budget in relation to disability carers and multicultural affairs. Before jumping into my pre-prepared notes, I would just like to take a moment to reflect on some of Mr Milligan's comments. I particularly welcome his commitment to the National Disability Strategy, a new one being brought in, considering the existing one expired in 2020. It will be long considered something that needs to be put in place and I am very glad the federal government is getting a move on, seeing as the other one has expired and is no longer current.

As to Mr Milligan's call that the ACT government should be committing funding to do a local one, an ACT one, while I can agree with that, it is very hard to commit funding to something that you have been waiting on for a very long time and that sets the direction for what you are trying to do. In place of having that, I am very glad that the ACT government has been working at improving the lives of people with disability within the ACT for many years, and looking not just within the disability budget columns but also in all the other areas of the budget where people's lives are impacted and can make their day-to-day existence much easier.

It is fair to say, I think, anyone with an experience even adjacent to the spaces understands that people's needs are not limited to just one directorate and will intersect with almost every single branch of what the ACT government does. It is, therefore, necessary to identify some of the broader parts of this budget that will go to improving the lives of people with disability and their carers.

In the first instance, I am very pleased to note the government will continue to provide ongoing funding for Sexual Health and Family Planning ACT to provide sexual health education, information and support services for people with disability. I am also similarly pleased to report that included in the budget is \$3.6 million for COVID mental health support package funding. It is a commitment to prioritise Canberrans

with a disability with increased funding to their relevant community organisations and emergency supports.

Mental health support will also receive an extra \$7.5 million for a phased implementation of integrated face-to-face and digital mental healthcare for young people; \$43 million over four years for up to 10 acute mental health inpatient beds at Canberra Hospital; and an additional high-dependency capacity in the adult mental health unit.

Regarding education, this budget provides an extra \$200 million, of which students with a disability will benefit from a \$5 million annual increase in funding for 42 full-time learning professionals and support staff. Also included in the additional \$200 million is further recruitment of additional youth and social workers by 2025 to support teachers, students and families across ACT public schools, and \$99 million over four years to improve the amenity, functionality and inclusivity of schools.

It is also important to note that Canberrans with disabilities and their families have access to physically and emotionally inclusive environments as early as possible. And prioritising teachers and support staff, youth and social workers and accessible spaces are material, necessary supports which, I am proud to say, this budget provides.

I am especially glad to note the government will provide \$245,000 for a disability education review for students with a disability in ACT public schools to develop an inclusion strategy in consultation with the community, including the students and their families.

This government has dedicated \$400,000 specifically for strengthening disability advocacy services. For instance, funding for the ACT Disability Aged and Carer Advocacy Service and Advocacy for Inclusion, which the minister noted in her speech, has been provided to increase their capacity to provide targeted advocacy support and services to people with disability as well as an increase in funding to the Human Rights Commission. This increased capacity complements enhanced legislative protections, which now enable people to bring complaints of neglect or exploitation of people with disability to the commission.

Furthermore, this government will expand the Integrated Service Response Program to provide case coordination and emergency funding for people with disability with high and complex needs not met by the NDIS, which the federal government continually proves it cannot be trusted to manage.

This government will also be delivering significant additional public housing repairs and maintenance, including disability modifications, and undertaking work to improve safety and disability access at the Canberra Museum and Gallery.

I think it is clear from these commitments that have been put in place that the ACT government is very much committed to, and funding, a more inclusive Canberra for people with disability.

As I said earlier, I also welcome the opportunity to speak to multicultural affairs. It is a space I am often keen to discuss, and some of the initiatives in this government's budget which will best serve our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and multicultural communities over the next four years.

Indeed, I am pleased to see that this government will be establishing a Healing and Reconciliation Fund with money in this budget to facilitate community conversations about a treaty process for the ACT. This choice is particularly important as it has been, and continues to be, made clear that resounding community demands will remain ignored by the federal representatives. I am therefore proud to say that this government remains committed to, and has budgeted for, the provision of, legislative relief to its fullest capacity. Doing so will also serve to keep such conversations in the national discourse.

Similarly, in 2022 the Healing and Reconciliation Fund will support the work of the Ngunnawal Language Group to establish the Ngunnawal Language Centre, including funds to develop the government's arrangements to oversee the administration of the Healing and Reconciliation Fund as per the 2019-2028 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement and priority reform area.

I am also very pleased to see that the COVID-19 community support package will include funding specifically for emergency material aid and support for vulnerable people in the multicultural community. Necessary supports for temporary visa holders through the Refugee, Asylum Seeker and Humanitarian Coordination Committee delivered by our community sector partners have been assured through this initiative. And these supports will almost certainly provide much-needed relief to members of Canberra's multicultural community.

Another initiative of note featured in this budget I wish to speak to is the enactment of the Multicultural Recognition Act, which the ACT government will develop and implement, including establishing a multicultural charter. It is so important to ensure that the ACT's commitments to the rights, aims, and principles of a multicultural society are formalised. Happily, funding will also be used to update accreditation and recognition of Canberra as a welcoming city to an advanced level.

Again, I am grateful for the opportunity to speak to just some of the initiatives included in this government's budget which will benefit people with disability, their carers and multicultural communities, and look forward to their rollout over the next four years.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra—Assistant Minister for Economic Development, Minister for the Arts, Minister for Business and Better Regulation, Minister for Human Rights and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (5.23): Madam Speaker, I need to seek your guidance. I am going to speak as Minister for Multicultural Affairs, but I am also going to speak on behalf of Minister Berry. Can I just keep going?

MADAM SPEAKER: I believe so.

MS CHEYNE: Thank you. I will indicate when I change.

I am proud to speak in support of this budget and appropriation, particularly for what we are doing to support multiculturalism in our community. This budget not only empowers our communities and sectors to build back stronger from COVID but also advances critical work to enhance our city's multicultural way of life.

Over the next two years, our government will invest \$458,000 to progress the multicultural recognition act and achieve the advanced level of Welcoming Cities accreditation. The development of the multicultural recognition act, as Ms Orr has deftly covered, will establish a multicultural charter, enshrine in legislation the existing Multicultural Advisory Council and establish reporting obligations against the multicultural framework.

The ACT government held preliminary consultation on the multicultural recognition act in April and May this year. In addition to six face-to-face community consultation sessions hosted by the Community Services Directorate, a discussion paper and a fact sheet translated into 14 languages were prepared to assist the ACT government to develop the act; they are available still on the CSD and YourSay websites. It is important, it goes without saying, that all Canberrans have an opportunity to have their say on the multicultural recognition act. While its development has been delayed due to COVID, we will continue to consult on it in the coming months to ensure that it reflects our ambitions as a community as we go about the drafting stage.

Together with the Welcoming Cities accreditation, this is a commitment that is central to enhancing our city's cultural diversity and identity. Madam Speaker, you may be aware that we have recently been awarded the "established" level of accreditation with Welcoming Cities. Welcoming Cities is an initiative of Welcoming Australia, a national network of cities, shires, towns and municipalities that are committed to an Australia where everyone can belong, contribute and thrive.

Assessment and accreditation as a welcoming city allow jurisdictions to benchmark progress and identify gaps in their welcoming and inclusion practice, through four levels: "established", which we have now achieved; "advanced"; "excelling"; and "mentoring". Our successful accreditation, as "established", has confirmed that the ACT government is a leader amongst our peers, both in Australia and internationally. The investment to help propel us to achieving advanced is obviously critically important, and we are proud to put our money where our mouth is.

These commitments also strengthen our collective ability to address and mitigate incidents of racism and discrimination that emerge as our population grows. I look forward to updating the Assembly on this work as it progresses.

Another key initiative is supporting the multicultural community to participate in community events and run their own fundraising events. The additional \$400,000 provided in this budget for community support through the National Multicultural Festival will meet its purpose even though we have made the incredibly difficult decision to move the 25th anniversary of the festival to 2023.

As members will recall from question time yesterday, Events ACT will use this funding to support the participation of multicultural organisations in upcoming events, beginning with Australia Day and Canberra Day. This will provide an opportunity for multicultural groups to showcase their culture and food and explore other revenue-raising opportunities in 2022.

The government is also using this budget to continue to support the refugee, asylum seeker and humanitarian program to provide financial assistance of up to \$2,000 for its clients who hold an ACT Services Access Card, as well as to support the resettlement of refugees, asylum seekers and humanitarian entrants in the ACT by building on recent government actions in this area, including funding of \$140,000 for the RASH program as part of the COVID-19 community sector support package and a further \$100,000 which was provided in the previous budget.

We are also, in this budget, providing emergency material aid and support for vulnerable people in the multicultural community, including \$137,000 in emergency material aid and additional COVID-specific liaison officers to the tune of \$135,000.

These are key investments, Madam Speaker. They are essential for our community to continue to grow as a culturally and linguistically diverse city-state where, whether they are born here or move here, people feel welcomed and hold a sense of belonging.

Mrs Jones touched on the large-scale community facility at EPIC. This is, as we have flagged previously, being managed by Economic Development, with Venues Canberra and Major Projects Canberra being the delivery partners. It is technically within another budget output, but I will provide a brief update.

There is funding in the budget to undertake planning and stakeholder consultation for the staged expansion and redevelopment of Exhibition Park in Canberra, including the consideration of options for the construction of a 10,000 square metre indoor venue to support major and community events. Once the budget is passed, governance of the project will be finalised, and a project group will then undertake stakeholder and community consultation.

I can confirm that a steering committee has been established, chaired by Economic Development. It held its first meeting in early November. The Community Services Directorate is a member of that steering committee. It has already flagged the need to engage with key stakeholders, in particular the multicultural community. I am sure that that comes as good news to the community, and to Mrs Jones and Mr Braddock, all of whom are very interested in this work.

Madam Speaker, I intend to thank all staff across my portfolios when I speak for the last time on the budget in coming days, but I want to send a special shout-out to the team at the Office for Multicultural Affairs. As has been recognised by several other members speaking on this output class, it is a small team of people who achieve extraordinary amounts, punching well above their weight. They have had a particularly challenging year, from having to change the format of citizenship ceremonies depending on restrictions, including delivering additional citizenship

ceremonies, to providing incredible support to the community as part of the health response; dealing with the complexities of planning for the festival, which, as I mentioned, was well underway, with work right across government until we went into lockdown; and supporting evacuees from Afghanistan.

That is all in addition to driving this critical Welcoming Cities work and the multicultural recognition act and much more. It is pretty mind-blowing, and I am in awe of what they achieve. I want to give special thanks to them for their incredible work throughout this year. It is a real honour to be the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. I commend that part of the portfolio to the Assembly, Madam Speaker.

I am now delivering a speech on behalf of Ms Berry. I will share some of what the ACT budget delivers for women and children, including the prevention of domestic and family violence responses.

It is important to acknowledge that many of the issues facing women, children and families have additional and particular complexities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, issues that are rooted in the long-term impacts of colonialism. All of our responses must include both recognition and tailored responses to First Nations communities and must be community-led.

The ACT budget includes important investments that underpin the government's vision for Canberra as a place where children are supported to thrive, where gender equity is achieved, and where everyone in the community recognises their role in preventing domestic and family violence.

Before I continue, I must take this opportunity on behalf of Minister Berry and myself to thank the many frontline workers who have continued to provide critical services throughout the lockdown in the challenging times of recent years. The commitment that the staff in these sectors have made to keeping families safe and supported is a real testament to their dedication, their professionalism and their expertise.

Madam Speaker, one of the key issues impacting women and children in the ACT is domestic, family and sexual violence. Domestic, family and sexual violence is not and will never be acceptable. This violence has negative consequences for us all: violating the human rights of those affected, reducing access to housing and employment, impairing children's health and development, and harming not only our economy but also the very fabric of our community.

We also know that women are feeling the burden of the pandemic through impacts to their safety, especially through an increased risk of domestic and family violence. Front-line services have reported an increase in the level and complexity of incidents of domestic and family violence. Some people who were already experiencing violence have seen that violence increase. Some people have experienced violence for the first time.

The investments in this budget will help us respond to the impacts of COVID-19, to continue to fund existing services and develop new and sustainable ways of working

across government and community that focus on intervening earlier, reducing barriers to access, joining up and integrating services, and responding to diverse needs.

This budget allocates \$46.5 million over the next four years to expand the ACT's evidence-based approach to preventing and addressing domestic, family and sexual violence. Of this, approximately \$30 million is expected to be raised from the family safety levy. The levy recognises that preventing and responding to domestic, family and sexual violence are collective responsibilities across our community. The levy will increase by \$5 each year, from \$30 per household currently to \$50 per household in the 2024-25 financial year. This relatively small increase will help meet additional needs as a result of COVID-19 and it will galvanise action through a systemic approach to preventing and responding to sexual violence.

We recognise the immeasurable contribution of our front-line services and are investing \$2.2 million over four years for the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre and the Domestic Violence Crisis Service to meet increased service demand, in addition to annual baseline funding already received from the ACT government.

We are doing the work that is needed to begin to address the issue of sexual assault. We have committed \$1.5 million over four years to roll out our sexual assault prevention and response program, working in partnership with our stakeholders and with our community to develop a robust approach focused on prevention, response, law reform and workplace safety. I really must thank the steering committee for driving this essential work throughout COVID-19, and I look forward to receiving their final report.

We are continuing to deliver on our commitments to work with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to scope and design domestic and family violence responses in response to the "We don't shoot our wounded" report. We have committed \$790,000 over four years to support this work, including continuing to support the Domestic Violence Prevention Council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reference group to prioritise action on the report's recommendations.

We are continuing to provide integrated services that operate across systems. We are investing \$4.1 million over four years to continue the health justice partnership delivered by Legal Aid and the Women's Legal Centre. The program provides wraparound health and legal support in healthcare settings, primarily to pregnant women and to new families experiencing or at risk of domestic and family violence. The program is reaching people who would not otherwise receive help, before they reach crisis.

There is also \$249,000 to continue and expand the family violence safety action pilot after its success in 2020-21. The pilot uses an integrated, collaborative model of information-sharing and case management that focuses on early identification and assessment of risk to women and families.

There is also \$1.4 million over four years for the safer families collaboration program, a partnership between Child and Youth Protection Services and the Domestic

Violence Crisis Service to improve responses to children and young people and their families experiencing domestic and family violence.

We recognise that we need to hold perpetrators accountable and we have committed \$1.2 million in this budget to extend the Room4Change program, which is a men's behavioural change program run by the Domestic Violence Crisis Service, with a residential component. Room4Change also supports partners and children to stay safely in the home.

We are committed to supporting people to leave violence. We are investing \$817,000 over four years for additional support for women and children to leave violence, including continuing the Safer Families Assistance program, which provides \$2,000 to support people to sustain or to re-establish a family home in the private market following the experience of family violence.

Through this financial year we will continue to expand and strengthen initiatives that are having a real impact for people experiencing domestic and family violence and we will continue to advocate in national forums for inclusive and effective approaches to domestic and family violence that centre on lived experience.

Madam Speaker, turning now to the women aspect of the budget, we know that gendered violence stems from a lack of gender equity. In addition to specific measures aimed at responding to domestic and family violence, the ACT government is committed to removing structural barriers that prevent women from fully participating in society.

Now, more than ever, there needs to be support for women as well as initiatives in place to address systematic causes of gender inequality. The longer term societal impacts of COVID-19, economic disadvantage, poverty and low income are more likely to be experienced by women than men. This can result in poorer health and wellbeing outcomes for women.

In this budget, \$420,000 was allocated to continue the Women's Return to Work Program. The program supports women who have been out of the workforce for an extended period of time due to caring responsibilities. It helps them prepare for, obtain and maintain employment with a one-off individual grant of up to \$1,000. Madam Speaker, speaking as myself, Tara, I know people who have accessed this program and received support through these grants. They have been life changing. I commend Minister Berry and this budget allocation. It really changes people's lives. We have also allocated \$100,000 each year for four years for the Women's Safety Grants program to support projects by community groups and organisations that make Canberra safer for women and children.

Initiatives in other portfolios demonstrate the government's commitment to enabling full participation of women. For instance, in Australia, women are underrepresented in organised sport. This budget commits \$1.6 million over four years to continue to support elite women's sport in the territory by providing ongoing funding to the Canberra Capitals and Canberra United.

As you know, Madam Speaker, and as I well know, \$200,000 has also been allocated to commission artwork by a female or non-binary artist about a female or non-binary artist to help us better celebrate and embrace diversity.

We are also continuing to prepare the annual women's budget statement as an action under the ACT Women's Plan. The women's budget statement is an important way for the ACT government to demonstrate the work it is undertaking to address gender inequalities in the ACT. The statement ensures we continue to analyse and consider gendered impacts in our policy and our investment decisions.

Madam Speaker, I will now share some of the specific ways the ACT budget supports children and young people, building on other areas of investment in the education and early childhood education space. Minister Stephen-Smith has already shared plenty about this as Minister for Families and Community Services.

Early intervention continues to be an important focus of this government, with funding provided for project resources to support early intervention model design and progress government commitments in relation to the early support framework, the first 1,000 days strategy, the child and family network and the early childhood strategy.

As part of this budget, the government will continue to support a critical service for children with developmental delay and disability in the ACT community. Funding of \$550,000 has been approved to support the Children and Young People Equipment and Loan Service operational and planning costs, and there is funding of \$207,000 for the purchase of new equipment, such as standing frames and wheelchairs, to replenish old and outdated stock.

This service is the only paediatric equipment and assistive technology loan scheme in the ACT. It holds approximately 950 pieces of equipment to loan to children aged from zero to 16 years. It is located within the Child Development Service in Holder. Some of this equipment is lifesaving—for example, chairs that support children with feeding. Other equipment includes seating systems, wheelchairs and standing frames, which support children with a disability to be able to access and engage safely in activities at school and at home and with their peers.

This budget also funds priority repairs to the Child Development Service site at Holder to maintain an appropriate environment to be able to deliver these early intervention supports. Funding of \$400,000 has been approved in this financial year and \$50,000 in the following financial year to fund the priority repairs to the Child Development Service site. An additional \$140,000 over two years has also been provided to undertake work to assess future accommodation options for this important service.

To conclude, Madam Speaker, this budget is a reflection of the ACT government's strong and enduring commitment to supporting women and children and to building safer families. There will always be more work to do in this space. The government will continue to develop connected, inclusive, accessible and meaningful initiatives for women, children and young people and their families in the ACT.

MR BRADDOCK (Yerrabi) (5.45): The Greens seek to create a safe space for communities, irrespective of their cultural backgrounds. Everyone is entitled to feel a sense of belonging, and no-one should be confronted with barriers in our community. I can say with confidence that Canberra is a multicultural city and that attitudes towards this diversity have, in the main, been positive.

The multicultural space is dynamic. It is growing and it is diversifying. No community is the same and, with that, CALD communities offer unique contributions to our democratic landscape. We must ensure that marginalised communities do not face barriers to participation in the community. We must empower CALD communities to have the choice to decide what the community requires.

I am proud of the initiatives undertaken by my colleagues in this budget to adopt substantive action towards advocating for Canberra's multicultural communities. The proposed multicultural charter is a testament to the government's investment in CALD communities.

The goals introduced are vital as a concept to setting targets, and allow us to shift from short-term thinking and begin to mobilise effective action. In saying this, standards of behaviour earmarked by the charter will construct norms that promote inclusive practices. The charter will also reduce discrimination and reinforce Canberra's identity as a multicultural community.

We also welcome the continued investment in community events, awards, ceremonies and grants. Financial support is integral to grassroots organisations to continue their advocacy towards areas that matter to them. This will give CALD communities the power to continue with their activities in the community and allow emerging communities to get involved.

We welcome the review of the Canberra language schools and hope that appropriate investment will be made to strengthen language learning here in the ACT. Promoting language learning can enhance communication and our ability to connect with others. Language holds a deep connection to culture. To create better inclusion, we must invest in intercultural education and language learning.

We welcome the endeavours introduced. However, there are still spaces for improvement. I, as are many in the Canberra community, am disappointed about the Multicultural Festival. Over the years this wonderful festival has grown and has become one of the most successful multicultural festivals in Australia. Above all, the event is a time when we celebrate Canberra's diversity. It is an occasion where CALD communities can showcase their culture. I look forward to CALD communities having those opportunities to share their culture at events in 2022.

Also, as a significant amount of resources is directed towards the multicultural charter, the focus will see the empowerment of CALD communities and reinforce access to rights. Government, however, must continue to strive to better engage with multicultural communities. For example, the multicultural framework is currently outdated, and we must implement the actions that reflect the changing times and

anxieties, a framework that fosters consultation and promotes intercultural dialogue between government, existing entities and emerging communities.

Moreover, the proposed multicultural charter highlights freedom and equality but different groups face different issues that can lead to a disproportionate level of engagement. As such, it is beholden on government to be the one that needs to do the outreach.

When we have conversations about multiculturalism, it is integral not to cluster groups as one entity. The multicultural space is dynamic. Growth is accompanied by diversity and disproportionality in capacity, engagement and opportunities. As such, we must not be complacent to existing structures. It is our responsibility to ensure that emerging communities can access services, advocate for their rights and representation.

We must reach out to those emerging communities to consolidate pathways of information and strengthen relations. This can be done through the physical action of attending community events, visiting places of congregation. Actions can also be done digitally through local media and regular emails expressing that the government is concerned, that the government is willing to listen. But to do so, we must expand our information networks.

Whilst we should promote community events to showcase culture, it is also essential to create tangible change. Greater representation in media and leadership is fundamental to empowering CALD individuals. Providing them opportunities through workshops, forums, leadership development and skills and development training will give tangible power to marginalised communities. It is also vital to extend invitations and outreach to under-represented groups in the multicultural community. This will in turn strengthen social cohesion and promote genuine inclusion.

There are efforts to advocate for multiculturalism, and I applaud the endeavours undertaken by the community organisations and their peak bodies. But I believe the government holds the potential to do better. I believe that facilitating training, workshops and leadership development can ensure equity for marginalised communities.

In closing, I would like to thank Ms Ericha Smyth for writing this speech. Ms Smyth is of Indonesian descent and has been working in my office on how we can increase multicultural communities' involvement in democracy and government processes and I, for one, am very grateful for her work.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (5.51): I rise today to speak on Appropriation Bill 2021-22 as it relates to my shadow portfolio of women. The year 2021 has been a monumental one for women. We have seen Australian women collectively call out poor behaviour and demand better as a society. It started with the announcement of Grace Tame as Australian of the Year.

Then a short time later we saw the March for Justice across Australia, and many of us in this place went to those rallies. Here in Canberra it was at Parliament House. We

heard, for example, from Brittany Higgins, who showed enormous bravery in talking about the appalling events that took place to her and against her wishes and, I guess, the mishandling of the whole process over time. Very recently we have seen the passing of affirmative consent laws in New South Wales and the bravery of Saxon Mullins in talking about what happened to her against her wishes or without any affirmative consent.

For someone of my era, it is depressing that we are still talking about some of the same issues that I talked about with my friends and colleagues when I was a teenager, a young adult, a young mother. Many of these issues remain unsolved, and they do relate to equality and the treatment of women generally.

I would like to also point out that recently the newish New South Wales Treasurer released a budget statement that had a four-pronged approach to kick-starting the economy and increasing workforce participation of women through childcare. A boost for childcare was one of the major tenets of this kick-starting the economy program. Women front and centre are an important part of getting our economy booming once again after COVID.

We did hear that women were disproportionately affected during COVID. They lost their jobs, at least initially, at a greater rate. They can often be in more casual and part-time roles. They apparently took on more of the household duties while they were working from home or without work. And of course, during the learning from home, it was often women who disproportionately took on responsibility for helping children with their learning from home.

Everything that has happened in the women's space so far this year is why I found it especially galling to see such a lacklustre attempt at a women's budget statement from this Labor-Greens government this year. Once again, it was a glossy advertising opportunity, very scant on the detail of how the initiatives listed in the budget would affect Canberra women. Quite frankly, it is embarrassing, and I am surprised that the Minister for Women has not done more to provide women with clarity on how her government's budget initiatives were affecting women and how the budget initiatives impact women. Instead, what we got was a pretty sad excuse for a women's budget statement. I will give you a few examples. Under "Women's safety initiatives" it listed upgrades to Beltana and Kallaroo roads in Pialligo. This referenced the Women's Centre for Health Matters Safety Map for Women which, at that time at least, had zero input for that area in terms of women's safety in the community. Very lazy!

There are many of us, I am sure, who have received representations from people in our community, especially women, about places where they feel unsafe. It may be about lighting in underpasses, for example, on their way home from the bus stop. Do not forget, usually they will have to walk further home from the bus stop these days because many of the bus stops have been closed and the buses are less frequent.

However, I digress. It is good that these roads in Pialligo are being upgraded. There is a real demand for it amongst the community there. But they are being upgraded because they have been neglected for years. Have you ever been out there to Pialligo

and driven on those roads? They are full of potholes. It is no wonder they are being upgraded and improved. But it is not about women's safety in the community, and it is pretty poor form to try to position it as such. If you are going to make some random example as the main point of your women's safety in the community, at least you could make sure that it appeared on the women's safety map, if that is what you are referencing as demand for it.

Another thing in this budget was the initiative to progress gender equality in construction, which was allocated the best part of \$700,000 over a five-year period. It is an exciting initiative. I go along to a number of National Association of Women in Construction ACT events and they are very, very active in promoting the role, the involvement and the support and the mentoring and the training of women in construction. It is an important thing and, thanks to many people's good work, we are seeing some little gains in those areas.

At lunchtime today I was really privileged to be able to go to a lunch at the Press Club and Sam Mostyn was the guest speaker. Sam is the President of Chief Executive Women. She talked about the need for more women in positions of power and on boards, and that is what then flows down to become a safer and more inclusive workforce.

Unfortunately, with the CFMEU being given this \$700,000 grant, we discovered there are no women on the board of the CFMEU. How are they going to encourage the participation of women in the construction industry? They cannot even get it right themselves. What does it say about this government's commitment to gender equality and representation if they cannot even do a bit of due diligence on the organisations they give their grants to and make sure they are actually walking the talk in this regard, instead of giving away money to organisations that quite clearly have no interest in progressing women's equality on their own boards? It is embarrassing once again and shows a lack of foresight from this government.

I note that the public accounts committee had several recommendations to improve the current uninspired approach this budget has taken to gender. Recommendation 1 is:

The Committee recommends, in evaluating the stimulatory effect of Government spending, a gender lens should be applied so as to ensure equity in the use of Government monies.

Recommendation 2 is:

The Committee recommends the Treasurer appear before the Economy and Gender and Economic Equality Committee to explain the gender impact of the Budget.

I was pleased to see the government agree to the first recommendation. How this works out in practice, I look forward to seeing. But the second recommendation was noted by the government. Apparently it is not important enough for the Treasurer to appear before the EGEE committee to talk about how this budget affects the women of Canberra. He is obviously far too busy. It is disappointing. The whole point about

analysing the budget from a gendered lens is not to discuss how women have impacted what goes into the budget; it is actually about how the budget affects women. And who but the Treasurer would be the person to talk about that?

Canberra women deserve better; they deserve a government that delivers a women's budget statement that is actually meaningful and useful to them. That would be a nice thing, would it not, rather than a glossy brochure that ticks the boxes? They could be better prioritised by this government, and this could be demonstrated with more budget initiatives that directly benefit women, that encourage workforce participation, that look at addressing the gender pay gap, which is still, I do not know, about eight per cent. *(Second speaking period taken.)*

Roads, footpaths, lighting upgrades et cetera are things that matter to women's safety. They are the things that we could be doing, where women have identified that they feel unsafe, not made-up examples that the government had promised at the election anyway to do and then tried to pass it off as a women's safety initiative. I hope in future the Minister for Women pushes for more than just talk when it comes to gender equality and actually delivers for women in Canberra.

I would like to make a few comments relating to my shadow portfolio of seniors. Once again I would like to acknowledge how disappointing the 2021-22 budget was for seniors. There were no new initiatives; it was the same things funded again. Yet again during COVID we heard that seniors felt so left out, so isolated, so afraid of going out. The minister talked about how disadvantaged seniors were during COVID, in a statement about seniors; yet that has not translated to actual more on-the-ground support of seniors.

The lockdowns, the border closures, the separation from their families and grandchildren and their friends have had a huge impact on senior Canberrans. They need extra support, and they need extra consideration from this government in policy-making that the pandemic has highlighted. They felt isolated at times by the reliance even on the scanning code to get into places because some seniors did not have a smartphone, and it took some time to work through those issues and make sure that seniors, if they did go out, did not feel frightened about accessing places in public. Again, the support here has to be reactive in aiming to fix already-established problems, not investing proactively in our older Canberrans.

We need to support them before they become isolated, before their mental health deteriorates, before their quality of life declines. Seniors are one of our most vulnerable cohorts. They have had very detrimental effects from the pandemic over the past two years. Why? Why then are there no new initiatives aimed at supporting our seniors?

On the plus side, many seniors and the organisations that support them have been very resilient throughout the pandemic. They have adapted to new ways of interacting with their family members, some of them online. We have seen some seniors talking and communicating through windows because that human interaction, even if slightly removed, is so important to them. They know how important it is to stay connected in

their local community. But they were also really mindful of protecting their own physical health and wellbeing.

As I said, it is so disappointing that there were no new solutions for older Canberrans. I am sure the minister would say the government is doing a lot for seniors. They give us initiatives such as the Seniors Card program as an example of this. Of course, the Seniors Card program is a great initiative. It is implemented by COTA ACT but that is not something to be excited about and champion. It is done across jurisdictions in Australia, providing Seniors Cards, and it is nothing new. It is the bare minimum that we should expect. To be frank, the bare minimum is what senior Canberrans have come to expect from this government.

The government could have provided support for new and improved initiatives, programs and facilities alongside the continued funding of existing initiatives. It is no surprise that in the *Canberra Times* rundown of the ACT budget seniors were listed as one of the losers. How sad that those people who have built our city are the ones losing out in this budget.

Ms Davidson recently said in a Standing Committee on Education and Community Inclusion hearing into estimates that we are trying to make Canberra more accessible and more inclusive for seniors. How is that happening with not a single new, improved initiative for our older Canberrans? I hope, once again, in the future this government can learn to actually walk the talk, not just do all of the talking. I really would like to see our vulnerable Canberrans, in this case seniors, supported more by this government.

MS ORR (Yerrabi) (6.07): I stand for a second time today just to quickly note that in my speech the number I thought that was incorrect was in fact incorrect and I would just like to fix the record. The Disability Education Review is \$245,000 and additionally it is \$400,000 for the strengthening disability advocacy services. All other figures, I believe, were correct in my speech.

Proposed expenditure agreed to.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Gentleman**) adjourned to the next sitting.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

The Assembly adjourned at 6.09 pm.