



Debates

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Wednesday, 18 September 2019

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MADAM SPEAKER (Ms J Burch) took the chair at 10 am, made a formal recognition that the Assembly was meeting on the lands of the traditional custodians, and asked members to stand in silence and pray or reflect on their responsibilities to the people of the Australian Capital Territory.

Petitions—ministerial response

The following response to petitions has been lodged:

Chisholm Village redevelopment—petitions 19-19 and 22-19

By **Mr Gentleman**, Minister for Planning and Land Management, dated 13 September 2019, in response to petitions lodged by Ms J Burch on 30 July 2019 concerning community engagement on redevelopment of Chisholm Village.

The response read as follows:

Dear Mr Duncan

Thank you for your letter of 30 July 2019 providing petitions 19-19 and 22-19 which were lodged by Ms Joy Burch MLA. Both petitions raise concerns about community consultation and input into a proposed development at the Chisholm Shops.

The process for community input into development applications is outlined in the *Planning and Development Act 2007* (the Act). I am advised that development application (DA) 201935300 has been lodged with the planning and land authority (the authority) proposing a new fast food outlet at the Chisholm shops, which is the subject of these petitions.

The DA was subject to major notification under the Act. The public notification period was originally due to close on 23 August 2019, but the period was extended for an additional two weeks and closed on 6 September 2019.

The authority made the decision to extend the public notification period after considering the significant community interest in this application, which is reflected in these petitions. Plans and supporting information for the development application are currently available for viewing at https://www.planning.act.gov.au/development_applications/pubnote.

At the close of the notification period, 116 representations had been received by the authority, including petitions 19-19 and 22-19. This shows a high level of community interest and engagement in the application. The authority will consider all representations made during the notification period and assess the DA against the requirements of the Act and the Territory Plan.

Thank you for raising this matter with me. I trust this information is of assistance.

Motion to take note of petition response

Motion (by **MADAM SPEAKER**), pursuant to standing order 98A, agreed to:

That the petition response so lodged be noted.

Wanniassa park and ride

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (10.02):

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) the need for better footpaths in Wanniassa, given that more people are now dependent on the Wanniassa Park and Ride due to the removal of other local bus services from the suburb;
- (b) the footpath from the Park and Ride car park to the bus stop traverses a floodway;
- (c) whenever it rains, at its lowest point the path is covered with a moving stream and puddle which flows down the floodway to the new Wanniassa wetlands;
- (d) the path also becomes muddy for some time after the rain, which, when added to the slope of the path, means it is slippery and challenging for all pedestrians but especially for older people and those with mobility impairments; and
- (e) in heavy rain and when the floodway is flooded, the path may become dangerous to use, with no other option for commuters to walk between the carpark and the bus stop; and

(2) calls on the ACT Government to:

- (a) investigate ways to improve the path and general access to the Wanniassa Park and Ride stop to alleviate safety concerns; and
- (b) report back to the Assembly by the last sitting day of 2019 on options to improve the path and how and when that will take place.

Park-and-ride facilities all over Canberra are there to make things more convenient to catch a bus from a more central location and they should make taking a bus from your suburb safer, easier and quicker. But a number of concerns have been raised with me by residents of Wanniassa especially but also Kambah and some other nearby areas about the Wanniassa park-and-ride stop located adjacent to the Wanniassa shops.

We need to recognise and take action on these problems because it can be a safety risk, as has been raised with me by some members of the public. We expect our government to avoid failings they know about, to fix failings they know about and to take action on failings that are brought to their attention.

This is important to the people of Wanniassa. Of course more recently it has become even more important, because some bus stops and bus routes through Wanniassa have

been removed which makes reliance on the Wanniassa park-and-ride stop even more important. Constituents have brought this matter to my attention. They are concerned for their safety and that of their friends and neighbours.

The cuts to the bus service mean that more and more Wanniassa residents are forced to use the park-and-ride service. It has flow-on effects to the nearby Wanniassa shops partly because more people are using the park-and-ride stop, which means that it is harder to get a car park at the Wanniassa shops. I understand that the government is considering introducing some short-term parking at Wanniassa shops. I am not convinced that the area identified is the best possible area, but at least some action is taking place because this has impacts on the traders at the Wanniassa shops. If people drive to the Wanniassa shops to do their shopping they cannot get a car park so they drive off and park somewhere else.

There are a number of flow-on issues. I have been out there to see the problem for myself after it was raised with me, and I went on purpose on a rainy day. There were mud and water flowing across the path because the location of the path from the car park to the Wanniassa park-and-ride stop goes down a bit of a hill and up the other side. This can be a bit difficult for older people, but that is not the particular concern. The reason residents are concerned is that the path cuts through a floodway.

The new Wanniassa rain collection area has been built about a hundred metres past where the path is. The water is intended to flow down that gully to the wetlands and it brings water and mud across the path. A number of different people have told me that it makes the path slippery. For people who may be a little frail it is hard for them to traverse the mud and the water and the slipperiness of the path and it is even more difficult for people with a mobility impairment.

This motion is relatively simple and straightforward; it calls on the government to take steps to assess how this path and access to the Wanniassa park and ride may be improved and report back to the Assembly later this year with the result of those investigations. Obviously the intent is not just to have a bit of a look and report back to the Assembly; the intent is to create improvements to make that path safer and better.

This is a show of support for the residents of Wanniassa that the Assembly is listening to their concerns. Not only do they appear to be very strongly disadvantaged by the recent bus cuts but it is also difficult for them to access the park and ride in their own area. This motion being agreed to would show that we take their concerns seriously. It is not an excessive motion; it is not overly demanding. It shows residents of Canberra, specifically Wanniassa and the surrounding suburbs, that we take their concerns seriously, we take their safety seriously and we will act on their concerns.

I hope that the government will support the motion today. It is the right thing to do for residents of Wanniassa and Tuggeranong more generally. I look forward to their support for this motion today.

MR STEEL (Murrumbidgee—Minister for City Services, Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Minister for Recycling and Waste Reduction, Minister for Roads and Active

Travel and Minister for Transport) (10.08): I am very pleased to speak in support of this motion today which highlights the investments that the ACT government has made to both public transport in the Wanniassa and Kambah areas and walking and cycling infrastructure to keep Canberrans connected and make it easier to move around our city.

I begin by acknowledging that Ms Lawder wrote to me in July about this issue and I responded to her earlier this week. The amendment that I foreshadow to her motion today echoes that letter of response.

As members may be aware, in 2017 the ACT government made a very significant investment in public transport infrastructure through the construction of a park-and-ride facility at Wanniassa. This included the provision of two new bus stops on Athllon Drive, new bus shelters, footpaths and a new pedestrian crossing to increase access to public transport for residents in Wanniassa. Earlier this year, in April, we introduced the new rapid 5 bus route through Wanniassa which is providing frequent services for Wanniassa residents.

These park-and-ride services and the new bus stops are particularly important, because it was very difficult for residents living on the eastern side of Kambah and the western edge of Wanniassa to access what was then the blue rapid service and which is not the R4 route running along Athllon Drive. This bus stop has been incredibly popular, as has the park and ride. It is great to see that over the two years since it was built the community is using this new facility to help them get around.

The footpath referred to in Ms Lawder's motion was constructed to provide access from the park and ride to the bus stops on Athllon drive. Given the floodway that exists between the park and ride and the bus stops, before constructing the footpath Transport Canberra and City Services engaged Northrop Consulting Engineering Services to undertake an independent flood study to review the potential impact of storm flows on the pedestrian crossing area.

The report demonstrated that the two 1,800-millimetre diameter stormwater mains that run below the swale perpendicular to the floodway crossing had sufficient capacity to ensure that the crossing would have minimal if any flooding over an average 10-year period. However, to ensure optimal safety of pedestrians the report also recommended that signage be erected to advise of the risk to users in the event of a rainfall event and that an alternative route should be provided.

In line with those recommendations, a warning sign was installed at both approaches to the footpath, and a short section of footpath was constructed on Rylah Crescent to connect to an alternative footpath route via Langdon Avenue, Atkins Street and Athllon Drive to provide safer access to the bus stops during wet periods.

I acknowledge that this alternative path is significantly longer than the path across the floodway and that there are some safety issues with its current arrangement, including the necessity to either cross Athllon Drive or walk along an unpaved section of it to get to the bus stop. However, due to the very low risk of water build-up in the floodway, pedestrians would rarely need to use that route. The alternative route is

important in its own right to connect people across Athllon Drive between Kambah and Wanniasa as well as providing an alternative to the bus stop during wet weather events.

I also note that the footpath referred to in Ms Lawder's motion as it exists has accumulated a build-up of silt and mud at its lower points. Some people are choosing to cut across the grass to the footpath from the eastern end of the park and ride. Transport Canberra and City Services are looking at ways of changing this behaviour and have organised a clean-up of the footpath to remove any debris. It is worth mentioning that the zigzag shape of the footpath is to allow for pedestrians with a disability or mobility restrictions to use the path without the gradient being too steep. That was part of the design of the path.

Despite the efforts of Transport Canberra and City Services to ensure the greatest and safest level of access to the park-and-ride facilities for residents in Wanniasa, the government agrees with Ms Lawder that more needs to be looked at to improve accessibility in the area. That is why I have asked Transport Canberra and City Services to investigate alternative ways of accessing the Athllon Drive bus stops from the park and ride. I look forward to updating the Assembly on this work later this year. I move:

Omit all words after "That this Assembly", substitute:

"(1) notes:

- (a) that, in 2017, the ACT Government invested in public transport infrastructure by building a new Park and Ride facility in Wanniasa including new bus stops, bus shelters, footpaths and a pedestrian crossing to help locals better utilise the public transport network;
- (b) the importance of footpaths and shared paths across the ACT to provide connections to public transport and, in particular, for the residents of Wanniasa to access the rapid route bus stop on Athllon Drive from the Wanniasa Park and Ride;
- (c) the footpath from the Park and Ride car park to the bus stop traverses a floodway;
- (d) prior to its construction, Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS) engaged Northrop to undertake an independent flood study to review the impact of storm flows on the pedestrian crossing from the Wanniasa Park and Ride to the bus stop on Athllon Drive. This study demonstrated that the two 1800 mm diameter stormwater mains that run below the swale and perpendicular to the floodway crossing, have sufficient capacity to ensure that the crossing will have minimal, if any, flooding over an average ten year period, but still recommended that signage be erected to advise of the risk to users in the event of a rainfall event and that alternate routes be provided;
- (e) in line with these recommendations, a 'Floodway Take Care' warning sign was installed at both approaches to the footpath and an alternative path exists from the Park and Ride to the bus stops via Langdon Avenue, Atkins Street and Athllon Drive. However there are some safety issues with this path as currently arranged;

- (f) in heavy rain or if the floodway is flooded, the footpath across it may become dangerous to use and pedestrians are encouraged to use this alternative path; and
 - (g) the footpath can also become dirty and muddy as a result of pedestrians walking down the grass slope from the eastern side of the carpark to the footpath. TCCS are investigating options to discourage this behaviour and have organised a clean-up of the footpath to remove the accumulated silt and mud; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) investigate ways to improve the path and general access to the Wanniasa Park and Ride stop to alleviate safety concerns; and
 - (b) report back to the Assembly by the last sitting day of 2019 on options to improve the path and how and when that will take place.”.

MS LE COUTEUR (Murrumbidgee) (10.13): I thank Ms Lawder for her fulsome contribution this morning. This is a very important issue. What we are trying to do to Canberra, and Tuggeranong in particular, is retrofit it to do something different from what it was originally designed for. If we had originally designed Tuggeranong with a park and ride I hazard a guess that it would not have been located where it currently is. When Tuggeranong was designed the idea was that the town districts would be pretty much self-contained and we were not going to have as much transport in and out of the suburbs as we do now. For various reasons we have a much more centralised city than we thought we would have when Tuggeranong was designed, and it is suffering, from a public transport point of view, as a result of that change.

I have great sympathy for the people in Tuggeranong, for whom public transport is not as good as it should be. I think we all agree that putting in the park and ride was a positive move, and it is unfortunate that the available location has the problems Ms Lawder has identified and with which Minister Steel has agreed.

The Greens obviously support public transport. We will support Minister Steel’s amendment. There are a few small issues with it, but it maintains an acknowledgement of the problem and is more specific in some areas. I have not seen this area in flood, although I go past it every time I visit Bunnings. It clearly is in a floodway and at times—I could almost say, unfortunately, not enough, given the drought we are in—this is a problem.

As Minister Steel noted, TCCS has cleared up the debris and silt from the path as a result of Ms Lawder raising this problem. I hope they have also looked at any issues with the original plan. With two quite large drainage pipes water should not be running over the top of that.

As I said, this is not an issue only for Wanniasa. It is not even an issue only for Tuggeranong; it is an issue for all of Canberra. We need better public transport and better ways of accessing public transport. Park and ride is one way we can make it easy for people to access public transport. At this stage I put in a plea for the park and ride at the RSPCA on the Cotter Road. It is nearly full and will be full very soon. That

point has a quarter-hour service to the city and it is becoming very popular. It is being held back by lack of ways to get there and lack of space to park your car.

Given how Canberra has developed, park and rides are an important part of our public transport strategy. If Canberra had been designed with public transport as the number one priority there might not be the same need for it, but we all know that is not the case. Park and rides are really important because people can catch buses into town or to Woden or Tuggeranong—wherever they need to go—without having to walk long distances or without having to wait for an infrequent local bus. They are a way for people to access the rapid routes and they are particularly important for older and disabled people or people who have to push prams, who may not be up to walking a very long distance.

I am sure everyone in the Assembly knows that the Greens have been banging on about the need for better footpaths and better shared paths since there was a Green to bang on about it. Active transport is part of our DNA and we would like to see a lot more of it in Canberra, for health benefits for both human beings and our planet. The climate change strategy released on Monday has clearly been misinterpreted by some people in this Assembly. It is not trying to ban cars; it is trying to—and hopefully will succeed—encourage more sustainable forms of transport such as catching the bus. Some ways to do this include appropriately placed park-and-ride facilities, footpaths, shared paths and an adequate bus service. A lot of things need to be done. We are not putting enough money into footpaths and shared paths. We are putting too much money, comparatively speaking into our road system. The Greens have been saying this forever.

I support Mr Lawder's motion and the fairly minor amendments made to it by Minister Steel. I am very glad to see the tripartisan support for our public transport system which this motion is pointing out.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (10.20): My Greens colleague Ms Le Couteur touched on some pretty interesting points. She mentioned the drought. We are not officially in drought in the ACT, but we are. In Tuggeranong, where we have backyards bigger than postage stamps, everyone has been praying for rain. Everyone in Tuggeranong has been praying for rain except the people who have to walk to the Wanniasa park and ride, because if it rains they are in diabolical strife.

I note in the amendment that Mr Steel is trumpeting loudly that “Floodway—Take Care” warning signs have been installed. That is good. Active travel can include wading, but I do not know that it includes swimming. In all seriousness, the problem has been identified and I thank Ms Lawder for bringing this really specific matter to the Assembly. We do not often see these extremely specific matters come before us in the form of motions and maybe we should more often. What is in place at the moment is clearly not acceptable.

When I was elected as a member for Brindabella I made a commitment to the people of Tuggeranong that I would continue to doorknock throughout the term of this Assembly and continue to seek their views. Over the last year and a half I have doorknocked a vast number of doors in a number of suburbs, but I have spent a lot of

time in Wanniassa. Wanniassa is a fantastic suburb. The people who live there are incredibly proud of their community. They often talk of the open spaces, the large backyards I mentioned and the nearby shops.

Despite its great size as a suburb, I think Wanniassa retains a village-like feel. That is partly because so many of the individual communities have many long-term residents, people who built homes there and are still there. Unfortunately, they also speak of the poor quality of government maintenance in their suburb. Almost every person I have spoken to in Wanniassa has told me that the amenity of the suburb needs to be improved—the cracked footpaths, the potholes, the poor mowing service. When they line that up with their skyrocketing rates and fees, they just scratch their heads and wonder what is going on.

These complaints have come to the fore in recent months, with this government's trashing of the bus network, particularly in Tuggeranong, which has led to many individuals having to walk much longer distances to get a bus. Ms Le Couteur pointed out that although this motion is very important, we could have probably come up with six or seven of them. Many residents have conveyed their irritation that they live in a forgotten part of the city. They point out that it is not just Wanniassa that lacks the most basic of local services; it is an issue that every resident of Tuggeranong has grown tired of—the broken footpaths; the poor bus services; the poor mowing service, and dare we mention the big speed hump in our town centre.

Just last week I had a conversation with Marie and Cec in Wanniassa, who specifically mentioned their expeditions and journeys to the park and ride, as described by Ms Lawder. In my day of doorknocking, Monique told me that she had trouble walking and on some days, after contemplating the difficulty of the walk to get to the Wanniassa shops, she concedes defeat and just stays at home.

These are the poor outcomes we get when basic maintenance is not undertaken. It genuinely affects the quality of people's lives. The residents of Tuggeranong are sick of being left behind. They are sick of being treated like second-class citizens by the Barr government, and they are sick of the local Labor MLAs refusing to stand up for them. I am proud to be from Tuggeranong. I am proud to represent Tuggeranong. If you ask me, Tuggeranong is Canberra's greatest asset. The residents of Tuggeranong deserve better and so do the residents of Wanniassa. The Barr government has increased their rates while removing their bus services and allowing their local infrastructure to fall apart.

I am pleased my colleague Ms Lawder has brought this motion to the chamber. I stand alongside her. I commend the motion to the Assembly. I implore members to support it today. I look forward to the support of all five members for Brindabella to deliver better local services for one of our great suburbs.

I must say I was pleasantly surprised with the content of the amendment from Mr Steel. As Ms Le Couteur said, there are some aspects of it that perhaps we would not agree on, but we are pleased to see that the "calls on" remain intact. My understanding is that we will be supporting that.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (10.25): I thank all members who spoke on the motion, and for their support in varying degrees. Generally it was absolute support. It will resonate with the residents of Wanniasa that someone has finally listened to some of their concerns. Mr Steel referred to the fact that I wrote to him about this issue specifically. That was almost two months ago, so imagine my surprise and delight when I received a response to my letter just yesterday.

As the minister pointed out, the letter contains a number of points about the path from the Wanniasa park and ride over to the bus stop on Athllon Drive. The government apparently did some research that said that the floodway would rarely be flooded. That is not really the point; the point is that it is a floodway. It is intended to channel water down towards the wetlands and to filter that water before it goes into Lake Tuggeranong. At times the volume of water down that floodway will be significant.

However, it is not only in that specific moment that it is an issue because as the water flows over the path—which I have seen happen because I visited it while it was raining, quite lightly, in fact—it leaves mud behind which stays there for quite some time. That creates the slipperiness.

We have occasional devastating flooding events in Canberra. Some members may remember such a flood in 1971 in Woden, where I think seven Canberrans died crossing a floodway, some of them in a car. It is human nature, unfortunately, that leads us to underestimate the power of floodwater. I would hate to see something like that happen again in Canberra.

It is not just the water and the flooding; it is the mud and slipperiness. From my visit to the floodway and the path from Wanniasa park-and-ride car park over to the Athllon Drive bus stop I know some people take a shortcut straight down the hill rather than following the path, which is a zigzag to alleviate the slope of the path. If the path went straight down and up it would be too steep for many people to use. So the path is a little longer than the direct route.

Once again, unfortunately, it is human nature to take a more direct path, and we often refer to these as desire lines. The minister believes the mud from people creating their own path is adding to the mud on the path. Having visited myself, I am not convinced that is the case. From my experience, the deposits of sediment on the path came from the water flowing across the path down the floodway towards the wetlands.

According to the minister's letter, TCCS officers have observed evidence of pedestrians using a short and direct route instead of the new footpath and that this incorrect use has resulted in damage to the grass and is contributing to silt accumulating on the footpath. However, many constituents remain concerned about the mud and sediment on the flat centre of the path within the floodway itself, which is where the water crosses across the path.

It is good to see from the minister's reply to my letter and the response to today's motion that it has been acknowledged that the current situation poses some issues and that TCCS has been asked to look into how access in this area can be improved.

I welcome this news and I trust that the minister will back up that position by not just looking at how access can be improved but actually improving the access over time, once they have done this bit of investigation and reported back to the Assembly later this year. This motion recognises the serious concerns residents have, especially older people, people with mobility impairment, and parents and carers with prams and strollers, as a couple of examples.

I thank the minister for his letter in reply and for his amendment today. I am pleased that the “calls on” remain the same. I do not want this to be a way of ticking the box and getting rid of this issue by reporting back to the Assembly. What I expect, what Mr Parton and Mr Wall expect as members for Brindabella—I would not presume to speak on behalf of all members for Brindabella—and what the residents expect is to see some changes made. Do not just report back to the Assembly—do something about it. I look forward to that happening or else we will be speaking more about this issue in the future.

Thank you once again to all members for their general support for the motion. I look forward to an update from the minister. I thank everyone once again for their contributions today and I thank the residents of Wanniasa for bringing this matter to our attention and for continuing to raise their concerns. They feel like they have been in a perfect storm—they have lost bus stops, they have lost bus routes through the suburb, especially on Longmore Crescent, yet parking at Wanniasa shops can be difficult and traversing the path through the floodway can be difficult. They feel they are being attacked or not supported on all fronts.

We are forcing people to go to Wanniasa park and ride but we are not enabling easy access to it. I hope we can address this matter and have real improvements and support for the residents of Wanniasa, Kambah and other areas that use that park and ride on Athllon Drive.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Health—fertility preservation facility

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra) (10.33): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes that many younger people can and will encounter cancer and other serious diseases in their lives, and that treatments, including chemotherapy, radiation therapy, surgery and prolonged anti-hormone treatment, can impact a patient’s fertility or render a patient infertile;
- (2) notes that there is a range of fertility preservation options available for patients depending on their relationship status and including, but not limited to:
 - (a) freezing eggs;
 - (b) freezing embryos;

- (c) freezing ovarian tissue;
 - (d) freezing sperm;
 - (e) freezing testicular tissue; and
 - (f) ovarian suppression drugs;
- (3) recognises that while discussions about fertility preservation should and often do form part of a broader, holistic approach to treating patients with cancer or another serious disease who are at risk of infertility due to treatment:
- (a) decisions about fertility preservation potential are naturally complex;
 - (b) for patients with a cancer diagnosis, there is added pressure to undertake treatment quickly, adding to the complexity and stress of the decisions; and
 - (c) recent evidence suggests that women with cancer can fail to take up fertility care as a result; and
- (4) calls on the ACT government to investigate the feasibility of establishing a territory-wide fertility preservation service specifically for Canberra patients of reproductive age diagnosed with cancer or another serious disease that may impact on their fertility.

There is a saying that Beth Lefevre's family knows all too well: "If you don't die of breast cancer, you'll live to 100." Beth was diagnosed with breast cancer almost three years ago. She had recently finished breastfeeding her six-month-old twins when she discovered the lump. Initial tests showed abnormal cells. A biopsy soon after identified the lump as pre-cancerous. By this stage it had tripled in size.

Beth made the incredibly difficult decision to undergo a mastectomy and immediate reconstruction. Breast cancer is all too common in her family tree. Less than a fortnight after surgery, Beth was contacted by one of her surgeons: eight millimetres of that lump had been invasive cancer. Beth underwent a course of chemotherapy, a year of immunotherapy and what will be at least five years of anti-hormone therapy.

The difficult decisions did not end with surgery or the beginning of treatment. Beth was in her early 30s when she was diagnosed with breast cancer and she was not sure that she was finished having children. If the cruel blow of a cancer diagnosis was not enough, adults of reproductive age, like Beth, face the prospect of not being able to fall pregnant or carry a child. The very treatments that can help them survive, like chemotherapy, radiation therapy and surgery, may render them infertile—treatments like Beth has had. Chemotherapy can damage the ovarian reserve. Anti-hormone treatment can go on for up to five years or more, and sometimes 10 years.

Beth is not alone in facing the prospect of infertility. Each year close to 2,000 new cases of cancer are diagnosed in the ACT. A number of these lives turned upside down—not a huge number but important nonetheless—belong to adults in their 20s, 30s and early 40s—adults of reproductive age, adults who have not finished having children, adults who may have recently decided to start a family or were in the process of trying to get pregnant, and others who may not be ready to have children or simply have not yet made up their minds.

After receiving her cancer diagnosis, Beth was referred to Canberra obstetrician and gynaecologist Professor Steve Robson. It was Professor Robson who discovered Beth had severe endometriosis and needed to have one of her ovaries removed. As Beth says, it was a miracle that she had even got pregnant in the past, let alone had three children. It was Professor Robson who discussed Beth's options to preserve her fertility as best she could in a supportive way, but also in an urgent way.

This is the nub of the issue—this urgency. There is a very small window between cancer diagnosis and the beginning of treatment for decisions to be made and actions to be taken about fertility preservation. Often younger cancer patients have more aggressive cancers, and these require quick and comprehensive treatment. Delays in starting cancer treatment are associated with a worse prognosis.

The question of making a decision about fertility preservation, then the actual procedures in doing so, also take time. For the decision, the pressure is enormous. As Professor Robson says:

Decisions about treatment are daunting, placing an almost overwhelming burden even on the most resilient and well-supported of us. Yet, unspoken, is the fear that treatment will take away chances of becoming pregnant once treatment is over and a cure is realised.

The technologies exist—and are available—to help preserve fertility. This is a key message of comfort at a time when young cancer patients are at their most vulnerable.

Luckily for Beth, Professor Robson was there at a time of immense vulnerability. They discussed her options and Beth decided to take injections that essentially switched off her hormonal system, not only to give her body a break, as she puts it, but to act as a temporary chemical menopause so that her fertility would not be compromised. The alternative would have been a hysterectomy.

It has not been easy. Not only does Beth have menopausal symptoms like hot flushes, feeling down and struggling to keep up with her kids, but also she has the knowledge that she still may struggle to conceive in the future. But Beth says she is lucky—lucky to have children, lucky to be able to afford treatment and lucky to be in a position in which she can make informed decisions about her health. Not every person always gets this choice.

There are people like Amy Hemsworth. Amy was 30 when she was diagnosed with breast cancer, but it was not a simple diagnosis. She was experiencing what she describes as “excruciating pain” in her right breast. She saw a doctor but they could not find a lump. She was told not to worry, but she knew something was not right.

About two weeks later, Amy did discover a lump. She revisited the doctor and underwent a mammogram. Again she was told not to worry, but she still knew something was not right. Amy then underwent an ultrasound which finally identified a cyst. She was told this was common, but the pain continued.

Amy arranged to get the cyst drained; then she received the call. This time something definitely was not right. Amy had been right all along. A biopsy confirmed it was a highly aggressive, stage 3 breast cancer. By the time Amy could see a surgeon and arrange a treatment plan, Christmas was fast approaching. She was told she needed to begin chemotherapy the following week. By the time she could see a fertility specialist, she was told it was too late to freeze her eggs. The risk of holding off chemotherapy until after Christmas so that she could harvest her eggs was deemed to be too great. As Amy says:

By the time anyone told me anything about fertility treatment it was just too late. Because of the delay and the misdiagnosis there was no chance for me.

Amy has now finished chemotherapy and has undergone a double mastectomy. She does not know what impact the chemotherapy has had on her fertility, but there is a very real chance that she will not be able to conceive a child. It is not as simple as trying to fall pregnant, either. It can take 12 to 18 months to recover from chemotherapy and be healthy enough to try to conceive.

Discussions about fertility preservation should and often do form part of a broader approach to treating patients with cancer or another serious disease, but these decisions are complex and they also need to be made quickly. Patients have very specific needs that require tailored treatment and close collaboration between the surgeon, medical and radiation oncologists, fertility specialists, and geneticists. The more supported a patient is, the better.

As it stands, fertility preservation conversations are not always a key component of care, and there are barriers to it being a key, prompt component of care. There is no rapid referral system for fertility preservation in the ACT. GPs need to refer patients to cancer specialists, who then refer them to fertility specialists. There are costs involved—financial costs, but also the costs involved when there are delays in getting the appointments, at a time when being prompt, efficient and quick is everything.

Whether this is a key component of care or not, whether things have progressed quickly or not, the fact remains that these decisions are ones which are complicated and overwhelming. Many people have not considered fertility preservation generally, let alone in the face of an overwhelming cancer diagnosis.

Professor Robson says he often gets confused calls from patients and specialists regarding fertility preservation options. Just last week he heard from two women in their 30s in the space of 24 hours. Both were overwhelmed by their cancer diagnosis and fearful that they may not be able to have children. In both cases Professor Robson also responded to calls from the women's specialists, who lamented that the fertility process was ad hoc, with no clear pathway.

This is not to say that Canberra does not have great hospitals and medical facilities. We do. We have great specialists and medical staff, and great fertility preservation clinics. But with so many specialists and services involved in the process of treating adults of reproductive age with cancer and other serious diseases, some in the public

system and some in the private system, it can become complicated. We know that without early, supported conversations about fertility, with a clear path to navigate, people can miss out.

One study by the Royal Women's Hospital, Melbourne IVF and the University of Melbourne found that many women diagnosed with cancer were not being referred to a fertility preservation specialist due to fears that those specialists may delay their treatment. The study of oncologists found that 44 per cent cited concerns about delaying treatment as the main reason they would not refer newly diagnosed patients. Yet international guidelines on this topic recommend that physicians have early discussions with all patients of a reproductive age about their risk of infertility from disease or treatment and their interest in having children in the future so that they can make informed decisions. This is also canvassed in the guidelines for the management of early breast cancer, as published by Cancer Australia.

It is this compelling evidence that has resulted in me moving this motion today. I am calling on the ACT government to investigate the feasibility of establishing a territory-wide fertility preservation service for Canberrans of reproductive age diagnosed with cancer or another serious disease which may impact their fertility. This would be a more streamlined, rapid process so that patients and their treating specialists can make early, informed, supported decisions about fertility preservation. This would then allow any fertility preservation measures to be undertaken as quickly and efficiently as possible, thereby allowing for treatment for the cancer or disease to also start quickly, with no delay.

I am not wedded to a particular model of exactly what this looks like or how it runs, but we just have to make this process simpler—more supported, more connected and more accessible. There needs to be a streamlining of existing services and resources, clear guidelines for treating specialists, perhaps a single point of contact to help shepherd patients through this urgent process, identifying or creating a fertility preservation clinic which provides this immediate care to patients when time is of the essence, and looking at what other barriers need to be removed, such as prohibitive costs.

This is not new. Last month the New South Wales health minister launched the state's new fertility and research centre, a collaboration between UNSW Sydney and the Royal Hospital for Women. Among its facilities are on-site fertility preservation services for young people with cancer and rare genetic diseases. The fertility preservation clinic at the Royal Women's Hospital in Melbourne provides a similar service, in conjunction with Melbourne IVF and major oncology units. Maybe there are opportunities for the ACT to partner with or at least draw from these experiences in other states.

Not everyone will need to use this service. The number of people who get cancer at a reproductive age is not huge. But when those people's lives are turned upside down by an insidious disease, everything becomes huge, complex, confusing and time limited. It is a tragedy that people might be limiting their own future options simply because they do not have the right support and services provided to them through a dedicated service. It does not have to be this way. Providing a service like this could

make all the difference for people like Beth and for people like Amy. I commend this motion to the Assembly.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (10.47): I thank Ms Cheyne for bringing forward this very important issue today. I note that she has told a number of real-life stories of Canberra women, and some of those were reflected in the *Canberra Times* today. I think that this is a very significant issue amongst the large number of significant issues that confront people when they are confronted with a diagnosis of cancer. I put on record the Canberra Liberals' support for what Ms Cheyne called clear pathways, but those clear pathways need to be not just in the space of fertility preservation but across the board.

I note the very sobering comments from Dr Steve Robson today in the *Canberra Times*, which were reflected in Ms Cheyne's comments. They highlight that this is one of a number of areas in relation to cancer services and other serious illnesses which impact on the Canberra population.

The Canberra Liberals support the motion. I will speak only briefly because I think that the motion speaks for itself, and Ms Cheyne has spoken quite eloquently on the subject. My voice is not going to last the day if I keep on speaking. I commend Ms Cheyne for the motion. I have heartfelt sympathy for those Canberra women and their families who have encountered these difficulties and I applaud the work done by Dr Robson and others in this space. It would be good if we had a more seamless service than we currently have.

Whilst speaking in support of the motion I also need to highlight that, although we have great medical specialists, great radiologists, great oncologists, great allied health people and people who save people's lives in the cancer space every day, I was thinking about someone who is close to my family and who has recently retired from the Canberra Hospital after 40-plus years as a radiation therapist, about the testament to the number of lives that that one person has saved and about people across the board who provide lifesaving services and services to people who may not have a great health outcome but have great health services in the ACT. But they can always be better.

I think that we cannot talk about cancer services and having clear pathways in the ACT without drawing attention to the radical decline in radiation therapy service timeliness in the past decade. We have seen, in the palliative and radical radiation interventions, a decline from close to 100 per cent timeliness for palliative patients and 98 per cent timeliness for radical patients in 2012 to the mid-50s in terms of timeliness.

This is one of the many things that I see, as the shadow minister for health, where there are not clear pathways and there is not clear and timely provision of service in the oncology space and in the cancer space. I have had feedback from cancer patients, some of whom are quite close to me, that it is very difficult to obtain timely radiation services at the Canberra Hospital at the moment, that there are problems with the equipment and that there are regular breakdowns.

I am pleased that the minister, in the last sitting, made it clear that they were prepared to work with Icon Cancer Centre and to use their radiation therapy machines to help deal with the backlog and address the issues of timeliness. But there is much more that needs to be done in this space.

To be absolutely fair about this motion, which is very worthy, I fear that we will not see anything from it. We had earlier this year a very worthy motion from Ms Cheyne about a breastmilk bank where there was wide support for the issue but we have seen nothing develop from the government since then. It was done in the context of the run-up to the budget. There was nothing in the budget in relation to a breastmilk bank and nothing has developed so far.

I am concerned that we will adopt this motion today, a very worthy motion, but the government will not follow through on it because the government cannot be trusted to follow through on services which are essential to the Canberra community. Cancer services that have clear pathways, that are streamlined, that are responsive—whether it is in relation to radiotherapy, whether it is in relation to chemotherapy, whether it is related to fertility preservation—need to be streamlined, need to be clear. There needs to be, in a sense, a one-stop shop. What Ms Cheyne has described is, through no ill-will or no particular institutional failing, something which is not a one-stop shop. But I cannot believe that after 18 years in government this tired Labor government is going to start getting its act together and getting the services more streamlined in a way that would better provide services to the people of the ACT.

I commend the motion. I commend Ms Cheyne for this and for the thoughtful way in which it was presented. The Canberra Liberals are happy to support the motion, with the proviso that we have considerable fears that this government just does not have the capacity to do what Ms Cheyne is calling for.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Health and Minister for Urban Renewal) (10.54): I thank Ms Cheyne for bringing forward the motion. I will respond very briefly to Mrs Dunne's comments about radiation therapy waiting times. We know this issue has been discussed many times before.

Mrs Dunne is well aware that 100 per cent of patients requiring emergency radiation therapy receive their treatment within one day. This is in fact the best performance across the country. A hundred patients a day receive treatment at Canberra Hospital. This is being achieved currently on three machines, as opposed to the same number being treated on four machines during the same period last year. In 2018-19, 1,450 patients received radiation treatment, compared to 1,377 patients in 2017-18. Even with the replacement of one of the linear accelerators we still saw more patients treated in 2018-19 than in the year before.

As members would know, Canberra Health Services is currently spending \$11 million, of which \$6 million comes from the commonwealth—and it is important to acknowledge that—on replacing two linear accelerators, the treatment planning system and updating the physical space to ensure the latest technology and the most

efficient services are provided. I was very pleased to stand up with Senator Seselja the other week to open the first of those two new linear accelerators.

During that period of these linear accelerators being replaced, improvements in treatment capacity have been achieved by extending treatment times to 7 pm, recalling clinicians from indirect roles to provide treatment where appropriate, improving patient scheduling, improving the planning process and ensuring that the downtime on machine maintenance is limited and that patients of course are triaged to ensure that those who will benefit most from early treatment are treated first.

I commend the staff who provide radiation oncology and radiation therapy services at the Canberra Region Cancer Centre for the work that they have done to ensure that patient flow through the centre continues while we replace two linear accelerators with state-of-the-art technology. I think Mrs Dunne's continued campaign to scare Canberrans about access to radiation therapy is sorely misplaced.

I place on the record that more patients were treated in 2018-19 than in 2017-18 and that we will soon have the second of those state-of-the-art linear accelerators replaced. Once all those four machines are operational, by mid-2020, wait times will return to within national benchmarks. But in the meantime patients are triaged to ensure that those who require urgent treatment receive that treatment. Mrs Dunne is well aware of that.

In relation to the motion before us today, of course cancer treatment and treatment for other serious diseases such as rare genetic conditions can have a significant impact on a young person and their family's lives. That is part of the reason it is so important not to conduct scare campaigns about what might be available to them. Younger patients undertaking radiation therapy, chemotherapy, surgery or anti-hormonal treatments for cancer and other serious diseases—and people generally—are often required to make life-changing decisions in a short time during a very stressful period of their lives.

Fertility preservation can be highly valuable for patients at a reproductive age. A variety of options are available, depending on the illness, age, gender and relationship status of patients. As Ms Cheyne's motion notes, preservation options should be considered as part of a holistic approach to treating patients. But this is not without challenges. Fertility and future decisions about children may not be something a person has considered in their life, let alone having to make critical decisions about their fertility in often a very short time frame, during a fraught and difficult time both physically and emotionally.

As Ms Cheyne has noted, fertility can be preserved through various treatments. The most common and clinically straightforward, of course, is the retrieval of egg, sperm or embryos and subsequent freezing for future use. Other options include freezing ovarian tissue or testicular tissue or taking medications to protect the ovaries from toxic chemotherapy drugs. It is important that advice and support on fertility preservation options are provided to younger people as soon as diagnosis is made, to facilitate this discussion and earlier access to services.

In 2018 the Breast Cancer Network Australia released their state of the nation report and highlighted the need for young women with breast cancer to access government fertility clinics for fertility preservation. Currently fewer than half of the women diagnosed with breast cancer in Australia are provided with adequate information on fertility preservation. Many reported that the approach taken for fertility discussions was inconsistent and inadequate, according to the work of the Breast Cancer Network Australia. We support the work that they are currently undertaking to explore this issue in more detail and to help states and territories improve current information provision for these patients.

Canberra Health Services routinely provides young breast cancer patients with information and support to understand the treatment effects on their fertility. This information includes advice on fertility during and after cancer treatment and, where necessary, referral to a private fertility specialist for support and preservation services. Some private services fast-track their appointments if the patient is referred through an oncologist as well as minimise as much as possible the out-of-pocket costs for these patients. Regardless, we recognise that the cost for these services can remain significant. Fertility preservation in cancer and genetic conditions is an increasing field in Australian medicine.

As Ms Cheyne has noted, New South Wales recently announced a new government-funded fertility and research centre at Sydney's Royal Hospital for Women. This centre will provide fertility preservation services for patients with cancer diagnosis or rare genetic conditions as well as conduct cutting-edge research on new approaches for fertility treatments. The Royal Women's Hospital in Victoria also has a fertility preservation clinic, providing care and fertility considerations for patients who have cancer or another health risk that puts their fertility at risk.

I understand the concerns raised by Ms Cheyne in relation to fertility preservation for younger people in our community. As others have noted, Amy Hemsworth's story that is told in the *Canberra Times* today is indeed a touching and an important example of how important it is that young people of a reproductive age, who have a cancer diagnosis, get the information they need in a timely way and access to services.

Whilst the ACT government does not currently have plans for a specific territory-wide fertility preservation service for young patients diagnosed with cancer, the ACT is formally part of the New South Wales-ACT adolescent and young adult cancer network which provides direct access to specialists within New South Wales when required. This network is regularly reviewed to ensure that it is meeting the needs of younger people with cancer.

We will continue to investigate potential avenues for enhancing access to fertility preservation services for patients diagnosed with cancer or other serious conditions which impact on fertility. This analysis will need to examine the current state of demand for this service within the ACT and surrounding region as well as explore additional opportunities for providing important information about options for fertility preservation to patients in need. Again, I thank Ms Cheyne for bringing forward the motion and commend it to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong—Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability, Minister for Corrections and Justice Health, Minister for Justice, Consumer Affairs and Road Safety and Minister for Mental Health) (11.02): I thank Ms Cheyne for bringing forward the motion today and providing the opportunity for the Assembly to have our attention drawn to this very personal matter for people and to discuss it here today.

Sadly, cancer and other serious diseases do not discriminate when it comes to age. They are always unexpected, often unavoidable and require seriously invasive treatment. For young people, or younger people, who develop a serious illness which requires an invasive treatment option like chemotherapy, radiation, surgery or hormone therapy, there is the risk of infertility. Chemotherapy causes egg damage and has various effects on the longevity of fertility. Radiation therapy can harm or cause scarring to a female's ovaries or a male's prostate. Surgery may remove parts of an individual's reproductive system. Clearly, these treatments are severe, and it is clear that they will impede on a young person in their reproductive years in terms of their ability to have children.

Breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer and typically affects women, although some men can get breast cancer. Australian data shows that in the age cohort of 34 to 39-year-olds the incidence of breast cancer in women more than doubles, from 26.4 per 100,000 in 30 to 34-year-olds to 61.6 per 100,000. Further, in the age cohort of 40 to 44-year-old women, breast cancer is 133.7 per 100,000.

Data also shows that cervical cancer and testicular cancer affect females and males respectively at moderately higher rates from puberty onwards. As we know, there are a large number of other cancers and diseases that can impact someone at any stage in their life and may impact on their fertility. This demonstrates that young people can be at risk of developing a serious illness that can impact their fertility, due to either the nature of the illness or the treatment in response to it.

In addition, there is a trend in society today whereby young people are choosing to have children a bit later in life. Young people are granted a lot more choice these days. Women and men are prioritising their careers and other things ahead of children in their early adult years, thinking they have time. This is where I think the premise of Ms Cheyne's motion has particular value, considering that the incidence of illness starts to increase from the mid-30s onwards. It would be an unfortunate situation that women and men who, for various reasons, have waited until a bit later in life to have children through no fault of their own are subjected to a severe illness and find that suddenly their choice to have a child is impeded.

Breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer for women; luckily, it is also the most curable. While the treatment for the illness could incur fertility issues, if, prior to undergoing treatment, someone is able to engage with fertility preservation, they may well be granted the opportunity to choose to try for a child, should they wish to do so, once recovered and once having gone through their treatment process. We Greens believe that all women deserve the right to choose and control their own reproductive rights. This is a different angle on that question and others that come up most commonly, but it is an important factor to consider as we talk about these issues.

As the Minister for Mental Health, I am conscious that there is a mental health and wellbeing component to this issue as well. Many people who have planned to have families, who expect that that will be their path in life, are thrown a curve ball when diagnosed with a serious illness that could impact their fertility. They may experience mental health concerns as a result of that process of trying to deal with those very difficult emotions when their plans for a family are so suddenly impacted. There is the inherent trauma associated with undergoing treatment for a serious illness as well. Potentially providing an avenue to engage with fertility preservation services may well assist people in terms of their mental wellbeing when it comes to dealing with the many issues that are thrown at them once they receive such a serious diagnosis.

Having said all of that, I support Ms Cheyne's call on the government to investigate the feasibility of a fertility preservation service to be available to Canberra's cancer and other illness patients who are in their reproductive years. I acknowledge that fertility clinics are already available in the ACT in the private sector and are a thriving industry, but private fertility clinics can be quite expensive. There is also a cost involved in maintaining the reproductive resources obtained from patients. Once the eggs or the sperm have been obtained, they have to be very carefully stored to ensure that they continue to remain viable.

I am conscious of the need to consider what this cost would be to our public health system. We will need to determine if this is something that is best provided in the public health system or whether the private services are enough. That is where the feasibility study is particularly valuable. It can consider these questions. I do not claim any expertise on these questions but they are really important questions to consider as we deal with all the issues we have just touched on around families being able to access the ability to have a family after serious illness and the various resource questions that would go with that.

Clearer education from treatment providers on the risk to fertility for people of reproductive age with cancer or other illnesses would be a really valuable step to help people make more informed decisions and also be aware of what services are available to them.

This motion also throws up a lot of questions. That is why we are very happy to support it today. We welcome the feasibility study to determine what the need, the financial costs and the best approach to this issue would be; to explore some of these questions in some detail; and to be able to provide the government with some really clear advice on the best way we can support those people who find themselves with cancer or other serious illnesses at that point in their life where starting a family is still a question that lies ahead of them.

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra) (11.09), in reply: I thank all colleagues in this chamber today for their support for what I think is an incredibly important issue. I was very pleased to hear everyone attest to that in their own remarks. I am very grateful to have the bipartisan support of this Assembly today.

In closing, I want to share the story of a woman who I will refer to as Jane. Jane is 36 years old; she has a husband and a three-year-old child. Just a few weeks ago, Jane was blindsided. What began as a simple ultrasound to investigate a painful lump in her left breast turned into a diagnosis of breast cancer. The diagnosis is still sinking in. Jane is still in the process of sharing the news with friends and acquaintances. As Jane says:

The diagnosis has been a complete shock and has already completely changed my life, plans, and certainty about the future.

Jane and her husband were planning on adding to their family next year. Together they have had to make what Jane describes as a rapid decision to undertake measures to preserve her fertility. Jane says she was unaware of the delicate balance that needed to be struck between undertaking chemotherapy as soon as possible while discussing her future family goals with an obstetrician—just as Amy was unaware.

Jane had less than two weeks from her appointment with her obstetrician to undertake fertility preservation treatment and all the associated injections, blood tests and scans that go with it, as well as undergoing egg retrieval. All of this in under two weeks, not to mention all the other medical appointments and tests. Jane says she has felt fully supported in her family's decision to undertake measures to help preserve her fertility. Her specialists discussed her options early, gave her the information she needed to make an informed decision and linked her with an obstetric support. Jane's experience is an example of good, holistic patient care at a time of unimaginable stress and shock. Her family was supported to make what needed to be an almost instant decision.

While many patients with cancer and other serious disease are well supported to make decisions about their fertility, regrettably we know that this is not always the case. And while Jane has had a good experience with this process, the sheer complexity of it all, and the overwhelming nature of the diagnosis and ensuing decisions, can mean that not everyone has a supported experience with a clear pathway like Jane had.

This is why it makes sense to investigate the feasibility of a fertility preservation service for Canberra patients. In addition to supporting patients generally, there are other reasons why this service is particularly suited to and required in the ACT. One reason is the size of the ACT. A smaller jurisdiction can have its advantages when it comes to better connecting existing services or creating those clearer pathways. Another reason, as touched on by other members in their speeches, is the prominence of breast cancer in the ACT. Breast cancer is the most common cancer among women in the ACT. While the territory has the highest survival rate of breast cancer in the country, women under the age of 40 are more likely to have more aggressive cancers—women like Jane, Beth and Amy.

Dr Carolyn Cho is a breast and reconstructive surgeon and acting chair of the ACT breast cancer multidisciplinary group. She has provided a statement of support to me for this service that we are calling for today. Dr Cho highlighted the need for comprehensive support, discussion and treatment regarding both the cancer and the fertility preservation measures. She also highlighted the challenges that we have

talked about today: the lack of quick referrals; the inevitable delays in obtaining appointments, despite the best endeavours of specialists to see people quickly; the costs; and the shock, devastation and indeed destruction of a cancer diagnosis.

Jane knows that feeling of shock all too well. She says the establishment of a fertility preservation service would provide hope to women like her who have been diagnosed with cancer before they have started or completed their families. Such a service would streamline and standardise the process of urgent fertility preservation, ensuring that conversations about family planning are a priority at the time of diagnosis. Jane also believes that it would create an equal platform for patients, ensuring that decisions are based on family planning goals rather than finance or chance encounters with proactive medical professionals.

Beth says that this holistic approach to her cancer treatment plan was crucial to being able to discuss and preserve her fertility as best she could. She knows that there are many women who miss out due to financial barriers or the lack of connectivity between specialists. Beth says that the prospect of having a service in place would be a relief for younger cancer patients facing a deluge of questions and decisions in such a small amount of time. Her reaction to the prospect of a fertility preservation service was: “Thank goodness there is something for other women.”

Not every patient with cancer or another serious disease would need to take up such a service, but having something in place would create peace of mind for adults overwhelmed by a diagnosis like this and the prospect of infertility. Professor Robson says:

It is time for a co-ordinated, centralised, and highly professional fertility service to provide support and resources to young people in the ACT who find themselves with cancer. A service that can come to their aid and address these highly personal needs without delay, and without further complicating or compromising their cancer care.

Dr Cho agrees. She says:

A mechanism by which young cancer patients could have rapid assessment and commencement of fertility preservation is greatly needed.

That is patients like Jane, Beth and Amy, especially patients like Amy. Amy says that missing that small window was devastating. Had there been a discussion about fertility sooner, she believes there would have been time to retrieve and freeze some of her eggs. Asked about the prospect of a fertility preservation service for others, Amy says, “I think this would mean the world to a lot of women.” I commend this motion to the Assembly.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Hospitals—infrastructure

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (11.17): I move:

That this Assembly:

- (1) notes the important services provided by staff at the Canberra Hospital (TCH) and Health Services to the people of Canberra and the region;
- (2) further notes that, in relation to Canberra's emergency departments:
 - (a) people waited longer in the fourth quarter of 2018-19 to receive treatment within the clinically recommended timeframe in the emergency, urgent and semi-urgent triage categories;
 - (b) the median waiting time for patients in the urgent, semi-urgent and non-urgent categories increased in the fourth quarter of 2018-19;
 - (c) the proportion of patients seen within four hours declined in the fourth quarter of 2018-19;
 - (d) the median waiting time for patients in the urgent category is longer than the median waiting time in the non-urgent category;
 - (e) that the winter beds strategy was not put in place at TCH until 11 July 2019 when the flu season had started in May;
 - (f) that 61 per cent of the infrastructure at the Calvary Hospital is nearing the end of its useful life; and
 - (g) that the Government has been aware of the infrastructure problems at TCH for a decade and has failed to act; and
- (3) calls on the Minister for Health to report to the Legislative Assembly by the last sitting day of 2019, on the:
 - (a) progress on the Surgical Procedures, Interventional Radiology and Emergency project and its likely cost;
 - (b) progress in developing other significant health infrastructure programs such as plans to upgrade infrastructure at Bruce; and
 - (c) 2019 flu season and why the winter bed strategy was so late in being implemented.

Two years ago Minister Fitzharris told the Assembly that emergency department waiting times were coming down. Repeatedly she told us that she had seen figures that showed that emergency department waiting times were, in her words, heading in the right direction. We know now that that was not the case. We know now that waiting times in our EDs are not coming down. They are, in fact, going up. It is one more factor that shows that the people of the ACT cannot trust the Barr government to tell them what is happening in health or to manage the health system.

Only 28 per cent of people who presented to our emergency departments in the last quarter were seen within the clinically recommended time frame. This compared to a target of 75 per cent. Yesterday in this place, when the minister was asked that question, she could not answer it. She could not answer the question. She had all the time in question time to answer the questions or afterwards to correct the record and tell us anything she liked, but yesterday, when she was asked for the average waiting time and the number of people seen within the clinically recommended time, she did not answer the question. She told us what the clinical times were for each category.

There is an average. It is reported regularly. It is reported in the quarterly reports. The figure is 28 per cent. That is a concern, compared to a target of 75 per cent.

Ms Stephen-Smith interjecting—

MRS DUNNE: I understand that Ms Stephen-Smith is very touchy about these things, and she should be. She is the last in a failed line of health ministers who have promised the people of the ACT improved emergency department waiting times. I was thinking about this today. I was thinking back to 2012. We found that when we could not fix the emergency department waiting times, they fixed the figures.

Then we had Minister Fitzharris in here on, I think, five successive occasions telling the Assembly that figures that she had showed that emergency department waiting times were heading in the right direction. When the figures were finally published, that was proved to be false. I cannot go back and challenge Minister Fitzharris for misleading the Assembly, which she clearly did. I cannot go back and do that. When I asked her on a number of occasions whether she had misled the Assembly, she insisted that she had not. But the figures contradict what she said.

This government and this minister are very sensitive, and they should be. The figures that came out last week show that we are in a parlous state. We are also under target when it comes to emergency and semi-urgent categories. It is worth going through these triage categories. Category 1 is for resuscitation, when the patient is not breathing and must be treated immediately. We perform according to target, and 100 per cent of people who proceed to accident and emergency in category 1 are treated on time.

Category 2 is emergency. Examples of category 2 are a patient who has had a stroke, an acute respiratory problem or an epileptic seizure; who has a condition like meningitis or severe sepsis; or who is experiencing acute psychosis. Patients in this category should be treated within 10 minutes. We have a target of treating 80 per cent of people within that time, and we fail to achieve it. Last year it was 74 per cent, which was a decline from the previous year, at 77 per cent.

Category 3 is urgent. Patients in category 3 have a potentially life-threatening issue, such as a serious issue, and are in severe pain. It is simply not good enough that only slightly more than 30 per cent of patients in this category are being seen within clinically recommended times of half an hour. We have a target of 75 per cent of patients being seen within the clinically appropriate time of half an hour, but last year only 32 per cent were seen in a clinically appropriate time, compared to 37 per cent the year before.

Category 4 is semi-urgent or potentially serious. It is recommended that people in this category are treated within an hour. Conditions in this category include migraines, foreign matter in the eye, earaches and sprained ankles. We have a target of 70 per cent. In this category, last year we saw 48 per cent of people, compared to the figure for the previous year of 48 per cent. The last category is non-urgent. There is a target of seeing 70 per cent of people within two hours in the non-urgent category.

This is the only category in which we are achieving above target; there has been a small improvement, from 82 per cent to 83 per cent.

We are seeing a complete failure of the emergency department waiting time processes. I am sure the minister will stand up and say, “It is all about the flu season.” The government spends every year preparing for the flu season and every year uses the flu season as an excuse for not meeting its targets. The government had a winter bed strategy for the Canberra Hospital which came into place on 11 July. The problem was that the flu outbreak for this year was not prepared to wait until 11 July; it had started to really ramp up by early May. The government did not have the capacity or the willingness—I do not know which—to bring forward its winter bed strategy to correspond with the peaking of the flu season.

The problems with our hospital system are not the fault of the hardworking doctors, nurses and allied health staff who man the hospital.

Ms Stephen-Smith: “Staff” would be better.

MRS DUNNE: I am not going to be told by this politically correct failure of a minister what terminology I will use. The people who man the hospital, day in and day out, need more respect than virtue-signalling from this minister. This failed minister only has a capacity to nitpick, in the same way she took time on one occasion to nitpick that Mr Milligan did not use “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander” but used “Indigenous” instead. She chipped him. When you go back and look at the record, this minister uses the word “Indigenous” as frequently as she uses the words “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander”.

This minister is a failed minister. She has failed in her previous portfolios; she has no capacity to grasp the importance of her portfolio; and when you challenge her, she either snipes or laughs inappropriately. She only has two responses. The other response should be a shame-faced, crestfallen apology to the people of the ACT. This government failed to prepare properly for the flu season. This government has failed to do anything comprehensive or constructive about infrastructure.

It was interesting to look at the Australian Medical Association hospital health report card that came out, I think, last week. It contains graphs on performance and timeliness of treatment in category 3, the urgent category. In 2002-03, just after the Canberra Liberals were in government, approximately 75 per cent of patients were seen on time in this category. By 2017-18, only 37 per cent of people in this category were seen on time. This figure has halved in 15 years. The minister has advised that the number has fallen to 32 per cent in 2018-19. The published figures are 37 per cent, but the unpublished figure, coming from the minister herself, is shown to have fallen even further. The figures will not get any better this year. This is why you cannot trust the Barr government on health.

At the weekend, the president of the AMA, Dr Di Dio, commented on the poor performance of the ACT health system. He said:

The usual reasons are apparent—insufficient inpatient beds to get patients out of the emergency department and into the hospital ... Significant parts of Canberra Hospital are overdue for replacement and an expansion of capacity is needed.

The media reported on 14 September that Dr Di Dio stated that short-term fixes that create extra space in the emergency departments only postpone the real problem of being able to get patients out of the ED and into the hospital's wards.

I would add that now Senator Gallagher found that 61 per cent of the buildings at the Calvary Public Hospital were approaching the end of their useful life. When she was the minister in this place in 2008, Ms Gallagher warned that we would face a health tsunami and that we needed to invest in health infrastructure. In 2012 the Labor Party promised a significant infrastructure program at the hospital; however, the government did not follow through in 2013, although a detailed proposal was developed.

The proposal was adopted by the Canberra Liberals at the 2016 election. If the government had approved the plans that it made in 2013, that project would have been finished by now. We would not be spending \$400 million at the hospital on infrastructure upgrades, because essentially we would have a new hospital in the heart of the campus. If we had built what Katy Gallagher promised in 2012 and planned for in 2013, we would not be having this conversation today. We would have beds to implement the winter bed strategy that was needed in May, not July.

In 2015 there was a proposal to spend \$1.2 billion on refurbishing the Canberra Hospital campus. KPMG prepared a business case for ACT Health, saying that demand for beds at the hospital was outstripping supply and the current infrastructure would not be able to deal with increased capacity needs. The government did not proceed with this proposal. Instead, the government announced the UMAHA program in 2016-17, at a cost of \$95 million. The replacement of the electrical switchboard in buildings 1 and 2 was part of that program. It was envisaged that it would cost \$14 million, but the incoming minister brief that I recently received shows that that has now blown out to \$51 million of a \$95 million project. As well as that, no work would have been done on the switchboard if it had not been for the April 2017 fire.

At the last minute before the last election, the government decided that it would build something called SPIRE. I know that there are glossy brochures; I noticed the minister had one in her folder and I am sure she will spruik from it in her remarks. We do not know what SPIRE will cost, but we do know that the delays caused by this government not investing in infrastructure mean that we will not get the facilities that we need until 2022, whereas we should be having them now.

In the time available to me, I will emphasise that what this motion calls on the government to do is really just be a bit more prepared than the minister was yesterday in question time. It gives her until the last sitting day of this year to put forward to the Assembly and report to the Assembly progress on SPIRE—not when it is going to be finished or how much it is going to cost; just tell us where they are in the process. It also calls on her to report on progress in developing other health infrastructure programs. One is the upgrade of infrastructure at Bruce. As we know, that is facing significant pressure. And there are the women's and children's hospital upgrades. As we have discussed in this place over a number of months, their timeliness has blown out as well, and the thing that was promised in 2019 will not be delivered until 2022. (*Time expired.*)

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Health and Minister for Urban Renewal) (11.32): I move the amendment that has been circulated in my name:

Omit paragraphs (2)(f) and (g), substitute:

- “(f) Calvary Public Hospital Bruce (Calvary) is an important part of the Territory-wide hospital network;
- (g) the ACT Government has invested more than \$1 billion in health infrastructure since 2009, including upgrading Calvary’s maternity ward, the expansion of TCH’s Emergency Department, the delivery of a new rehabilitation facility at the University of Canberra Hospital and the establishment of the nurse-led Walk-in Centre network;
- (h) the ACT Government’s commitments to the expansion of Calvary’s Emergency Department and the Surgical Procedures, Interventional Radiology and Emergency (SPIRE) project at TCH will deliver increases in emergency department treatment spaces of almost 20 percent by winter 2020 and more than 50 percent over five years; and
- (i) the fourth quarter report for 2018-19 showed that more than 92 percent of patients would recommend TCH to family and friends, while more than 93 percent of Calvary patients reported a positive experience and were satisfied with the care provided; and”.

The amendment largely leaves Mrs Dunne’s motion intact; it just adds a few facts about the investments that have been made by the ACT government in infrastructure and the satisfaction that Canberrans have shown, patients have shown, with the services provided by both the Canberra Hospital and Calvary.

I would encourage Mrs Dunne—as I did, in a rather unparliamentary way, I admit, while she was speaking—to check the *Hansard* from yesterday and to check what she has said in the *Hansard* for today. Mrs Dunne claimed that I failed to answer a question in relation to the proportion of urgent patients seen within the recommended time.

Mrs Dunne: No, we didn’t ask you that question yesterday. We asked you—

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Mrs Dunne used the figure of 28 per cent, so Mrs Dunne may wish to go back and check the *Hansard* for today because she has either claimed that the average figure across all categories is 28 per cent or she has claimed that I have failed to answer a question that I did answer, to which the answer was 28 per cent. I would strongly urge Mrs Dunne to go back and check the *Hansard* in relation to what she said at the beginning of her remarks.

This motion refers to data that was in the most recently released quarterly performance report for ACT health services. This report is part of our commitment to provide transparent and useful information for health consumers and Canberrans more broadly. It is a report that has been designed with input from the Health Care Consumers Association, drawing on data from 130 performance indicators that are reported across a variety of reports and formats throughout the year. It reports on a

system that, during the quarter, overall treated more than 29,000 admitted patients, up two per cent, and supported almost 95,000 bed days across all three hospitals, including the University of Canberra Hospital.

This report includes patient feedback data because Health Care Consumers believe that that is important. Patient feedback is a true testament to our dedicated and hardworking staff who go above and beyond to ensure that our community have access to and receives the care they need. In 2018-19 Canberra Health Services received more than 4,400 consumer feedback items, and, of these, 64 per cent were compliments.

A recent inpatient experience survey at Calvary found that more than 90 per cent of patients reported a positive experience and were satisfied with the care provided, and a fourth quarter report that Mrs Dunne's motion relates to, in large part for 2018-19, showed that more than 92 per cent of patients would recommend Canberra Hospital to family and friends, and more than 93 per cent of Calvary patients reported a positive experience and were satisfied with the care provided.

What Health Care Consumers have also told us is that quality and safety are important. What Mrs Dunne did not mention was all of the positive information that came out in this report, in that both Canberra Hospital and Calvary Public Hospital exceed their quality and safety benchmarks on almost all benchmarks, with the exception of Calvary Public Hospital's estimated hand hygiene rate, which is very slightly below benchmark. Other than that, the hospitals perform very well, including on important things like the number of patients per 1,000 occupied bed days who acquire a SAB infection, which is significantly below target for both hospitals.

It is important to acknowledge the good things, and the successes of our health system, which, as Mrs Dunne acknowledged, can be attributed to the dedication and professionalism of our medical, nursing, allied health support services and administrative staff right across the system. Our staff work tirelessly to deliver health services around the clock, and I would like to take this opportunity again to express my thanks and gratitude for the important work they do every day.

While we will come to emergency, this work is also reflected in the positive data we have seen in relation to elective surgery in the latest quarterly performance report. Again I note that Mrs Dunne did not mention it, because it is good news. There was an 18 per cent increase in elective surgeries in the quarter, compared to the previous quarter, and Health Services exceeded its target of 14,000 elective surgeries in 2018-19, a record for the ACT. There was a reduction of nine per cent in the number of overdue patients waiting for surgery and four per cent overall in the number of patients waiting for elective surgery.

The focus on patients needing urgent elective surgery did see a slight reduction in the median waiting times for urgent patients and a slight increase in the waiting times for semi-urgent and non-urgent. The 2019-20 budget has continued our investment in elective surgery, with a target of 14,250 surgeries to be performed in 2019-20. Those investments include two new theatres being commissioned at Calvary and an expansion of Calvary's urology service to meet growing demand, with four staff,

territory-wide planning to ensure the most efficient and effective use of services across the system, and working with New South Wales—although that is not in the budget—to better integrate services across the region to ensure patients can get the care they need as close to home as possible.

Another very good news story from the quarterly performance report is the performance of our nurse-led walk-in centres, which have proven to be extremely popular with Canberrans and which we know, of course, the Canberra Liberals oppose. Presentations were up eight per cent to 16,900 for the quarter, and that is 39 per cent more than for the same quarter last year. That can be partially attributed to the Gungahlin walk-in centre opening in September 2018, but we also saw increases in presentations in Belconnen and Tuggeranong. We have new walk-in centres opening in Weston Creek by the end of 2019 and in the inner north in late 2020. This is reflecting what we are hearing from Canberrans—that they want to receive care in a timely way, close to home, and they are embracing the nurse-led walk-in centres.

Of course, the report does contain data about emergency, which is not where we would want it to be. Emergency waiting times are not where we would want them to be. I was very clear about that in talking with the media about the report on Friday. But I do think it is important to recognise that, as I said yesterday in question time, comparing the performance of ACT health services to whole jurisdiction performance of other states and territories is not an apples with apples comparison, because our system does not just treat ACT residents; it treats the sickest people from the surrounding region.

Canberra Hospital has one of the busiest emergency departments in the country, and its actual peers are all facing the same challenges, with more and sicker patients. As I mentioned yesterday in question time, the data from 2018-19 demonstrates this. During 2018-19 there was an approximately eight per cent increase in resuscitation category patients, a more than nine per cent increase in emergency category patients, a four per cent increase in urgent category patients, which is the largest cohort of patients arriving at emergency departments, and an actual reduction in semi-urgent and non-urgent patients.

The 10 per cent reduction in non-urgent patients potentially speaks to the fact that Canberrans are understanding that they have the alternative of a nurse-led walk-in centre. Part of the strategy in managing emergency department demand that Canberra Health Services has employed is to remind Canberrans to only come to emergency when it is an emergency and that there are other alternative options available.

Mrs Dunne touched on the fact that we talk, in relation to emergency department performance, about the flu season coming early, and it is undeniable that the flu season did come early this year. Presentations across the system for emergency were up three per cent from the previous quarter, to more than 38,000 for the quarter.

Mrs Dunne is not correct to imply that nothing was done about this prior to 11 July. A number of measures to support seasonal demand were indeed implemented prior to 11 July. These included the introduction of strategies to improve discharge planning, removing barriers to discharge, including access to pathology rapid testing to enable

early diagnosis of influenza, and commencement of additional recruitment to address seasonal demand. A targeted external communication strategy also commenced in June to promote the utilisation of walk-in centres and to help Canberrans understand the difference between a cold and flu.

As Mrs Dunne mentioned, 16 winter beds at Canberra Hospital opened on 11 July, and 12 additional beds were progressively opened at the University of Canberra Hospital in the period since June, to provide additional capacity across the system. That goes to the point that Mrs Dunne referred to in quoting the AMA, noting that it is in fact a whole hospital capacity issue in terms of how patients flow through emergency departments.

The all-care discharge unit was also established as a separate unit with a broader model of care than the current discharge lounge, enabling non-ambulant patients to access the discharge lounge. It is an important element of the timely care strategy that is being implemented across Canberra Health Services and Canberra Hospital to improve patient flow and ensure that valuable hospital beds are being used as efficiently as possible.

The timely care strategy, which Mrs Dunne will get around to being briefed on in October, I understand, after I offered a briefing in my first sitting week as minister, contains a number of initiatives, including expansion of the daily multidisciplinary team, ward huddles in more ward areas, the introduction of referral pathways for simple fractures and minor plastic surgery injuries in the emergency department, increasing CHS awareness of the services provided by hospital in the home to facilitate early discharge and treatment of patients, and amending CHS policies which potentially delay patient care and extend the length of stay in hospital, and other matters.

Mrs Dunne talked about whether or not it is possible to bring forward responses when a flu season starts earlier than it has in the last 10 years. I do need to make the point that the commencement of both the additional beds at Canberra Hospital and the all-care discharge unit were aligned to the completion of critical infrastructure works across the campus. The opening of new beds and services in a large and complex organisation like Canberra Hospital requires considerable planning.

Work to develop the 2019 winter management plan commenced in early 2019, but opening new beds requires both staff and physical facilities, and it is important to recognise that staff in hospitals work on rosters which need to be planned in advance; and, similarly, infrastructure works in a hospital need to be carefully planned and implemented. It does take time to open new beds and it does take planning to open new beds. I want to commend Canberra Health Services on the way that it has managed this very demanding winter season. In fact, performance has actually been quite stable between the previous quarter and the last quarter, in an environment of significantly increased demand pressure.

Turning to the question of investment, my amendment to the motion notes that the ACT government has already made considerable investments in health infrastructure and will continue to do so. We have demonstrated record levels of investment in

ACT public health services in recent years. Adding it all up, the government has invested more than \$1 billion in health infrastructure in the last decade. This has seen investment at Canberra Hospital, Calvary hospital and in the community, and has included new fit-for-purpose facilities as well as significant upgrades to existing assets.

At Canberra Hospital this has included the construction of the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children, the adult acute mental health facility, Dhulwa secure mental health facility—which is not at Canberra Hospital; it should be Canberra Health Services—the construction and opening of the University of Canberra Hospital, a new Canberra region cancer centre, and the expansion of Canberra Hospital emergency department.

In addition, there is ongoing investment in new and upgraded community health centres in Belconnen, Tuggeranong and Gungahlin. In recent years, as I have mentioned, we have also added to our network of walk-in centres, with new centres in Gungahlin, Weston Creek and the inner north last year, this year and next year. We are delivering on our commitment to a new health facility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans, with \$12 million in funding being provided to Winnunga to deliver that. I was very pleased to be at the ground-breaking on that.

We have also invested in Calvary Public Hospital, with new ICU and coronary care units; ongoing investment to expand the emergency department which will deliver a 20 per cent increase in emergency places by next winter; and, with SPIRE, we will deliver a more than 50 per cent increase in the total number of emergency department places across the system within five years. That is an enormous expansion in emergency capacity.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong—Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability, Minister for Corrections and Justice Health, Minister for Justice, Consumer Affairs and Road Safety and Minister for Mental Health) (11.48): I begin by acknowledging the outstanding work of our Canberra Health Services staff and the high quality service they provide to the Canberra community. We often make that reflection, but it is worth stating again because they work tirelessly in extremely pressured environments to provide the health services Canberrans need. The Greens, with Labor, are committed to ongoing investment and upgrades so that we can continue to deliver on the government's health priorities and support staff in delivering services.

I intend to outline the investments we are making in mental health services in particular which are part of the overall strategy for improvement of and upgrade to Canberra Health Services. As Mrs Dunne has raised in her motion, wait times at the Canberra Hospital are often longer than four hours. This is an area about which I am in consistent conversation with the CEO of Canberra Health Services to see where we can improve the flow of patients presenting for mental health concerns in particular and to identify how they can most appropriately be assessed and then placed for care if needed. Oftentimes the adult mental health unit is not the most appropriate place for people with mental health concerns, and the assessment team at the hospital will establish what care will be most suited to the individual.

To improve the this flow of patients in our system, a patient flow coordinator role has been created to provide increased visibility of bed capacity across the system, including Calvary Hospital, and to support a proactive approach to increasing the movement of patients when it is suitable for them. This includes twice-daily bed capacity reporting, including all in-patient units, and identification of patients suitable to be cared for in other settings. This enables the creation of capacity for high dependency unit beds in particular.

I need to be very careful in making these comments, but I make the observation that an inpatient environment is not always the best outcome for somebody with mental health concerns. The consistent advice we receive from health experts is that being at home, with services coming to patients, can be far more effective. I put that rider on the table in the context of ensuring that we have the right number of beds and the right number of facilities. Simply creating more inpatient beds is not the right answer in the mental health space. That is not to say that we do not need to increase capacity at points in the system, but I bring that nuance to the conversation in reflecting on how we provide mental health services.

We have also placed a dedicated full-time, Monday-to-Friday business hours consultant psychiatrist in the emergency department to enable timely assessment and planning for people presenting with mental health concerns. This will enable better relationships with the other ED consultants and ensure that dedicated analysis is being provided for patients presenting to ED in that state.

There is increased funding in the 2019-20 budget to increase the mental health consultation liaison service to expand hours and increase ability to cover ED as well as the general wards. A four-bed pod within ward 7B at Canberra Hospital has been created for mental health patients and has created capacity for flow of patients. This is a medical ward which often accommodates patients with physical health conditions and concurrent mental illness. These physical problems are often associated with their mental illness; for example, suicide attempts or eating disorders. The ward is risk assessed and additional staff are put on shift to accommodate and care for the mental health patients in the ward.

In order to streamline processes which impact both emergency services and the ED, regular cross-directorate meetings between the Justice and Community Safety Directorate, including Emergency Services and Canberra Health Services, have been established to deal with issues immediately they arise so that we ensure that what might traditionally be described as the silo approach does not present a barrier to the best possible treatment approaches and that we are streamlining our systems to maximise effectiveness for our patients.

As I have previously mentioned in this chamber, Canberra Health Services and Emergency Services will work together to establish the PACER model in the ACT. PACER is intended to deliver patient-centred, in situ safe care, assessment and treatment in an attempt to minimise hospital emergency department presentations and demand on acute services as well as the prospect of people ending up in the custodial environment because of a mental health episode.

Police will provide community safety in a time of crisis, paramedics will conduct a physical health assessment and screening, and mental health clinicians will also be present to provide a comprehensive mental health assessment. This is about bringing a three-service approach and providing a better response when a crisis call is made for somebody in the community.

Again I put the view that ending up in the emergency department is not necessarily the best outcome for somebody in these circumstances. In fact, being in an environment perhaps supported by family and friends within reach of mental health services may well be a better option. We see this as an outcome that will reduce pressure on the ED but also get better outcomes for the people who need our help at a time of considerable crisis.

Mental health, justice health, and alcohol and drug services also have a number of teams that provide interventions with a focus on diverting admission whenever safe and appropriate. That comes back to that point I was making. Some of these include the home assessment and acute response team, or HAART, a highly mobile and intensive service focused on providing brief interventions in a person's home or other community environment when a person is experiencing acute exacerbation of a mental illness, a disorder or a severe psychological or emotional distress situation.

The acute response component of this team provides a rapid mental health response to referrals provided by the access team. The intensive home treatment component of HAART provides continued acute response for up to two weeks and is focused on avoiding admissions wherever safe and appropriate to do so.

As the Minister for Health has addressed in her amendment to the motion, the government last year established the rehabilitation facility at the University of Canberra Hospital. The adult mental health rehabilitation unit, or AMHRU, is a 20-bed unit. It has played a critical role in managing patient flow and enables patients with barriers to discharge to be cared for in a less restrictive environment than the adult mental health unit, with access to day programs regardless of whether they meet the criteria for rehabilitation.

This year's budget has allocated funding to a number of projects that will add to and improve the infrastructure and overall capacity of Canberra Health Services for the purpose of responding to Canberrans' health issues when needed. The mental health budget provided additional beds to the adult mental health unit. Suitable mental health patients will have access at the Canberra Hospital to electroconvulsive therapy, which has significant capacity to change lives. The SPIRE project will deliver a 10-bed short-stay mental health unit.

These recent investments will make an impact right across the system. There is no single solution to the pressures that Canberra Health Services faces, but a series of steps along the lines I have been outlining today will improve outcomes for patients across the spectrum, particularly as I am outlining with a mental health focus.

A key area of focus for me as the Minister for Mental Health is to ensure that we are planning for the future of acute to subacute mental health units and services to manage capacity, reduce ED presentations and ensure that Canberrans have the care they need at the right place and at the right time.

In terms of the concern raised regarding the early flu season we experienced, having the flu or any other physical health concern is not a barrier to accessing mental health services at the emergency department or in the community. At the emergency department people are medically cleared for their physical health before seeing a mental health clinician if required. If a person is admitted for a physical health concern, the mental health consultation liaison team can see people on the non-mental health wards and a nursing special can be organised if required. If someone admitted to the mental health unit is diagnosed with flu, they are managed as per standard infection control procedures.

In relation to Calvary hospital and its mental health facilities, its services complement and supplement those of the Canberra Hospital. Our public hospitals join together with our community health centres, primary health network and a range of other health facilities and private practitioners to make up a whole health system in the territory. I am pleased at the level of coordination occurring across our different health providers in the ACT.

Calvary offers inpatient mental health services for adults and older persons presenting with acute mental health issues. These services include assessment and treatment for a range of mental health issues on a short-term basis. Patients are generally admitted to the adult mental health unit, ward 2N, after presenting at the emergency department at Calvary hospital or they can be sent to Canberra Hospital if the diagnosis points to that need.

The older persons mental health inpatient unit provides care and treatment to older people experiencing mental illness. Patients admitted to the unit are generally aged 65 and over and are experiencing psychiatric, emotional or behavioural disturbance. The ward adjacent to Calvary's older persons mental health unit was vacated following the relocation of the aged-care and rehabilitation service to the University of Canberra Hospital. This has presented an opportunity to collocate the adult mental health unit and the older persons mental health unit, providing a cohesive mental health hub at Calvary. This has benefits for both patients and staff, as it will improve the functionality and flows across the two inpatient units. It also means the facilities can be upgraded with minimal disruption to service delivery, as the ward will be relocated following the completion of the works.

The upgrades will provide an updated adult mental health unit with improved ward layouts, allowing for increased security and visibility of patients and an outdoor area. Overall these works will support the delivery of enhanced treatment and care, as well as the health and wellbeing of our patients. The works are well underway and are expected to be completed by the end of this year.

In addition, an expansion of the emergency department at Calvary is due to be completed by around March 2020. It will deliver additional treatment spaces, improved access and triage arrangements, enhanced waiting areas and an expanded short-stay unit. This year's budget has also provided the necessary funding to staff the expansion once it is complete. This investment will enhance access to care for people on the north side of Canberra and contribute to the improvement of waiting times.

Further, a territory-wide mental health management committee has been established to design and guide the implementation of a robust territory-wide governance framework to assess, review and manage the capacity of all public mental health services through Canberra's health system. This committee includes representation from Canberra Health Services, Calvary Health Services, and the ACT Health Directorate, in addition to the office of the Chief Psychiatrist and the office for mental health and wellbeing.

Each of these stakeholders is working together to prioritise actions for service development and the implementation of strategies to improve models of care and capacity within ACT mental health services. The committee is developing a program of work aimed at addressing more immediate demand and access issues. As part of the program of work, consideration is being given to strategies to address demand in the ED and mental health inpatient units in addition to the steps that I have already outlined. The program of work also includes measures to improve the integration of mental health services across the territory and addresses some of the legislative and regulatory barriers to access and drivers of demand.

In addition to the committee, the ACT Health Directorate is currently developing a territory-wide health services plan, which of course has been spoken about in this place before. The service plan will provide a system-wide review of priorities for health service development and redesign in the ACT. The service plan is based on a comprehensive assessment of health service needs across the care continuum on a geographic basis and for priority population groups.

Work undertaken on the service plan is also being used to inform the development of a mental health service plan that will establish the medium to longer term strategies and service requirements to meet the needs of our population. The plan will have a focus on early intervention, care in the community and strategies to limit growth in demand for inpatient beds.

The work I have described that is being undertaken through our health system can provide an assurance to the ACT community that the Minister for Health, our directorate officials and I are working closely together to ensure that we are increasing the capacity of our health services by tackling current demand but also planning for the future.

We need to have that immediate short-term focus to identify areas that are not performing as well as they could and find solutions to them, but we also must be thinking ahead for the long-term needs of our growing population and, certainly in the mental health space, the increasing levels of demand that we are seeing.

I will be supporting, on behalf of the Greens, Minister Stephen-Smith's amendment. It provides additional information but has retained the calls from Mrs Dunne. The update the minister will provide to the Assembly by the last sitting day of this year will be an opportunity for all of us to hear about matters in which we all share a deep interest. We will be supporting Minister Stephen-Smith's amendment today.

Debate interrupted in accordance with standing order 74 and the resumption of the debate made an order of the day for a later hour.

Sitting suspended from 12.03 to 2.00 pm.

Questions without notice Canberra Health Services—deficit

MR COE: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, your incoming minister's brief provides commentary on the operating result for Canberra Health Services, including for 2018-19. Minister, why was the deficit for Canberra Health Services, as projected, going to be much worse than expected?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Coe for the question. As we have talked about many times in this place, there has been significant demand placed on Canberra Health Services over the past year.

MR COE: Minister, what was the final financial operating result for Canberra Health Services in 2018-19 and, again, why was this deficit worse than expected?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The annual report will be, of course, released shortly and budget papers are available to the Leader of the Opposition. All these figures are public in relation to those matters and, as the Leader of the Opposition has identified, they have access to the documents they received under FOI. They have the same information I had in my incoming minister's brief in relation to that matter. I am awaiting the final annual reports from my directorate and Canberra Health Services.

MS LAWDER: Minister, was the final result worse than expected, and if so, why?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Lawder for the question, but I think Mr Coe, in his first question, pointed out that the incoming minister's brief said that the final result was expected to be worse than had originally been anticipated. As I have just said, I am awaiting the final annual report.

Justice—age of criminal responsibility

MS LE COUTEUR: My question is to the Attorney-General. It relates to the age of criminal responsibility. Minister, when are you, or are you, planning to lift the age of criminal responsibility so that the Canberra community can be assured that we will not be locking up young people unnecessarily? What processes do you need to undertake to make this important policy change?

MR RAMSAY: The matter of the age of criminal responsibility is currently subject to conversations across the various jurisdictions as part of the Council of Attorneys-General. On 23 November last year the Council of Attorneys-General agreed to establish a working group to look at this matter and to report back within 12 months. My Justice and Community Safety Directorate is working with officials from across Australia on this matter and I anticipate that there will be a report back to the Council of Attorneys-General at the November meeting this year. At that stage I will consider the information that has come through that work.

MS LE COUTEUR: Attorney, does the ACT have a policy on what is the most appropriate age, and would the ACT be prepared to go it alone if COAG takes as long on this as it has on so many other things?

Mrs Dunne: A point of order, Madam Speaker. I seek your ruling on whether this is a request for an announcement of government policy.

MADAM SPEAKER: I do not think it is a request, but I caution the attorney not to seek to make an announcement of government policy.

MR RAMSAY: My comment is that I do not believe that 12 months of consideration on this as part of the work of the Council of Attorneys-General is an excessive time. We will be considering the matter when the report comes in. I do not believe it is appropriate for us to pre-empt what may or may not be in that report to the CAG meeting in November this year.

ACT Health—deficit

MISS C BURCH: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, again referring to commentary in your incoming ministerial brief, why was the deficit for the ACT Health Directorate worse than expected?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Again, I refer members of the opposition to the fact that annual reports have not yet been finalised. So I am awaiting the final versions of the annual reports from both the ACT Health Directorate and Canberra Health Services. I will have more to say in relation to the financial outcomes on receipt of those documents.

MISS C BURCH: Minister, what was the final financial operating result for the ACT Health Directorate in 2018-19?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Miss Burch for the supplementary but again indicate, as I have previously, that I am awaiting the final annual report from the Health Directorate.

MR COE: Minister, have you seen the end-of-year financial report? If not, what have you been doing for a couple of months? If so, what was the final financial operating result?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: The annual report for the ACT Health Directorate is in the final stages of finalisation. I understand that a draft was received in my office last week but I was advised by the Director-General of the Health Directorate that it needed some work. I have not yet looked at the final version of the annual report. In the due process of government, budgets are released and annual reports are released, and this information is made public.

Mr Coe: On a point of order, my question was specifically about the end-of-year financials. It was not about the annual report, which is a different document. I ask that she be directly relevant.

MADAM SPEAKER: I think she has made reference to both the financial end of year and also the annual reporting period. Nothing else to add?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I have nothing to add.

Canberra Health Services—Ronald McDonald House

MRS DUNNE: My question is to the Minister for Health. In your incoming minister's brief on the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children upgrade, it states, "Delivery of the additional post-natal ward in the CHWC is dependent on the decant and relocation of Ronald McDonald House." What discussions have been held with Ronald McDonald House Charities ACT about plans to decant and relocate Ronald McDonald House?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: There have been discussions with Ronald McDonald House, as is indicated in the incoming minister's brief. I will take on notice whether those discussions are ongoing or have been finalised. That is a matter that, clearly, as the incoming minister's brief said, needs to be finalised. But that work is underway. I will come back with further information.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, what is the timetable for the decanting and relocation of Ronald McDonald House?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I will come back to the Assembly with detailed information in relation to that issue, but my understanding—I certainly have not been advised to the contrary—is that the time frames for the expansion of the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children are on track. I have not been advised that there are delays in terms of those time frames. This is a significant investment in the expansion of the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children that will deliver new maternity spaces, new paediatric spaces and the delivery of the adolescent mental health unit.

MS LAWDER: Minister, has a site been identified for the relocation of Ronald McDonald House, or is there any further information you can provide about the Ronald McDonald House relocation at this time?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I understand that a site has been identified for the relocation, but obviously it would be inappropriate for me to talk about that in this place while

those conversations with Ronald McDonald House are still ongoing and that has not been finalised.

Mrs Dunne: Well, you don't know whether those conversations are ongoing.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: If it has been finalised obviously I will come back with further information.

Government—spring events calendar

MS CHEYNE: My question is to the Minister for Arts, Creative Industries and Cultural Events. Minister, with the start of spring and the festival season upon us, can you outline how the ACT government is committed to funding vibrant events for the community to enjoy?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Ms Cheyne for the question. Indeed it is the start of spring, although with a flurry of snow. We are pleased to have not only the range of events that are happening at the moment but also a year-long calendar of signature government-run events and a vast array of community-run events funded through the ACT event fund.

Of course, most Canberrans would be familiar with our major spring and autumn festivals, Floriade and Enlighten. But they are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to a landscape of a vast number of government funded events celebrating arts and sport, promoting multiculturalism and diversity and showcasing local food, wine and beer.

The ACT government supports local and community events through the ACT event fund. That provides grants for non-government-run festivals and other events through a peer reviewed application process. In 2019, the event fund is supporting 22 events to the tune of nearly half a million dollars. This includes a mix of new as well as pre-existing festivals and events across a number of areas, including sport, entertainment, food and culture.

I can advise the Assembly that the 2020 ACT event fund applications are in and that there was, as always, very strong interest. The assessment phase for the 2020 round is now underway. We have also introduced sector development workshops to assist local event organisers with skills in running large events. These have been very well received. Building capacity in our events sector will continue to grow the scale, the number and the diversity of festivals and events for everyone in the Canberra community both to enjoy and to be a part of.

MS CHEYNE: Minister, can you please advise the Assembly of the many events that the ACT government provides for the enjoyment of our community?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Ms Cheyne for the supplementary question. We know that events bring people together; create vibrancy; build community; attract tourists from both near and far; showcase local talent, products and organisations; celebrate culture and diversity; and generate significant economic benefit to the capital.

As members would well know, in addition to our signature events, Floriade and Enlighten, the ACT government provides a large number of other community celebrations. This year, for the first time, we are taking Floriade to the suburbs, with pop-up floral displays, public art, food and drink vendors, and entertainment in five suburban locations. This year we also have the return of the popular Windows to the World program that intersects with Floriade.

EventsACT and the City Renewal Authority are hard at work on preparations for both Christmas and New Year's Eve celebrations for 2019 which will have a new and exciting approach this festive season. EventsACT also provides Australia Day activities and a landmark Reconciliation Day event.

Canberra Day celebrations in March 2020 will include the Canberra Balloon Spectacular and an absolute favourite of mine, the CSO's Symphony in the Park, which next year will feature the Australian Fleetwood Mac experience.

The next event for the community to enjoy will be the Canberra Nara candle festival on 26 October, which will include Japanese food and cultural activities such as calligraphy, origami, lantern making, martial arts demonstrations and entertainment.

There is so much to get out and do, see, taste and experience. I encourage all Canberrans to make the most of the many events that our great city has to offer.

MR GUPTA: Minister, can you list for the Assembly some of the many fantastic community-run and other events the ACT is investing in for the benefit of the Canberra community?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Mr Gupta for the supplementary question. In addition to the great events the ACT government runs through Events ACT the 2019 event fund is supporting a number of fantastic community-run events: the Canberra highland gathering, the Truffle Festival, the Canberra Triathlon event, GAMMAcon, the Stronger than Fiction Documentary Film Festival, the Out and Loud LGBTIQ choral festival, the Australian Running Festival, the Canberra International Music Festival, the Canberra Comedy Festival, the National Folk Festival, Forage, Skyfire, SouthFest and the AIDS Action Council fair day to name just a few of the many.

The ACT events fund is not the only that way we support great events for the Canberra community. The ACT government also supports Art Not Apart, SpringOUT, the Writers Festival and the Design Canberra Festival. I am pleased to note the BOLD dance festival was also funded this year through arts activity funding. Of course, we have the enormously popular National Multicultural Festival and a host of other fantastic multicultural community events that are funded under Minister Steel's portfolio.

There is so much on in Canberra and something for everyone. As, hopefully, we move beyond the snow to the finer, warmer spring weather, I encourage people to get out and enjoy this beautiful, vibrant city we are all fortunate enough to call home.

Canberra Hospital—switchboard

MS LAWDER: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, why has the cost of replacing the electrical switchboards in buildings 2 and 12 of the Canberra Hospital blown out from the original \$14 million estimate?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Lawder for the question. Obviously, this is a complicated infrastructure project, as part of the UMAHA program. With respect to looking at old infrastructure like those hospital switchboards—of course, we are all aware that there was a fire in the switchboard, and that may have complicated matters—and at replacing infrastructure, you do an initial assessment of what it might cost, but it costs what it costs.

MS LAWDER: Minister, what is the estimated or expected final cost of the electrical switchboards project?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Obviously I was unable to predict exactly which papers in my incoming minister's brief members of the opposition would have with them. They may have the information from the incoming minister's brief on that matter. I do not have it in front of me. I will take that question on notice.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, how has the scope of the work on the switchboards in buildings 2 and 12 changed over the period of the contract to justify such an exorbitant blow-out to, for your information, \$50.9 million? I do not have that written down but I do remember it.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: It is quite easy to remember something that you wrote just a few minutes ago. I have thousands of pages of briefing and tend to focus on what we are actually doing moving forward to continue to improve the excellent services that Canberra Health Services provide to Canberrans.

As Mrs Dunne has mentioned, the allocation of capital funding for the building 2 and building 12 electrical mains switchboard replacement project within the UMAHA program is \$50.9 million. Through the development of the EMSB project, the scope and associated costs have evolved to reflect the realities of this complex project and its impact on critical buildings across the Canberra Hospital campus. The work is being completed in stages. Stage 1 works in building 2, physical installation of the boards, is complete.

Mrs Dunne: On a point of order, my question specifically, minister, was: how has the scope of work changed? I ask you, Madam Speaker, to ask the minister to be directly relevant to the question.

MADAM SPEAKER: She is speaking on the matter of the change in the costs, and she has a minute to go.

Mrs Dunne: I am sorry, the question was not about the change in costs. It was about how the scope of work had changed.

MADAM SPEAKER: I am aware of your question, Mrs Dunne, and I believe she is on the scope of the work and the cost. Minister, you have got time left.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: As I was saying, stage 1 works in building 2 involve the physical installation of boards, and that is complete, with the boards active since August 2019. Completion of building works is ongoing and subject to clinical operational constraints.

The staged works in building 12 are scheduled for completion in December 2019, subject to clinical operational constraints, with additional minor ancillary works. This work is staged so that power is maintained to critical clinical functions at all times, and the staging reflects the methodology adopted to manage the significant challenges in working, as I said, with ageing infrastructure where it is not possible to quantify—*(Time expired.)*

Health—elective surgery

MRS JONES: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, in 2017-18 the number of people waiting longer than clinically recommended for elective surgery was 410. In the last financial year 699 people waited longer than clinically recommended for elective surgery. Minister, why has the number of people waiting longer than clinically recommended for elective surgery blown out?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Of course, in the last quarter there was an 18 per cent increase in elective surgeries completed compared to the previous quarter, and last year the health services across the ACT exceeded their target of 14,000 elective surgeries for 2018-19, which was a record for the ACT. What Mrs Jones has neglected to mention—

Mrs Jones: A point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: Resume your seat, please, minister.

Mrs Jones: The point of order is on relevance. The minister was asked why there was a blowout in the numbers, not what great work her department had done.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, Mrs Jones. The minister does have over a minute left. To that point in the time you have left, minister.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I was looking up the data from the quarterly report because I thought Mrs Jones's question was incorrect. Indeed at the end of June 2019 there were 635 people who were overdue patients waiting for elective surgery, not 699. Of course, this reflected a reduction of nine per cent in the number of overdue patients—

Mrs Jones: A point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: Resume your seat, minister. Mrs Jones, on a point of order.

Mrs Jones: There is a lot of debate about me in this answer, but I am wondering why the numbers have blown out.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. To that point, minister, in the time you have left.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I was just trying to point out that over the previous quarter the numbers have actually reduced. Sorry, I thought you were standing again, Mrs Jones, and making another point of order. Our health services performed more elective surgeries in 2018-19 than were targeted. Obviously, demand also increased.

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms Berry: Madam Speaker, a point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: A point of order.

Ms Berry: Madam Speaker, the Minister for Health is doing her very best to respond.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Wall and Mrs Dunne, you were very close to being warned yesterday. There have been a significant number of interjections while the minister was on her feet. I would ask you to stop. Is there anything else?

Ms Berry: That was my point, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you, Ms Berry. I call Mrs Jones.

MRS JONES: Minister, why has the government strategy for reducing elective surgery waiting times overall failed to reduce elective surgery waiting times?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: As I have just mentioned, in the last quarter there was in fact a reduction in the number of people who were waiting who were clinically overdue. That is a result of a significant amount of work that is going on across the Health Directorate and within Canberra Health Services to ensure that people who are on the waiting list are the people who need to be there to ensure that people are getting the care they need as close to home as possible.

In 2018-19, our hospitals achieved the recommended 30-day treatment time for 96 per cent of the most critical category 1 patients. This was also an improvement over the year before. Treatment timeliness has improved for category 2 and 3 patients as well. But, of course, elective surgery waiting lists and demand continue to increase quite significantly. We have faced growth in elective and emergency surgery across ACT hospitals of around three per cent per year since 2013-14

This growth includes the demand from our surrounding regions. As I have mentioned before, ACT hospitals treat not only ACT residents but also the sickest people from around our surrounding regions, which means that our elective surgery waiting lists quite often contain complex patients with high needs.

MRS DUNNE: Minister, what was so different about the last quarter that brought about a result which you are so proud to talk about, even though there are still well over 600 people waiting longer than recommended for surgery?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mrs Dunne for the supplementary because I am very pleased to talk about the work that Canberra Health Services and the Health Directorate have been doing, including continuing to work with hospitals and the surrounding New South Wales local health districts to develop and implement improved strategies to ensure that the people on the waiting list are getting the treatment that they need as close to home as possible. This includes active management of the waitlist with the territory service providers and working with clinicians to renew the focus on treating patients in turn whenever clinically possible.

Of course, we do have significant investments in infrastructure to continue to address meeting our increased target for elective surgeries in 2019-20. We have an increased target of 14,250 elective surgeries to be completed in 2019-20. Services will be expanded, including two new theatres at Calvary Public Hospital, Bruce as well as staff to support those theatres—one in 2019-20 and another in 2020-21—as well as expanded urology services and staffing to meet the growing demand for urology surgery in the ACT. So there are multiple strategies in place. If Mrs Dunne would like a further briefing on all of those strategies, of course she is more than welcome to have one.

Emergency services—preparedness

MR GUPTA: My question is to the Minister for Environment and Heritage. How is the government using emerging technology to help in preparing for natural disasters and emergencies?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Gupta for his question and his interest in the safety of all Canberrans. I am proud of the staff we have across the Emergency Services Agency and the parks and conservation service. As we approach this year's bushfire season my message to them is that the government is supporting you and the volunteers that help during bushfire emergencies and other natural disasters. We have the best experts within these agencies, and I will stand up for them. They are innovative and world leaders when it comes to helping prepare for and respond to emergencies.

At the recent Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council conference in Melbourne two staff from parks and conservation were recognised with prestigious awards. Brian Levine was awarded the excellence in prescribed burning award for his implementation of an integrated intelligence system to improve prescribed burnings. Brian's work delivers exceptional fire management strategies. His knowledge and expertise are sought around the world and we are incredibly fortunate to have him working in our public service in the ACT.

Adam Leavesley was awarded for outstanding achievement in research utilisation. In consultation with ANU researchers he has led the development of sophisticated fuel mapping using satellite-based technology to manage and implement controlled burns

and also improve fire behaviour predictions. These tools have been adopted nationally and in the current work of the Emergency Services Agency and EPSDD in the ACT. I have seen firsthand the work of Brian and Adam, which was instrumental in last year's bushfire season and helped improve responses to fires that occurred.

MR GUPTA: Minister, why are emergency management and preparation so important in the ACT?

MR GENTLEMAN: We are the bush capital. It is important both to protect our environment and to mitigate the risk of bushfires. This is what this government has been doing. The advice I have from the Bushfire Council and the Commissioner for Emergency Services is that our city has never been better prepared. We are prepared because we listen to the experts. We take their advice and back their judgement. This is what an experienced government does.

I spoke about AFAC before. Attending this year's conference, one of the things that was clear is the high regard that is held across the country for both the ESA and the parks and conservation service. We have some of the best emergency management practitioners in the nation. Between ESA and PCS, we have two very nimble and innovate agencies that make every effort to keep our city safe. I am proud to be able to support them and serve in a government that is providing funding to help with their preparedness and response.

Madam Speaker, these agencies need an experienced government. The last thing this city needs is a shadow minister for reckless indifference being in charge, an inexperienced shadow minister who is on the record as saying that dry conditions should not be a deterrent to undertaking prescribed burns. It is familiar playbook. It is one that says that they will decide when and how burns should occur, one that attacks and undermines our hardworking public servants.

MS CODY: Minister, what steps is the government taking to prepare for the upcoming bushfire season?

MR GENTLEMAN: Climate change of course is having an impact on our environment. This is the clear advice from our scientists and experts. A changing climate also impacts our ability to prepare and respond to bushfires; just look at what is occurring in New South Wales and Queensland. As a former Commissioner of Fire and Rescue NSW wrote last week:

Fires are burning in places where they never used to burn; places that are not adapted to fire and which therefore cannot easily recover.

He also wrote that the inaction of the Morrison and Abbott governments is costing all of us a great deal. He went on to write that it is time for genuine policies on climate change and protection of our unique environment.

This government is acting; we are working to protect our bush capital from bushfires and taking climate change very seriously. We have committed to climate action, something that Canberrans want. The climate change strategy released by the Chief

Minister and the Minister for Climate Change and Sustainability builds on our city's leadership.

Inexperience means burying your head in the sand like the Leader of the Opposition. Experience means being able to tackle difficult issues like climate change while being able to prepare and respond to the threat of bushfires. Experience means investing in our experts and our agencies. Amongst the many things in this year's budget was \$2.2 million for helicopter services to enhance the early detection and suppression of bushfires in remote locations across the ACT and surrounding regions. Inexperience means voting against these investments.

Sport—controlled sports

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. Minister, output 3.3 of the 2019-20 budget has an expense item for controlled sports that shows that the net expense of these new regulations is expected to be \$184,000 over four years whereas associated revenue is forecast at \$422,000. Minister, what will the government be spending the additional \$238,000 on, and will it be reinvested in combat sports?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Milligan for the question. I will have to come back with some detail on the process involved when combat sports regulations are changed. Mr Milligan has been briefed significantly on changes to the combat sports legislation and how that program will be rolled out.

With regard to the costs and returns to government, I expect that there will be more to say about that, but it is not designed to be a revenue measure at all for the ACT government, rather to ensure that combat sport remains accessible and safe for everybody.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, what modelling was used to show the revenue peaking in 2022-23 at \$183,000?

MS BERRY: I will take that question on notice.

MISS C BURCH: Minister, what is the cost of outsourcing the inspectorate function to Sport and Recreation Victoria, and why don't you trust ACT public servants to perform this function?

MS BERRY: It is not a matter of trust; it is a matter of expertise within other states and territories, and making sure that we have a system that can actually operate in an efficient way. It would be way more expensive to have an official employed in the ACT to regulate the number of activities that would occur in the ACT. A much better way is to employ the expertise of other states and territories to manage that work.

Clubs—government consultation

MR PARTON: My question is to the minister for regulatory services. On 28 June you tabled the Gaming Machine Amendment Regulation 2019 (No 1). During the drafting of this regulation how many clubs did you consult with?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Mr Parton for his question. There has been extensive consultation with the clubs industry over the past two years on a number of matters. In terms of consultation activity on the gambling harm reduction reforms we have had consultation with each club that has asked for it. In terms of the work around the community contributions scheme there has been specific consultation with each club that has asked. I assure the Assembly that all of the clubs that contact my office—

Mr Parton: Point of order, Madam Speaker, on relevance. The question was specifically, “how many clubs did you consult with?”

MADAM SPEAKER: I think the minister responded that he consulted with those clubs that asked.

Ms Lawder: How many is that?

MADAM SPEAKER: Minister, you may have that information to hand.

MR RAMSAY: I will take on notice the precise number, but I can say that we have engaged with every single club in the ACT over the past three years on a number of matters including the club diversification process, the community contributions scheme and the regulation changes. We have had 54 meetings with different clubs and clubs industry groups, 26 meetings with 14 ClubsACT members and five meetings with ClubsACT itself. During the community contributions scheme review six clubs specifically looked for consultation and we met with each one of those through direct meetings with my officials to provide in-person views on those reforms. I have met directly with, visited and corresponded personally with a large number of clubs across the ACT in a range of areas as well.

MR PARTON: Minister, can you name the clubs that you consulted with in regards to the gaming machine amendment regulation? Can you name even one of them?

MR RAMSAY: Yes.

MR COE: Minister, will you now please name a single club that you have consulted with in regard to the gaming machine amendment regulation, and have you personally consulted with any clubs about this regulation?

MR RAMSAY: It is important for the opposition to be aware of the way that the government works. The government works in a way that consultation can happen either with me or with—

Mr Coe: Point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: Minister, resume your seat.

Mr Coe: The specific question was, “Will you name a club?” and then “Have you personally?” It is all very well to have other background, but it is a very specific question. I ask that he be directly relevant; not relevant but directly relevant.

MADAM SPEAKER: You stood on a point of order within 15 seconds. I will let the minister continue, but go to the points of those questions, please, minister.

MR RAMSAY: I understand that there has been a range of very specific consultations. They have been taken in a number of ways. Some of them have been email conversations; some of them have been personal conversations.

Mr Coe interjecting—

MR RAMSAY: My understanding is that—

Mr Wall: Point of order, Madam Speaker. I ask that, under standing order 118, the minister be concise and directly relevant in his answer. I also draw your attention to standing order 118(b) which states that a minister answering a question shall not debate the subject to which the question refers. The minister's answer has been more a debate about the question as opposed to the very specifics of the question put to him.

Mr Gentleman: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Stop the clock.

Mr Hanson: Are you going to stop the clock?

MADAM SPEAKER: It is my call, but I will at this point.

Mr Gentleman: On the point of order, Madam Speaker, we are 50 seconds into the available time. He was interrupted earlier, before this. The minister should be allowed to provide the answer in the available time.

Mrs Dunne interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Are you quite finished, Mrs Dunne? I am going to start the clock. The minister has been interjected on. He has had a number of interjections in his answer. The question you are asking is simple. I cannot direct him other than to be relevant. I believe he is being relevant to this point. You have 30 seconds, minister.

Mrs Dunne: On the point of order, Madam Speaker, I know that you cannot direct the minister how to answer the question, but you do have the discretion, if he is not answering the question in a directly relevant way, to sit the minister down. You have never exercised that. It might be time that you considered it.

MADAM SPEAKER: I also have been very reluctant to warn for unparliamentary behaviour—continued interjection. If you want me to go down the path of the letter of the law of the standing orders, next time someone interjects, they will be warned. Minister, you have 30 seconds left.

MR RAMSAY: In relation to the particular gaming regulation, my understanding is that one of the clubs that has been linked with that has been Eastlake.

Mr Coe: Point of order. On relevance, the question was also: “Have you personally consulted with any clubs?” He has not been directly relevant to that question.

MADAM SPEAKER: He has not indicated whether he has personally contacted them, but he has referred to a number of ways and methods of that contact.

Clubs—gaming machine regulation

MR HANSON: My question is to the minister for regulatory services. Minister, on 28 June you tabled the Gaming Machine Amendment Regulation 2019. Did you or anyone in your office seek legal advice regarding this regulation prior to tabling this regulation?

MR RAMSAY: It is a matter of legal privilege as to what extent it is appropriate for us to disclose whether legal advice has been sought, and, if so, on the basis of that—

Mr Hanson interjecting—

MR RAMSAY: because there is precedent—

Opposition members interjecting—

Ms Berry: A point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: Resume your seat. Ms Berry.

Ms Berry: Madam Speaker, the point of order is on the interjections continuing from those opposite when we are trying to hear the answer from the Attorney-General.

Ms Lawder: We’d like an answer, too.

MADAM SPEAKER: You are warned, Ms Lawder. I made it very clear that Mrs Dunne’s contribution did not help your side.

MR RAMSAY: Madam Speaker, there is precedent that establishes that if it is indicated that legal advice has been sought, it runs the risk of waiving the legal professional privilege in relation to legal advice. What I can say in a general way is that the government always works on the best basis of legal analysis in terms of the production of its regulations and all legislation.

MR HANSON: Minister, will you table or provide an outline of any legal advice that you received during this process?

MR RAMSAY: No.

MR PARTON: Minister, did you or anyone in your office seek advice from the Human Rights Commission in regard to this regulation?

MR RAMSAY: Again, in relation to the way the government works, it is not necessarily I or my office that works with the Human Rights Commission. That is one of the reasons why in governments we have directorates. Directorates do a lot of the work—

Mr Coe: Point of order, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Resume your seat, minister. Point of order.

Mr Coe: Again, my point of order relates to standing order 118(a) and 118(b). The specific question was: did you or anyone in your office. We are not talking about what is the process for seeking advice. We are simply asking whether he or someone in his office for whom he is directly responsible sought advice from the Human Rights Commission.

MADAM SPEAKER: Minister Ramsay, there is probably a straightforward answer to that if you can provide it.

MR RAMSAY: Indeed, thank you, Madam Speaker. No, I did not and not to my knowledge did anyone in my office seek specific advice in relation to that from the Human Rights Commission. However, I do note that that does not mean in any way that the Human Rights Commission was not consulted or involved in any of the considerations as the government went about its work.

Light rail—stage 2

MS CODY: My question is to the Minister for Transport. Can the minister advise the Assembly on the progress of light rail stage 2 to Woden?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Cody for her question and her interest in making sure that light rail comes down to Woden. Of course, building on the success that we have seen with the Gungahlin to city light rail route, with the project coming in under budget and passenger levels reaching levels that we were not expecting until 2021, we are now getting on with the job of delivering the next stage of our city-wide light rail network, starting with building the north-south spine of the network from Gungahlin to Woden.

The government has recently approved the business case for stage 2A, the extension of light rail from the city to Commonwealth Park, marking the start of negotiations with Canberra Metro to deliver the project. By starting the work on stage 2A now the government is capitalising on the jobs and expertise created through the stage 1 construction phase as we continue to work with the commonwealth government on the necessary approvals for light rail to progress through the parliamentary triangle. With work expected to begin on the Commonwealth Park extension as early as next year, subject to approvals, we will continue with progressing the more complex approvals for stage 2B, linking Commonwealth Park to Woden town centre, delivering light rail to Woden residents as soon as possible.

Stage 2A will add three new stops to the light rail network: city west, city south and Commonwealth Park. To do this, the government will be undertaking a separate but complementary project to raise London Circuit, providing a new gateway for the CBD. The raising of London Circuit will enable better cycling, walking and public transport links between the city and the Acton waterfront.

We are investing in light rail now to deliver the transport network that Canberrans want and help to avoid the congestion problems faced by other cities. We are building on the success and benefits that we have seen with stage 1 of light rail and we are determined to see these benefits extended to other parts of Canberra.

MS CODY: Minister, what are the benefits of extending light rail to Commonwealth Park?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Cody for her supplementary. The ACT government is determined to extend the benefits of light rail to other parts of our city, including Woden. The first stage of the extension of the line from the city to Commonwealth Park is a 1.7 kilometre extension of our light rail line, with three new stops. Because this is an extension to the line, this will provide access for passengers from Dickson to city west, Gungahlin to Commonwealth Park and everywhere in between.

The extension will provide access to residences, businesses, entertainment precincts, the Australian National University and events and attractions. We expect that the city west stop will be one of the busiest and best used on the network, providing access to the ANU as well as the courts precinct, businesses and residential areas in the city west area.

The Commonwealth Park stop offers an exciting opportunity to provide mass transit access to people attending many events at Commonwealth Park and around Lake Burley Griffin, from Floriade through to Spilt Milk. For visitors, it will provide access to our visitor information point at Regatta Point before they explore the rest of our city.

The government will continue to progress stage 2B to extend light rail across the lake to the employment hubs of Barton and Deakin and through to Woden to deliver the benefits that we have seen with stage 1 to the south side.

MS LE COUTEUR: Minister, how long do you expect it will take on the light rail from Woden to the city?

MR STEEL: I thank Ms Le Couteur for her question. While the business case was approved for stage 2A, we need to work with the commonwealth to lock down elements of stage 2B. That process is happening in parallel to the work we are doing on stage 2A, which will start as early as 2020. It is subject to approvals. One of the key elements we have committed to under stage 2A is looking at how we can work with the commonwealth to deliver a wide network. We know the benefits a wide network would provide in terms of reliability, certainty and cost—

Ms Le Couteur: A point of order.

MR STEEL: and also the travel time. That is why—

MADAM SPEAKER: Resume your seat, minister.

Ms Le Couteur: I was asking how long it was going to take for the light rail to get from Woden to Civic, not about the approvals process.

MADAM SPEAKER: Minister, you have a minute left to answer.

MR STEEL: Noting that there is the potential of this becoming a matter of sub judice, I want to be very clear that we have put forward—

Mrs Dunne: We're going to court?

MR STEEL: Well, there is a court matter currently underway in relation to this particular question. We have been very clear in the case that we have approved that we are looking to do a wide network, and the wide network will have an impact on the travel time from the city to Woden and from Gungahlin to Commonwealth Park. That is something we will look to work on with the National Capital Authority and the commonwealth government because it will impact on the cost of the project in stage 2B. It will impact on the reliability and the travel times for 2B, and that is something that we need to work through with those entities. We are hopeful that they will provide approval so we can make sure that the route down to Woden is as fast as possible and delivers the benefits we are seeing with stage 1. *(Time expired.)*

Clubs—community contributions

MRS KIKKERT: My question is to the minister for regulatory services. Minister, under the new guidelines for community contributions, the responsible minister may grant an exemption to a professional sports team and allow contributions to that team to be counted as part of the community contributions scheme. What criteria need to be met to receive an exemption?

MR RAMSAY: That exemption can occur when the relevant minister—at the moment, that is me—

Mr Parton: It is, at the moment.

Mrs Kikkert: At the moment.

MR RAMSAY: I am clarifying for the members of the opposition that this actually sits within the responsibility of the Attorney-General as it is a matter of policy. It is not a matter of asking about it in terms of regulatory services. It is a matter that regularly the opposition does not understand the distinction between. But the exemption can be granted when I am satisfied that the contribution will support participation in community sport, that the team, or the person's viability to participate

in the sport, would be adversely affected without the determination, and also that it is in the public interest that the contribution be made as a community purpose contribution.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, how many applications or approaches have been made for an exemption?

MR RAMSAY: One.

MR PARTON: Minister, is there a cap on how many exemptions may be granted?

MR RAMSAY: No.

Clubs—community contributions

MR WALL: My question is to the minister for regulatory services, or it may be in his capacity as Attorney-General; it depends how he chooses to identify on this one. Minister, on 28 August in the *CityNews* former Chief Minister Jon Stanhope said:

The new arrangements in relation to community contributions also clearly discriminate on the basis of sex.

In light of the concerns in the broader community that these new arrangements discriminate on the basis of sex, will you be reviewing the decision to exclude men's "professional" sport from the community contributions scheme?

MR RAMSAY: For clarification, and for the edification of members opposite, that is actually a matter of policy; therefore it sits with me as Attorney-General. It might be good for the opposition to understand at times the distinction between policy and regulation—that is okay, as they get there, as they understand the way the government works.

There has been a longstanding government policy providing incentives and support to promote women's sport. That existed under the previous form of the community contributions scheme. There is no intention to review the current form that has been enacted and that has been in effect since 1 July.

MR WALL: Minister, why has the government introduced a policy that discriminates on the basis of sex?

MR RAMSAY: We have not.

MS CHEYNE: Minister, how do the changes to the scheme improve it?

MR RAMSAY: I thank Ms Cheyne for the supplementary question. It is an important question when we come to the area of community contributions, noting that there has been significant debate in this place about why it is that the reforms were happening and noting that there had been a report by PWC and there had been a report by the

Auditor-General that noted and found that the previous form of the scheme was not clear enough and that there needed to be some reforms to it.

Those were accepted, in fact accepted in this chamber by both Mr Parton and Mr Milligan who have argued for the reforms and that we needed to make some changes there and yet at the same stage they tended to argue against that. It is not the first time that we would have had the opposition arguing simultaneously both for and against something or other as they develop a Schrodinger's approach to policy development.

What we are doing is making sure that there is increased funding available for community groups. We want to make sure that those matters that have not supported the community strongly enough have been removed. We have incentivised and made it possible for more organisations, more diverse organisations, to be supported so that more funding can go to more places.

I also want to make sure that we clarify very clearly that the government is not saying that it has not introduced regulation, has not changed it, so that community clubs cannot support professional men's sport. What has happened is what has been occurring within the specific element of money that is known as the community contributions scheme. In previous years contributions to organisations have gone beyond the community contributions scheme. That is still possible. That is still able to happen even with the changes that came in on 1 July. *(Time expired.)*

Employment—apprentices and trainees

MR PETTERSSON: My question is to the Minister for Employment and Workplace Safety. Can you update the Assembly on how the government is ensuring secure employment for Canberrans, especially for workers starting in their chosen fields?

MS ORR: I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. The ACT government is committed to ensuring that Canberrans are employed in safe and secure jobs, especially as they start their careers, for example, as apprentices and trainees. We know that our economy and our community depend on the skilled work of apprentices and trainees, including construction tradespeople, hairdressers, mechanics and early childhood educators. That is why this government is providing them with the support and resources they need to enter secure employment and fulfilling careers.

For apprentices and trainees under 25 the recently launched Young Workers Centre can provide them with information and support on their employment and workplace conditions including information on awards and agreements, payslips, penalty rates and national employment standards. This government committed funding to support the delivery of a young workers advice service, and I know that the Young Workers Centre is making a huge difference for young Canberrans, including apprentices and trainees.

Our government is also ensuring secure local jobs right across the territory through the secure local jobs package. As members would be aware, the secure local jobs

package came into effect earlier this year and it is continuing to raise ethical and labour standards across a range of industries in the territory.

Apprentices and trainees working for businesses tendering for construction, cleaning, security or traffic management work are now protected by the code, and through the Secure Local Jobs Code Registrar who will continue to educate and enforce the legal requirements of employers under the code.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, how is the government supporting young women in particular to gain secure employment and develop their careers?

MS ORR: As Minister for Employment and Workplace Safety, I am committed to supporting Canberrans, particularly women, to gain secure employment in their chosen careers. On 29 August, I had the pleasure of attending the 2019 Construction Industry Training Council's graduating apprentice and industry encouragement awards. These awards, supported by the ACT government and industry, acknowledge the hard work of apprentices in the ACT and the valuable role they play in building and construction across our city.

This year's award for outstanding apprentice of the year went to Lauren Baseden. Lauren is an apprentice electrician and has worked extremely hard to gain the skills she needs for her career in her trade. Lauren was also successful in winning the outstanding electrical apprentice award and outstanding woman in a non-traditional trade award. It was fantastic to meet Lauren and the other young women at the awards, who are all excelling in their industries.

As a government, we know the benefits of breaking down barriers in what have traditionally been male-dominated occupations. The ACT government will continue to support women right across Canberra to gain secure employment and develop their careers. Celebrating the achievements of women such as Lauren helps to break down barriers and encourage others.

MS CHEYNE: Minister, what other ways is this government supporting Canberrans to access secure employment?

MS ORR: This government will always support Canberrans to access and gain secure employment. All of us in this government understand how important a safe and secure job is for all Canberrans who can work. As a government, we are delivering the public services that Canberra needs and we can guarantee that, as our city grows, we can employ more people in secure jobs. We will continue to create more job opportunities for Canberrans and ensure that we can continue to deliver essential services right across the territory.

Our government can guarantee Canberrans that our public service will be safe from cuts. We value the work that public servants do every day and we are fundamentally opposed to the federal and ACT Liberals' policies of cutting public servants and outsourcing their work. We will continue to support working people right across the ACT, including apprentices, trainees and public service workers. Canberrans can trust that this government will always value secure employment in this city.

Mr Barr: Madam Speaker, further questions can be placed on the notice paper.

Personal explanation

MRS JONES (Murrumbidgee) (2.58): I seek to make an explanation under standing order 46 about how Minister Gentleman has misrepresented me again. Minister Gentleman today has come out again to misrepresent me on non-quotes about me in the newspapers regarding back-burning, despite this very matter, this very exact quote, having been clarified here in this place before. I seek again to remind him that he is misrepresenting me.

In regard to the non-quote in which the journalist paraphrased me, referring to our need to achieve more than our seven or 24 per cent of back-burning targets that are prescribed burns, to remind the minister, the journalist wrote that when conditions were favourable we should engage the RFS and CFUs to increase our back-burning from not only seven per cent or 24 per cent of our prescribed burns, as has occurred under this minister, and that our dry nature should not stop us doing better than that.

What a low and disgraceful act again by this minister, who perpetually comes in here using a Goebbels-style technique—

MADAM SPEAKER: There is no debate on this. It is just to explain where—

MRS JONES: I ask you to ask him to withdraw that misrepresentation.

MADAM SPEAKER: No, Mrs Jones. You have had an opportunity. You have explained where you have been misrepresented, and I will leave it there.

Supplementary answer to question without notice Canberra Health Services—Ronald McDonald House

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: During question time I was asked a question in relation to Ronald McDonald House Canberra and its requirement to relocate as part of the expansion of the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children. My office has advised that a brief arrived in my office this afternoon, and I can advise the Assembly that CHS has commenced a feasibility study with input from Ronald McDonald House Canberra to confirm the suitability and cost to design, construct and fit out a new residential accommodation facility that will meet Ronald McDonald House Canberra's needs or requests. The feasibility study is scheduled to be completed in October 2019 and then will need to go through Ronald McDonald House's internal approval processes.

Answer to question on notice Question No 2574

MR WALL: I ask the minister for education for an explanation in regard to question No 2574 on the notice paper that has expired after 30 days.

MADAM SPEAKER: Do you have an explanation, minister?

MS BERRY: I am just trying to recall what the question was about. Do you know, Mr Wall?

Mr Wall: It related to designated priority enrolment areas for students attending Southern Cross Early Childhood School and other matters.

MS BERRY: Yes, I have. I am pretty sure I signed that yesterday. It is going through the system to your office.

Hospitals—infrastructure

Debate resumed.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (3.01): I am glad to stand in support of Mrs Dunne's motion today. I acknowledge the outstanding work of our health professionals in our hospital, despite the crumbling and aged infrastructure that this government expects them to work in. We just cannot trust this government when it comes to our health infrastructure. For example, as we have discussed in this place and has been discussed in other places, the government wanted to close the hydrotherapy pool at the Canberra Hospital, as if it was news to them that it was ageing infrastructure. It would have closed on 30 June this year if not for the intense political pressure brought here in the Assembly, including by my colleagues Mrs Dunne and Mrs Jones. We have also spoken about the electrical switchboards, previously identified as high risk, which then experienced a fire, the cost of replacement of which has now blown out from \$14 million to just under \$51 million.

But more than that, I address the fairy tale which has been the story of the SPIRE project so far. Before the last election, on this side we worked hard to present to the people of Canberra a comprehensive, a real, a well-costed plan to address the government's neglect of our major hospital, and we presented a plan that would have by now had a major expansion of the Canberra Hospital well progressed. That was a plan over three stages that would have brought the Canberra Hospital up to a modern 21st century standard and beyond. It would have addressed the issues of beds in corridors, ambulance bypass and crowded wards.

Instead, what we got was a plan conjured up on the back of an envelope to build a fictitious building which they dubbed, in a rush, the SPIRE. And like Brigadoon, the imaginary idyllic place so remote from reality, this imaginary Brigadoon hospital was going to be built on the site of the helipad car park at the far end of the hospital campus. This government's poorly conceived 2016 SPIRE would never be built, and of course has now been abandoned. This plan for SPIRE offered to the people of Canberra was just another mirage.

We now know there was no planning done for that election promise, for the 2016 SPIRE. Now, with some planning, the 2019 SPIRE expansion of the Canberra Hospital is a new promise on a new site. But when will it be built? We have seen in the incoming minister's brief that the new plan will have a decanting of existing buildings to commence this year, with construction to be completed in 2023-24.

We had a promise before the 2016 election, never delivered. Now we have a new promise that will not be finished until after the election after the next election. The delivery date for these projects is going out further and out further and out further every time we hear it spoken about. We have had the AMA come out about the ageing hospital infrastructure which is contributing to the long waits in our hospital.

I commend Mrs Dunne's motion today because we just cannot trust this government's promises about health infrastructure. It is all promise. It is all spin. It is all hot air and very little in the way of delivery. I thank Mrs Dunne for bringing this motion to the Assembly today.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (3.06): I note Ms Stephen-Smith's amendment to my motion, and I am somewhat surprised really to see that there is minimal change to the motion, which is not the government's usual form. It is also gratifying that the minister has committed to the reporting dates in the original motion. I do not have any real problem with her re-editing of the "notes" so long as the "calls on" part remains the same, which it does.

I reflect on some of the comments that have been made. I notice that the ministers, Mr Rattenbury and Ms Stephen-Smith, spent a lot of time talking about the money that they had been spending but the real concern is that we are spending a lot of money and we do not seem to be getting substantial and adequate improvements to the hospital.

I have recently come across a figure in the order of \$400 million of works underway and planned, which are essentially refurbishments of decaying buildings. All this goes to the point that was made by Dr Di Dio that the problem is that we have decaying buildings, we have crumbling infrastructure, but the problem is that instead of taking a holistic approach to this, which is what Katy Gallagher when she was the Minister for Health, proposed in 2012 and started the planning of in 2013, they are doing a sort of piecemeal approach. Dr Di Dio has said that this piecemeal approach is not actually solving the problem. We will not solve the problem until we have substantial new buildings.

We are not going to see substantial new buildings until, roughly, the election after the next. This is far too long. I suppose what the government has done is reinforce the point that was made by the outgoing health minister at the last election, when Mr Hanson announced our policy at the last election. The outgoing health minister's response was immediate. He said it was nonsense, it was unnecessary, we would never have to do this for another 10 years. He was wrong because it is quite clear that the crumbling infrastructure at the Canberra Hospital is breaking under the strain. Dr Di Dio, the current President of the AMA, and the previous president of the AMA have both spoken about the need for new infrastructure going back to 2016.

Actually what this government has done is that it has implemented the parting wish of Simon Corbell and ensured that we will wait at least 10 years before we have a radical rebuild of the hospital completed. We should have had that radical rebuild of the hospital already completed and occupied. It is not beyond the wit of some Labor

governments to build hospitals. It is a difficult task. No-one denies that it is a difficult task. But we saw the South Australian government completely build a new hospital rather than put good money after bad, putting sticky tape, bandages and gaffer tape on the old Adelaide hospital. They built a new Adelaide hospital on a new campus.

It was a difficult task. There is no doubt about it. It was a hard road. I know how hard it was. I have spoken to the minister at the time about it. It is a very difficult task. But the South Australian Labor government did not shy away from it, not like this government, this incompetent government, which has shied away from building new facilities and rather has spent, according to the minister's briefing, something in the order in the last little while of \$400 million on stop-gap measures. This is a waste in many ways of taxpayers' money because we should have been up and building new facilities rather than trying to keep the old ones going beyond their useful life.

I look forward to the minister reporting on this at the end of this year. The Canberra Liberals and the people of the ACT, through the Canberra Liberals, will be keeping this government, this incompetent, this untrustworthy government, accountable in relation to infrastructure which is much needed in the Canberra hospital system.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Children and young people—out of home care

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (3.12), by leave: On behalf of Mrs Kikkert, I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) we demonstrate our value for vulnerable children in out-of-home care by making top-quality decisions and listening to their voices;
- (b) the 2016 Glanfield Inquiry recommended that "A review should be undertaken of what decisions made by CYPS should be subject to either internal or external merits review. The review should have regard to the position in other jurisdictions and be chaired by the Justice and Community Safety Directorate";
- (c) earlier this year, a working group that was established to address this recommendation released a discussion paper titled Review of Child Protection Decisions in the ACT, with consultation open to public submissions;
- (d) the Minister for Children, Youth and Families has also invited stakeholders within the child protection and legal systems and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to participate in face-to-face consultations; and
- (e) the review process, as acknowledged by the Minister for Children, Youth and Families, has experienced delay;

(2) further notes that A Step Up for Our Kids, the ACT Government's out-of-home care strategy, promises to "embed a culture of listening to the voices of children and young people"; and

- (3) calls on the Minister for Children, Youth and Families to:
- (a) remind the independent expert who is undertaking the consultation process that the voices of children and young people must be included; and
 - (b) update the Assembly no later than the last sitting day in September 2019 regarding:
 - (i) how the voices of children and young people are being included in the consultation process;
 - (ii) the progress of this review and the consultation process, including when these are expected to conclude; and
 - (iii) what steps will follow, and when these are expected to conclude.

The opposition is grateful for the opportunity to bring this motion before the Assembly today. Nearly 2½ years ago, Mrs Kikkert moved a motion calling on the ACT government to recognise the importance of ensuring that decisions in the realm of child protection “be subject to external review both to ensure the quality of such decisions and to engender confidence in the system”.

Mrs Kikkert’s 2017 motion was informed in part by the 2004 Vardon report, which raised as one of its main issues the lack of external scrutiny of child protection decisions in the ACT. While this report did not specify a single mechanism for external review, it did note that the Children’s Court magistrate and most of the legal representatives with whom the review spoke had expressed support for an administrative tribunal supplemented by a judicial review process. The report went on to suggest that a commissioner for children and young people could have the power to convene such a tribunal. The ACT government’s response to the Vardon report’s suggestion was to create the commissioner position, but it then made sure that it lacked any power to provide the recommended external scrutiny.

As a consequence, by 2016 we had another report, the Glanfield inquiry, once again raising concerns about the lack of external merits review of care and protection decisions in the ACT. The Glanfield report suggested that the ACT was in some way out of step with other states and territories on this issue. This inquiry recommended that “a review be undertaken of what decisions made by CYPS should be subject to internal or external merits review” and that “the review should have regard to the position in other jurisdictions”.

This inquiry and its recommendation also informed the 2017 motion moved by Mrs Kikkert. At the time Minister Stephen-Smith tabled extensive amendments to the motion, specifically removing calls for the government to recognise the importance of external review as well as a statement noting that the ACT was out of step with other jurisdictions on this matter. Minister Stephen-Smith did, however, inform the Assembly that the recommended review had already begun. The opposition later learnt that the panel had commenced meeting in the previous December. That is almost three years ago, and 3½ years after the government accepted this recommendation.

I bring this point up in light of the fact that, when debating Mrs Kikkert's motion back in 2017, she said, "Let us not delay any longer." Two years down the track, unfortunately, this process has dragged on and on. In April this year Mrs Kikkert asked the minister, on notice, if the review had been finished yet. The minister replied that it had not, but the public release of a long-promised discussion paper was imminent, and she acknowledged that "this time line does represent a delay". That is newspeak.

Some significant things have happened in the months since then. The discussion paper has indeed been released and public consultation has been sought. We note with satisfaction that the ACT Human Rights Commission made a whole-of-commission submission in response to this discussion paper. Exactly as Mrs Kikkert did in 2017, they have explicitly called on the ACT government to recognise the necessity of external review. I quote from their submission:

The Commission considers that the provision of external merits review of child protection decisions ... is necessary to uphold the rights of children and young people, and their families, and is essential for achieving full compliance with the ACT's human rights obligations.

Internal merits review on its own is not sufficient to meet the requirements of the HR Act.

... the Commission considers that the broad discretionary framework ... to make decisions about a child or young person's care, combined with the lack of appropriate mechanisms to challenge and remedy such decisions, is incompatible with the HR Act.

In other words, Mr Assistant Speaker, unless we fix this situation, we are not human rights compliant, and we have not been since this act was adopted. I hope you can begin to understand now why Mrs Kikkert has continued to push this matter for more than two years.

Likewise I note with satisfaction that Dr Watchirs, of the Human Rights Commission, has recently supported the point made by Mrs Kikkert in 2017 about the ACT government being out of step with other states and territories, which point the minister felt the need to remove from the original 2017 motion. Speaking to local media on this topic just last week, Dr Watchirs said, "We must step into line with other jurisdictions and provide for external review of child protection decisions." Indeed we must.

In light of the fact that this process has already gone on for too long and experienced too many delays for such an important matter, as well as the fact that the public consultation period closed nearly three months ago, it is time that we got an update. Mrs Kikkert's motion today calls on Minister Stephen-Smith to provide that update to this Assembly before the last sitting day of the month. We need to know what has happened and what exactly still needs to happen, and we need to know when we can expect a final outcome.

This motion also raises the issue of who is being consulted as part of this review. As noted, the public have been invited to make submissions on the discussion paper released earlier this year. In addition the minister stated on 16 May that she had “written to a wide range of stakeholders within the child protection and legal systems and to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to invite their participation in face-to-face consultations”. The opposition certainly endorses such face-to-face engagement with stakeholders, but there is one group of stakeholders not mentioned in the minister’s list of invitees, that is, children and young people themselves.

This motion calls on the minister, as part of updating the Assembly, to inform us how the voices of children and young people are being included in the consultation process. This would seem to be an obvious inclusion, but I would like a clear assurance that it is part of the process. Earlier this year the CREATE Foundation, which is the nation’s peak body representing those in care and protection, released a comprehensive survey subtitled *Children and young people’s views after five years of national standards*. This survey, which was endorsed by academic experts, raises concerns about how well children are being listened to in this territory’s out of home care system.

For example, the ACT has by far the nation’s highest rate of children and young people in care who report being removed from a placement against their wishes. At the same time we have the lowest rate of such young people who report being consulted regarding these removals. On a more specific measure, the ACT tied with the Northern Territory for the fewest young people who agree that they are listened to within the system broadly. We are second-last when it comes to the number of young people who report participation in formal meetings that involve them. And amongst young people who have been invited to attend such meetings, fewer Canberra children said that they were actually listened to, compared to children across the nation.

In fact, one of the clearest messages found in the CREATE Foundation’s survey is that children and young people in this territory simply do not trust the Barr government to listen to them or let them have a real voice in decisions that affect them. This finding stands in stark contrast to the promise in this government’s out of home care strategy, which is to “embed a culture of listening to the voices of children and young people”. Aware of their own data, the CREATE Foundation chose to emphasise this point in their submission to the ongoing review. CREATE said:

CREATE further advises that it is vital that if the working group must determine which decisions could benefit from external review, children and young people should be consulted as to their opinions on which issues are important to them.

Perhaps those overseeing the review process have already developed plans to access the vital voice of children and young people and this consultation has happened or is happening. I certainly hope so. This is the hope of the opposition. But in light of what we know about what children in Canberra are saying about their experiences more generally, it seems wise to ask the government to remind the independent expert who is undertaking the consultation process that the voices of children and young people must be heard.

In conclusion, I look forward to hearing the minister's update either today—I understand there is some proposal that she may give an update today—or, if not today, later this month. I fully understand that this will be an interim update and not a final report, but it is important for this Assembly to be informed regarding progress so far, what still needs to happen and the current time line for when this review will conclude. I commend Mrs Kikkert's motion to the Assembly and I look forward to the minister's response.

MS STEPHEN-SMITH (Kurrajong—Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Minister for Children, Youth and Families, Minister for Health and Minister for Urban Renewal) (3.23), by leave: I move:

(1) Insert new paragraph (1)(f):

“(f) submissions on the discussion paper *Review of Child Protection Decisions in the ACT* will soon be publicly available on the Justice and Community Safety Directorate website;”.

(2) Omit paragraph (3), substitute:

“(3) calls on the Minister for Children, Youth and Families to update the Assembly no later than the last sitting day in March 2020 regarding:

(a) how the voices of children and young people are included in this consultation process;

(b) the progress and outcomes of this review and the consultation process;
and

(c) what steps will follow, and when these are expected to conclude.”.

I thank Mrs Dunne for moving Mrs Kikkert's motion on her behalf. It is an important issue that we are discussing today, one that I take very seriously. The ACT government as a whole is committed to ensuring that the voices of children and young people are heard as we develop policies and implement services, particularly children and young people involved in the out of home care system.

On 6 May 2019, as the motion notes, the *Review of child protection decisions in the ACT* discussion paper was released for public consultation. Following an extension of the consultation period, consultations closed on 28 June 2019. As part of this consultation process, I wrote to 18 stakeholders, inviting their feedback on the issues raised in the discussion paper and offering them a face-to-face meeting with the independent consultant to support their participation. These stakeholders included the CREATE Foundation, the peak organisation representing the voices of children and young people with an out of home care experience; the Our Booris, Our Way steering committee; the Human Rights Commission; local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations; disability advocacy organisations; and Carers ACT.

I am pleased to inform the Assembly that 18 formal submissions were received during the consultation period. Five organisations that made a written submission and one carer family accepted the opportunity to meet with the consultant, Mr Muir.

Submissions will be made public where respondents have provided their express permission for the publication of their submission and where these submissions do not include the disclosure of personal information about another person. These submissions will soon be publicly available on the Justice and Community Safety Directorate's website, which is the first element of my amendment as circulated.

Like all decisions and processes in out of home care, this consultation is well informed by the inclusion of the views of people with lived experience in the system—importantly, children and young people. While every effort has been taken to make this discussion paper and process as accessible as possible, I acknowledge that it remains a very complex issue. Indeed, the discussion paper points out in great detail that there is no consistency across jurisdictions in how these matters are handled, and there are many options for how we go forward with the establishment of both better codified internal review mechanisms and also external review mechanisms.

For this reason, I am very pleased that both the CREATE Foundation and the Children and Young People Commissioner, as part of the Human Rights Commission, who are experts in engaging with and reflecting the voices of children and young people, have made submissions to the process.

As I have said, the CREATE Foundation performs an incredibly important role as the national consumer body representing the voices of children and young people in the out of home care system and young people who have transitioned from care up to the age of 25. In the ACT, CREATE is a partner in the delivery of A step up for our kids, the ACT government's out of home care strategy.

CREATE is funded under the strategy to deliver the children and young people engagement support service. The service includes encouraging and enabling children and young people in care to participate and contribute to community life; empowering children and young people in care to build self-confidence, self-esteem and skills that enable them to have a voice and be heard; empowering children and young people in care to fully participate in society; encouraging children and young people in care to develop communities of peer support; encouraging children and young people in care to participate in decision-making; and encouraging children and young people's talents, hopes and dreams.

CREATE staff and representatives of the CREATE young consultants program had a face-to-face meeting with the independent consultant, Mr Peter Muir, during the review period. Hence my amendment removes the request that the government remind Mr Muir that it is important to listen to the voices of children and young people. Mr Muir needs no reminding of this. Mr Muir reported that he was touched and grateful to meet with these young people and to listen to their views on these important issues.

Young consultants are young people with a lived experience of out of home care in the ACT who work with CREATE to ensure that the voices of children and young people are heard and their perspectives are included in decision-making. I particularly value my regular meetings with CREATE young consultants and CREATE staff. It is incredibly important to hear directly from children and young people about their

experiences and recommendations for improving the out of home care experience and system. By directly hearing the voices of children and young people, the independent consultant was able to understand how young people experience decision-making processes.

The CREATE Foundation's written submission states:

CREATE acknowledges the significant work in refocussing on the participation of children and young people in the OOHC—

out of home care—

system in the ACT by both community and government stakeholders.

That is certainly what I have experienced over the past almost three years in this portfolio, with a commitment to hearing those voices of children and young people. I will have a little more to say about that in a minute.

As I have noted, consultation on the discussion paper closed on 28 June 2019. Mr Muir has reviewed the submissions and is preparing a findings paper for the ACT government working group. The purpose of the findings paper is to provide accurate and independent feedback about what stakeholders have said during the face-to-face consultation process and through their written submissions.

The review of child protection decisions in the ACT is an important piece of work. The findings paper includes the views of children and young people along with the views of birth families, carers, the legal sector and other key partners. As a next step, Mr Muir will be meeting with the ACT government working group—consisting of representatives of the Justice and Community Safety Directorate, who have carriage of this project, the Community Services Directorate, and the office of the Coordinator-General for Family Safety—to discuss the findings.

I look forward to sharing the findings paper with the Legislative Assembly in due course and reporting back to the Assembly by the last sitting day in March 2020 regarding how the voices of children and young people have been included in this consultation process as it goes forward; the progress and outcomes of the review and the consultation processes; and what steps will follow and when these are expected to conclude, which is the last part of my amendment.

I make the point to Mrs Dunne that this is not about changing the willingness to report back. It is just that if I reported back again next week, I would not have anything more to say than I am saying today. It is about locking in when I will come back and provide another update. If I can do it before the end of the last sitting day in March 2020, I am very happy to do that.

As I mentioned earlier, there are many ways in which the ACT government listens to the voices of children and young people and encourages their involvement in decision-making. One example of this is the talking practice forum. Embedding the culture of listening to the voices of children and young people was part of the talking

practice conference held in July this year. Talking practice is an opportunity for staff from child and youth protection services and our non-government partners to come together to share and exchange best practice as well as explore the challenges and trends, solutions and initiatives for child and youth protection systems throughout Australia. This year's theme was "Stepping up with dignity: empowering children and families through purposeful partnerships".

The agenda for talking practice was deliberately structured to include the experiences of children and young people at the very beginning of the day. At talking practice, I was pleased to attend a panel discussion hosted by the ACT Public Advocate and Children and Young People Commissioner, with three CREATE young consultants, in front of a full house of around 300 staff. These three inspiring young people provided insights into their personal experience of out of home care and freely gave advice on how case managers and the wider system can better support young people to feel heard and involved in decision-making and to feel valued. It was an incredibly powerful and moving experience for everyone, as it was at last year's talking practice forum.

One of the things I appreciate about hearing these stories directly from young people is seeing the development in young people's own stories, young people who have had very complex backgrounds and sometimes have had difficulty engaging. Yes, they tell us stories about the difficulties they have had in the system, about not understanding decisions that have been made at times, about the way they want to be listened to and heard and have their opinions represented through the system. But we also get to hear stories about the incredible caseworkers who have made an enormous difference in the lives of these young people, caseworkers who have stood by young people and therapeutic support workers from the Australian Childhood Foundation who have walked alongside young people through very complex journeys, in their trauma recovery and their complex lives. Out the other side are coming young people who have hope for the future, who have a vision for where their life is going to go that is a positive one. Sometimes we hear from young people who, 12 or 18 months earlier, saw no future for themselves. We have a lot to learn, but we also hear about the incredible work that young people see from their caseworkers and from our non-government partners.

That was also reflected at the round table I attended on 30 November 2018. I had the pleasure of listening to young people during the youth round table for young people in care. The round table provided insights into how staff across our organisations can better work to support children and young people to participate in the decisions that impact on their lives. These findings have been shared with staff and have generated resource material to be referred to in daily practice.

Following the round table, a group of staff from across child and youth protection services and ACT Together are forming a participation reference group that specifically focuses on how children and young people can be encouraged to participate in the care system. This is from an individual basis through to policy and governance.

At a broader community level, the Youth Advisory Council provides young people in the ACT aged between 12 and 25 years with an opportunity to take a leading role in participation and consultation activities on issues that affect their lives; raise awareness of the aspirations, needs and concerns of young people within government and community; and facilitate interaction between young people, the ACT government and the wider community.

The Youth Advisory Council provides the ACT government with advice on youth issues, giving young people a voice in our community. The YAC, as it is known, conducts a number of consultation processes, including think tanks, open meetings, face-to-face consultations and youth surveys. Council members also participate on other committees, working parties, task forces and other government bodies.

In the August sitting period, I was pleased to table the ACT government's response to the 2018 ACT Youth Assembly report. The Youth Assembly was a deliberative democratic process to draw out key ideas and policy recommendations, run by the Youth Advisory Council. The issues addressed at the forum were youth mental health, homelessness and young people, youth civic participation and equality, and equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

The 2018 ACT Youth Assembly report and ACT government response reflects our commitment to meeting the current and emerging needs of young Canberrans. I again congratulate the members of the Youth Advisory Council for pulling together the Youth Assembly and writing up such a useful report.

The ACT government will continue to support and strengthen innovative ways to hear the voices of children and young people and embed them into practice. We will do this by supporting and encouraging young people to have a voice through providing direct opportunities for them to be heard and participate in decision-making. We will also do this by continuing to listen to voices such as the CREATE Foundation, the Human Rights Commission, the Youth Advisory Council and the Youth Coalition, who are providing a voice for young people in our community and advocating on their behalf.

I commend the amendment and also the motion. As I say, my amendment is simply to add some information and to change the reporting day so that I can report back to the Assembly with some more concrete information and so that I can commit to doing that when the next steps of the process are clear. I thank Mrs Kikkert—and Mrs Dunne, who moved the motion on her behalf—for bringing this discussion to the chamber. It is a very important issue.

MS LE COUTEUR (Murrumbidgee) (3.37): I thank Mrs Kikkert, and Mrs Dunne in Mrs Kikkert's absence, for bringing forward the motion. I acknowledge the ongoing passion and commitment of both of these ladies to ensuring that the child protection system in the ACT is as robust and effective as it can be. This motion maintains that commitment and it is consistent with previous motions that Mrs Kikkert has brought before the Assembly.

I support the motion that Mrs Kikkert and Mrs Dunne have brought forward, and I also support the minor but important amendments put forward by Minister Stephen-Smith. I must say I was particularly pleased to see item (1)(f), which commits her to ensuring that the submissions provided to the review currently underway will be in a central location in the public domain, because they have not been easy to find.

I also support the extension of the report-back date, because I know that the review has been delayed and, by then, the government will be in a better position to outline how the voices of children and young people have been included in the consultation process. By then we should also have a better idea of where the government is headed in terms of external review mechanisms for care and protection decisions, as per recommendation 12 of the Glanfield report.

I can understand why Mrs Kikkert wants reassurance along the way about how the voices of children and young people are being included, and I thank the minister for providing some of that information to us today. Glanfield stated:

In a context where life changing decisions are being made based on human judgement, in circumstances where errors can never be entirely eliminated, review of decisions and quality assurance arrangements can play an important role.

I could not agree more. There needs to be transparency in decisions made by CYPS. They need to be clearly articulated and decisions need to be able to be reviewed.

I am sure that we are in agreement that decision-making, quality assurance and oversight of child and youth protection services in the ACT are important aspects of ensuring that we are doing the best for children and young people who are the responsibility of the territory. Equally, I am sure we are all in agreement that decisions must always be made in the best interests of the child.

As I have engaged with key stakeholders about the issue of including the voice of children and young people in the review of child protection decisions that is currently underway, what is clear is that submissions already submitted to the review are including the voices of children and young people that have already been documented.

I have been somewhat concerned by the fact that many young people—many people—tell me they have been consulted to death. Of course, not really to death; that is not quite what I should say. The point is that children and young people have been repeatedly consulted through various avenues, including through the Children and Young People Commissioner and other researchers over the years, and the most important thing now is that we listen and take action.

I have been reassured by the fact that there are ample existing consultations and reports, both locally and nationally, that can inform the review, and that many of the views that this review may elicit directly from children and young people will be views that we have already heard.

That does not mean that I am saying that we should not consult with them with regard to the current review; we should. But there is no point in engaging with and including children and young people in this particular review unless there is a demonstrated commitment to listen, understand and act upon the advice provided. We must not consult with them simply so that we can say we have consulted with them. It has to be meaningful and it has to bring about improvements and change to the system.

I have also heard from stakeholders that previously there have been times when recommendations made about improving care and protection systems and responses have either not been made at all or have not been done properly. But I have faith that this minister will ensure that the system is improved, especially with regard to the ability to review decisions made about where and how children at risk of abuse and neglect are living and how they are cared for.

That, after all, is at the centre of this motion. The importance of embedding a culture of listening to the voices of children and young people is vital and central to any decisions that are made in the care and protection system. This includes initial decisions being made about where they will live, who they will live with, where they will go to school, and how much contact they may have with their birth parents. Children and young people should be included in declared care team discussions about their lives. These discussions need to occur in contexts that suit the child or young person.

The declared care team should ensure that, for example, the location of the meeting is not intimidating for a young person. It should engage with them, and seek them out in an environment where they are comfortable. I am not entirely convinced that this is happening as a rule but if it were, as it should be, if the voice of the child or young person at the centre of the matter is not just heard but listened to, the need to externally review decisions in and of itself should be reduced.

This is particularly the case where care and protection orders are made for children who are Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders, or where they are made for children of parents with disability. There are guiding principles that child and youth protection services must follow in making decisions about placements of young Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders. Now that the government has committed to using the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander placement principles, including the use of meaningful cultural plans, we can hope to see an improvement in the provision of the right supports in the right way, and at the right time.

Furthermore, orders, particularly long-term ones, should be reassessed when circumstances change, for example, where parents have been successfully parenting other children, when they have managed to cease their drug use, when they have their mental health issues under control, or indeed when they are no longer living with violence. Importantly, such orders must be reassessed if the young people themselves are seeking re-evaluation of their circumstances.

We can see how tragic the outcomes can be when the voice of a child or young person is not heard, as is being revealed in the Coroner's Court at present with the tragic and

preventable death of Bradyn Dillon. I am sure that that is what Mrs Kikkert is trying to avert in the future. I have no doubt that nobody wants to see such a tragic and critical outcome ever again in Canberra, or anywhere else. We owe it to him and to all children and young people involved in the care and protection system to ensure that they have a voice in critical decisions that are being made about their lives, and we must get better at it. I support the motion and the amendments.

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women) (3.45): I want to make a brief contribution to this conversation today in respect of how the government is doing some important work on listening to children in the context of domestic and family violence.

In April 2018 the Domestic Violence Prevention Council recommended that children and young people should be directly consulted about domestic and family violence services and responses. The DVPC made several recommendations. On 24 October 2018 I announced a commitment to early funding addressing a consultation on children and young people and their experiences and needs. The Children and Young People Commissioner and the Office of the Coordinator-General for Family Safety have been working together to design and deliver this listening and learning project.

The listening and learning project gives effect to this commitment. The family safety hub and Children and Young People Commissioner have been working on this for a little while now. The outcomes of the project will include children and young people's insights on family violence, contributing to system and culture change by hearing and amplifying the views of children and young people, and the insights gained through this project will feed directly into a family safety hub challenge, leading to improved service response.

The consultation activities have been carefully designed under the guidance of the expert reference group and in collaboration with the children and youth sounding boards. Mixed consultation methods will also be used to ensure that the government can listen to and learn from children and young people with a range of backgrounds and experiences, and that the methods are developmentally appropriate for children and young people across a range of ages.

Consulting on the sensitive issue of domestic and family violence requires the highest level of care and attention to participant safety and wellbeing. An expert reference group has been established to ensure that this project is ethically sound and safe for children and young people. The expert reference group includes Professor Morag McArthur, Emeritus Professor Australian Catholic University, Dr Justin Barker, Director, ACT Youth Coalition, Marcia Williams, Chief Executive Officer, Women's Centre for Health Matters, as well as Jodie Griffiths-Cook, Public Advocate and Children and Young People Commissioner.

Children and young people's experiences of family violence are unique. They are different to adult experiences of domestic and family violence and they also differ between each child and young person. By listening to and understanding children and

young people's experiences, the listening and learning project will provide a new knowledge base to improve the ACT service system's capacity to respond to children and young people's needs. What we learn will be shared across government and the non-government sector.

I commend the motion and I also commend and support the amendments that have been brought to the Assembly by the minister for children and young people. I thank the Assembly for discussing this important matter today.

MRS DUNNE (Ginninderra) (3.48): I thank those members who have spoken in support of the intent of this motion. In closing, I wish to address the amendments put forward by Minister Stephen-Smith. Firstly, I thank the minister for informing the Assembly that submissions will be made public. I welcome both this decision and its inclusion in this motion. This is an appropriate act of openness.

Secondly, I want to thank the minister for providing us with an update, at least in part today, as the motion called for. I understand that more information will come in the future, and I look forward to that as well. I also welcome the introduction of a date for the reporting of an outcome in six months time. I acknowledge what the minister has said about not being able to compel the completion of a review that, although it sits in her portfolio, is being chaired by the Justice and Community Safety Directorate.

I therefore take this opportunity to put the Attorney-General, Mr Ramsay, on notice. This review process has already gone on for too long, and I expect him to do whatever is in his power to make sure that the final outcome can genuinely be reported to the Assembly in March. There is still much to do, including amending current acts to align with the recommendations of the report. I do not want to see this matter pushed out beyond the election. The way that it has been handled so far means that that could well be the case.

It is an embarrassment that this government require another motion to get them to do this important work. Evidence suggests that we cannot trust the Barr government to prioritise the needs of vulnerable children. Children and young people, and their families, in the ACT have already waited for too long for this important mechanism of external review. I commend this motion to the Assembly and thank members for their participation.

Amendments agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Forestry—sustainable products

MS CODY (Murrumbidgee) (3.52): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes:

- (a) forests have a major contribution to make in helping meet Australia's commitment to limit global warming to two degrees or less;

- (b) forests and wood derived from them are a renewable source of energy, and preferable energy source when compared to fossil fuels;
 - (c) wood products in building and construction offer a pathway to achieving zero net emissions, particularly when compared to other building materials such as cement and steel;
 - (d) wood products sourced from within Australia have lower transport emissions, in comparison with imported construction materials;
 - (e) forests help clean up carbon emissions with wood products forming part of the carbon cycle; and
 - (f) forests have other co-benefits providing habitat for flora and fauna and recreational and other opportunities;
- (2) congratulates the ACT Government for replanting the Ingledene Forest and thereby enhancing the local forestry industry, boosting conservation outcomes, providing new recreational areas for Canberrans as well as helping clean up the equivalent of 200 000 tonnes of carbon dioxide over the next 25 years; and
- (3) calls on the ACT Government to:
- (a) investigate the use of wood and other sustainable products in government infrastructure projects; and
 - (b) work with the building and construction industry to promote the use of Australian Forestry products.

This has been a big week for the development of the ACT government's environment policy. Adapting to climate change and moving to a zero net emissions society and economy is the greatest task facing humanity and we should all be proud that the people of Canberra are further advanced in the task than any other jurisdiction in the country.

Whilst fringe elements continue to want to have an argument about whether climate change is real, we are getting on with the task of dealing with the consequences. Whilst others phrase their arguments around who does or does not believe in climate change, this government is ensuring that the way it changes our city is fair and that the health, wellbeing, and prosperity of Canberrans are improved as a consequence.

This is a big, complicated set of policy issues. Climate change affects every single aspect of human existence: what we eat, how we heat and cool our houses and workplaces, how we move around, how we communicate, and the built environment, the topic of my motion today. What we need more of in this conversation is detailed work on how we develop our city, our territory, to ensure future generations can live happy, healthy, prosperous lives.

In developing our policy we need to not just go after the low hanging fruit, things like moving our electricity supply away from carbon-intensive sources such as coal and improving the efficiency of our transport systems through better provision of public transport and the use of electric vehicles. These are tasks the ACT government is well advanced in delivering. The next steps are in reducing the carbon intensity of consumer goods, initiatives like the reusable coffee cup trial.

The longevity of manufactured goods is a debate that is well underway and a large amount of work is needed. Everyone in this place has a mobile phone which took huge amounts of energy to produce, used rare and non-renewable resources to create and which will need replacing in one to three years. The manufacturing process also required them to be shipped across the world, often multiple times, as components. Whilst the savings in labour costs might make it cheap to do it that way, and sometimes involve shameful worker exploitation, it also comes at an inexcusable cost to the environment.

Reducing carbon emissions and environmental impact has enormous policy challenges. It demands action at the local, national and international level. Just trying to give consumers a nudge here or there can help, but large structural issues need large structural answers.

I am not so ambitious that I would attempt to address all of those issues in one private member's motion. I know I am pretty good, but Mr Coe would probably start calling me arrogant if I tried, and having Mr Coe being right about something really would upset the vibe of this place. So today I have limited my contribution on this important debate to one very small corner of the climate change debate: wood.

Wood is great stuff. In the history of humanity it has been central to so much innovation, invention and development. Whilst it can be pretty it is also strong and durable. Whilst it grows it takes carbon dioxide out of the air. That is a pretty neat trick.

Of course, as our cities have grown, and technology has developed, wood has also been displaced by other products. So much of our furniture and so many of our tools are now made of oil-based plastics. Our buildings are so often made of concrete and steel. The next great challenge for developing climate change policy is how we can reduce our use of concrete, steel and plastics in construction

One important consideration is increasing the quality of construction. Better buildings last longer and therefore use less energy and create less emissions in construction. Mr Ramsay's comprehensive agenda on building quality is tackling that issue. The difficulties of manoeuvring that agenda through national building rules, dodgy developers and free trade agreements are hard work, but he is proving that it can and will be done.

I do not need to repeat the problems being caused by imported products of dubious quality. We know some of Australia's trading partners are sending us second-rate materials, some dangerous, some sourced from unsustainable forestry and manufacturing processes and others produced through the most horrendous labour exploitation. Getting control of the issues is just the first task; we need to keep working to develop comprehensive answers to the challenge.

If we are to reduce the use of concrete, steel and plastics in construction, what will we move to? Whilst my research for this motion included seeing an awful lot of arguments about how much embedded carbon is or is not included in concrete, steel

and plastics in one product or another, I am not a physicist or a chemist. I am not inclined to come in here quoting numbers that are highly disputed, especially when there seem to be an awful lot of dubious claims and political agendas behind them. Members will see that the only numbers I have in my motion relate to the Ingledene Forest, and those are from reliable, published sources produced by highly professional and valued public servants.

My motion avoids the perils of politicians claiming outsized expertise on policy detail. Our public servants, scientists, construction workers, architects, engineers and forestry workers should be respected for their expertise and advice. My motion comes from a far more principled and appropriate perspective.

What do we need? Buildings made of lower carbon emissions products. Trees are best for that. They are not just low emissions; they are negative emissions. They suck carbon dioxide from the air. Grow it, cut it down, put it in a building that lasts a long time, and then grow more and do the same thing. Our buildings then contribute to reducing carbon in the atmosphere rather than increasing it.

Where should we do it? As close as possible to where we are building the buildings. This saves on the carbon cost of transportation. It is also a great source of work for locals.

What sorts of trees? That is a matter for experts. There are places, such as Ingledene, where pine is appropriate. In other areas there is also a terrific opportunity to grow native eucalypt hardwoods.

What other benefits do we get? Forests can provide great tourism and recreational activities, be that walking, orienteering, rally car driving, camping, horse riding or so many other activities whilst the forest is growing. They also provide amenity and enjoyment for both locals and tourists. Modern forestry practices also provide habitat for many of our wonderful native animals.

As we adapt to climate change in our development of forestry practice we must acknowledge the failures of the past. The old approach of clear felling and land clearing old growth forests has been consigned to the history books. Likewise, a view that takes the terra nullius approach that the land was somehow virgin or untouched by human hands before white settlement must also be abandoned. Our policies going forward must use the best science we have, but also the culture of husbandry and active land management shown by our first nations peoples.

Wood is a great product. In developing our climate change policies we should, among many other things, be looking at how we can increase the use of local forestry products in our construction industry.

I now seek leave to move an amendment to my motion which includes a new paragraph.

Leave granted.

MS CODY: I move:

Add new paragraph (3)(c):

“(c) calls on the ACT Government to develop sustainability guidelines for the sustainable use of building materials in the ACT, in accordance with the *Building Act 2004*.”.

Amendment agreed to.

MR GUPTA (Yerrabi) (4.04): I rise to support the motion moved by Ms Bec Cody MLA calling on the ACT government to investigate and promote the use of sustainable building products in both government and private infrastructure projects. As we are all aware, the ACT is quickly expanding, with the fastest growing population in Australia. As our population rapidly grows, the need for more infrastructure also increases. It is our responsibility to ensure that the infrastructure projects which are building the future of our city are safe, sustainable and have a positive impact on the lives of all residents. I am pleased to support this motion proposed by Ms Bec Cody to ensure that the ACT government increases the sustainability of our infrastructure projects through the use of environmentally sensible building material.

As students and businesses across the world this week advocate for increased action on climate change it is important that this motion be discussed in this place today. The threat of climate change on the future of our lives is imminent and undeniable. The ACT government is already an international leader in governmental action towards climate change and we have some of most comprehensive greenhouse gas emission targets and policies in the world. We are already on track to achieving our commitment of 100 per cent renewable electricity by 2020. And this motion will add to our extensive and effective response to climate change.

Sustainable building materials such as wood and bamboo are holistically more environmentally sustainable and, as I mentioned above, will keep the government on track to achieving 100 per cent renewable electricity by 2020. Comparatively speaking, traditionally used building materials such as concrete and steel not only have poor environmental effects in construction but also have detrimental environmental impacts through the manufacturing and transporting of these materials. Wood and other sustainable materials are holistically better for the environment, will have a positive ecological impact and will add to the ACT government’s internationally renowned action against climate change.

Increasing the promotion of used or sustainable material in government and private infrastructure projects will also have other positive benefits on our local natural environment. Forest plantations, which will support the supply of these sustainable materials, will help clean up carbon emissions, with wood products forming part of the carbon cycle. Forests also provide habitat for our flora and fauna as well as providing vital green spaces around the ACT.

I commend the ACT government for replacing the Ingledene Forest which will clean up the equivalent of 20,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide over the next 25 years. This is a perfect example of some of the positive benefits that forests and the use of sustainable building materials will have on our environment. And I commend the government's continued effective action to reduce the ACT carbon footprint.

Another great aspect of this motion is its focus on supporting Australian businesses. On various occasions I have mentioned my passion of supporting businesses both small and large. The ACT has experienced an exponential increase in the amount of private and government infrastructure projects in recent years due to increased demand for buildings. In the March quarter alone the total value of construction activity in Australia was over \$50 billion, with a notable amount of this taking place in the ACT. This is an exponential injection into our local economy, providing local jobs as well as increasing the liveability of our city. With such a large volume of construction happening now and into the future there is a clear opportunity to support Australian businesses and industry through using locally made, sustainable products.

Currently in Australia construction materials such as concrete and steel are imported from overseas countries that can manufacture these products at a low cost. Not only does this take vital business away from Australian industries but also, as I mentioned earlier, the transportation of these materials to Australia has tangible and negative environmental effects.

Working with the building and construction industry to promote the use of Australian forestry products will benefit the Australian forestry industry and boost the economy as well as reduce costs of building materials for construction companies through lower transport and manufacturing costs. I commend this motion calling on the ACT government to promote the use of sustainable Australian products.

In conclusion, I am pleased to speak in support of this motion moved by Ms Bec Cody as its environmental and economic benefits are evident and far reaching. This government is prioritising tangible action on climate change and this motion is an effective solution to reduce the negative and environmental impacts of the public and private construction industry and is building a sustainable future. The actions in this motion also fundamentally support Australian businesses, increasing economic growth and creating local jobs, which the ACT government is committed to doing. I commend this motion to the Assembly.

MR RATTENBURY (Kurrajong) (4.11): I thank Ms Cody for bringing on this motion today and for the opportunity to discuss what I think are really interesting and important issues. My appreciation for the motion is extensively about sustainability and about reducing carbon emissions. The ACT Greens have some issues with the way it has been framed and do not agree to it in its current form. The principal problem is that the motion tries to closely link forestry operations with sustainability and reducing carbon emissions, painting forestry as a key initiative in the battle against climate change. That is not the case. Forestry operations can be quite problematic. It is inaccurate to attempt to link forestry to sustainability in climate change action. There are various other environmental problems associated with forestry of course.

As a starting point, let us at least separate the logging of native forests from this debate. Logging of native forests, especially old growth forests, is very damaging to the environment, to sensitive and high-conservation value native ecosystems, and it has a negative effect on climate change mitigation, as old growth trees take literally hundreds of years to grow back. We also know that most native forests that are cut down actually become woodchips, pulp and pallets, all items with short lifespans.

Very little native timber currently ends up as timber for building materials. Thus many of these wood products end up in landfill in different forms, either discarded pallets or chipboard, and then break down in the landfill, releasing carbon back into the atmosphere. If we leave these old, carbon-rich forests as they stand, as intact forests, they play an incredibly important role in carbon storage. But as soon as the trees are cut down the carbon is being released.

The Greens, of course, have a long and proud history of fighting to protect native forests in Australia. The ACT has had quite a different perspective on native forest logging to some of our regional and neighbouring jurisdictions, as we have never had native forest logging here in the territory, only ever plantation forestry. South Australia and Queensland have also only had plantation forestry for many decades now. However, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia continue to log old growth and high-conservation value forests, despite all the science being very clear for many decades now, as well as the bottom falling out of the market once plantation forests boomed internationally.

The ACT Assembly has debated this issue before and has a history of supporting native forest protection. In 1995, when the issue of timber and native forest logging was debated, the Assembly agreed that “the ACT government should adopt a policy of purchasing timber products that are recycled or sourced from plantations wherever possible”. Organisations like the CFMEU in the ACT have also traditionally actively supported the native forest protection movement, understanding that these protections would still allow the growth of the plantation sector and, importantly, the related jobs that go with that.

The Greens do not accept that native forest logging is a sustainable activity and it is not appropriate that it is discussed in this motion in a context of renewable resources, sustainability or climate change mitigation. I note that Ms Cody’s motion refers generically to forests, wood products and Australian forestry products and it does not really specify that she is talking only about sustainable plantation forests. If it were only about sustainable plantation forests I believe that would be quite a different discussion, which I will go into in a moment. However, as the motion stands, we do not support the various assertions in this motion relating to or that could be related to the logging of native forests.

The clause in Ms Cody’s motion which refers to forests providing habitat for flora and fauna suggests that Ms Cody is in fact referring to native forests in her motion. Native forests absolutely support a diversity of flora and fauna. They are vital habitat for biodiversity, and the very survival of our planet depends on keeping these ecosystems intact.

Plantation forests typically do not support this same rich diversity of flora and fauna. Most plantations are a monoculture of trees selected for their ability to grow quickly. The plantations in the ACT are fairly sterile. I know some members have spent some time in the plantations. You might see the occasional kangaroo, perhaps a black cockatoo, even a rabbit occasionally but, sadly, not much else.

The second point I make is that, while sustainable plantations forests have their uses, I do not want to emphasise them as a sound climate change mitigation measure. There is no substitute for reducing fossil fuel use, which needs to be our main focus. Nor do I believe that plantation forests should be considered an offset for fossil fuel use. The ACT Climate Change Council agrees. The council has provided advice to me in my capacity as climate change minister that planting forests is not a valid or secure offset as the plantations are susceptible to problems like fire, or insects, or diseases, which will cause their carbon to be released.

In fact, we are currently planting Ingledene Forest because it was previously destroyed in the 2003 bushfires. The carbon stored in the trees in Ingledene would have been released into the atmosphere as greenhouse emissions. Of course we need to be increasingly mindful of that risk as climate change advances and the number of high-risk bushfire days increases. Replanting Ingledene Forest is still a good initiative, for several reasons, but we do not think we should be saying climate change mitigation is one of them. That land cannot be used for much else.

There are uses for plantation wood. The new plantation forests can help support our sustainable plantation forestry operations in our region. As Ms Cody's motion notes and as members will have heard me say numerous times before, plantation forests also create a good environment for recreational activities like mountain biking and trail running. Many of the trails enjoyed by riders and runners in the ACT are actually in our plantation forests, in Madura and Kowen and increasingly perhaps around Cotter reserve and those areas. I do not agree, though, that we should be talking about Ingledene as a significant climate change mitigation measure. As I said, our focus should be on reducing fossil fuels and making permanent reductions.

Greenhouse gas emissions held by trees are at risk of being returned to the atmosphere by bushfires, logging or other events. The focus needs to be on reducing emissions in the key sectors outlined in our new climate strategy. I welcome Ms Cody's positive comments about that today and I agree with many of the points she made in that space. Those areas of challenge, of course, are primarily transport and gas as these are more permanent solutions. Of course, if wood from the forest is used in buildings, furniture or other longer term uses then the remaining carbon in those trees is locked away, that is, until they are burned or otherwise break down at which time they will release the carbon back into the atmosphere. This is a short-term carbon storage and carbon reduction compared to reducing fossil fuel use.

That is not to say that we cannot also look into replanting and developing carbon sinks—and there is an action in the new climate change strategy related to this—but we need to be careful. Another method of developing a carbon sink that is likely to be more permanent is to enrich and improve soils. Nationwide, there are better mitigation

activities in the land use sector than plantation forests, activities like preserving mangroves, stopping land clearing and letting old growth forests either remain standing or regrow, having gone through the logging process.

For the reasons I have outlined, I need to challenge Ms Cody's premise that wood products in building and construction offer a pathway to achieving zero net emissions. There is a little more complexity to it than that. Certain types of wood can be sustainable, depending on where they come from, but not necessarily.

I also note that there are considerable advancements being made in zero emissions technology in the building and construction industry, including right here in Canberra. A local company called Mineral Carbonisation International, for example, has developed technology to capture carbon and transform it into building materials such as cement. Considering technologies like this, Ms Cody's suggestion that wood is better than other building materials is not necessarily correct. But it is an evolving space.

The motion asserts that wood derived from forests can be a renewable source of energy. I point out that in the ACT we will very soon be powered by 100 per cent renewable electricity. A preferred source of energy in the ACT is, therefore, the electricity that we are deriving from the wind and solar generation we have contracted to be built.

We do not need to talk about using wood for energy, which, as I have already explained, is quite complex. I would even challenge whether it should be considered as a sustainable renewable energy source at all. This has been a very hotly contested debate over a number of years around people attempting to build, essentially, furnaces to burn the by-products of native forests and, of course, it then becomes a question of feeding the beast and driving more forest harvesting to then continue to feed the so-called renewable energy generators. It is a really tricky area and one we certainly do not support.

One other complexity, of course, in the whole wood-for-energy thing is: I note that smoke from wood heating continues to be a problem in Canberra, causing air quality issues and health problems, particularly in Tuggeranong where the smoke is trapped in the valley. This is also an issue in some other parts of Canberra but is most prevalent in Tuggeranong.

The preference is to minimise the use of these heaters, and the Greens have done quite a lot of work on this over the past 2½ decades. Members would know that the ACT government also runs a wood heater replacement program for this reason.

Mr Parton: I am just about out of wood at my place.

MR RATTENBURY: Mr Parton quips that he is almost out of wood at his place. As is his wont, he is trying to be funny but I hope that Mr Parton does not have any neighbours who suffer from asthma because that is exactly the issue that is a problem here in Canberra.

Wood heaters are nice but we live in a community, and on those cold winter nights where we get those inversions the excessive use of wood heaters can lead to people ending up in our emergency department because of the impact that the particulates coming from wood heaters have. I do not want to pick on individual people but, as a community, that is why we talk so much about the need to remove wood-fired heaters, because of the impact they have on vulnerable people in our community, not to mention some of the issues around the harvesting of the wood that occurs in the region.

With all those points in mind, I have an amendment to Ms Cody's motion. I have been advised by the Clerk that I need to seek leave to move it. I seek leave to move the amendment.

Leave granted.

MR RATTENBURY: I move the amendment circulated in my name:

Omit all words after "notes", substitute:

- “(a) the importance of protecting native forests in Australia;
 - (b) the oversupply of softwood timber in Australia, making it unnecessary to log native forests;
 - (c) that re-establishing Ingledene Forest as a working plantation forest provides opportunities for job creation, recreation, and supports a sustainable plantation forestry industry in the ACT;
 - (d) the importance of improving the sustainability of building materials to assist the ACT to move towards zero net emissions, and to reduce the broader impact buildings have on sustainability and emissions outside the ACT's border;
 - (e) plantation grown wood products can form part of the solution to improving building material sustainability, provided they are genuinely sustainable, taking into account issues such as the source of the wood, the distance it is transported, etc; and
 - (f) a variety of alternative sustainable building products have been developed or are emerging in the industry, such as 100 percent recycled plastic trusses and beams; and
- (2) calls on the ACT Government to investigate the use of sustainable products in government infrastructure projects, and develop sustainability guidelines for the sustainable use of building materials in the ACT, as required under the *Building Act 2004*.”.

The amendment emphasises the importance of protecting native forests but also notes that it is important to improve the sustainability of building materials because we want to reach net zero emissions here in the ACT but we also need to increase efforts to reduce the emissions created outside the ACT.

It notes that there are a variety of alternative sustainable building products that have been developed or are emerging in the industry—and I already mentioned the

zero-carbon cement—but there are a number of recycled products that should get more attention too. My amendment calls on the government to develop sustainability guidelines for the sustainable use of building materials in the ACT.

I note that Ms Cody, in her amendment, has moved a similar set of words and I very much support that part. That is why I voted yes in support when she moved that amendment. I see that as quite different to some of the rest of the motion.

I commend my amendment to the Assembly. I think the issue of guidelines for the sustainable use of building materials in the ACT is very important. It is actually a requirement under the Building Act 2004. The section has been there for many years and it has not yet been completed. I welcome the support of the chamber today for that work to be done. I believe Minister Ramsay will speak to that shortly and I look forward to his remarks on that because I think that there is a lot of opportunity in this space. I commend my amendment to the Assembly.

MR RAMSAY (Ginninderra—Attorney-General, Minister for the Arts, Creative Industries and Cultural Events, Minister for Building Quality Improvement, Minister for Business and Regulatory Services and Minister for Seniors and Veterans) (4.23): I rise to support the original motion and, as Minister for Building Quality Improvement, speak to the final point about the government's development of guidelines for the sustainable use of building materials under the Building Act. As Mr Rattenbury said, he raised it recently with me and I have asked my directorate to look into it. However, with the broad range of the building quality reform agenda that is currently on foot, that will always be the highest priority that I have my officials focusing on.

While the amendments that have been proposed and moved by Minister Rattenbury are generally admirable—they call for the protection of native forests and they share with the original motion the recognition of the ACT government's replanting of Ingledene Forest—we will not be supporting those amendments. We believe that the wording of the original motion adequately conveys the issue at hand and that there is no real justification for an amendment which rewords a number of technicalities that are not inconsistent with the spirit and the intention of the original motion. I am pleased to see the addition in the original motion of the final call about the development of sustainability guidelines under the Building Act; that is something that is shared with Minister Rattenbury's amendments.

I am sure that we would all agree that Canberrans deserve a home of the highest quality to live in, first and foremost. Proper and safe use of sustainable building materials is also an admirable goal. If a dodgy builder or a corner-cutting developer has left you with cracking walls, water ingress or balconies that leak from above, the first concern is going to be better quality building. Rightly, that is where the government's focus and energy are. We will be looking at the guidelines in due course. I thank the member for raising this in the context of timber products, which have an important role to play in sustainable building practices.

It is also important to note that our own existing Waste Management and Resource Recovery Act allows for more sustainable use of construction materials, including

recovering materials for re-use and recycling, after both the initial construction and the demolition of buildings.

I can advise the Assembly that when the provisions for sustainability guidelines were included in the Building Act 2004, it was because, in the absence of federal laws at the time to adequately protect rainforest from logging, the ACT government of the day was seeking to be able to address the use of rainforest timbers, should this become an issue. Subsequently, the commonwealth government established the Illegal Logging Prohibition Act, which prohibits both the import and the processing of illegally logged timber and timber products.

Under that act, people importing timber and timber products into Australia, and processors of domestically produced logs, are required to carry out due diligence to minimise the risk of illegally logged timber being present in supply chains. If a builder is importing materials directly, they need to make a customs declaration about their compliance with those due diligence requirements. This law effectively addressed the ACT government's concerns at the time, so sustainability guidelines under our own Building Act, as they were imagined then, were not pursued.

In 2004 there was very little focus on sustainability in the National Construction Code. Now, however, it is a core goal of the code. As the Minister for Building Quality Improvement, I will continue to champion the importance of a modern, useful and high standard national construction code. My directorate is looking at the issue of the sustainable use of building products and how we can tie together all of the various work that is giving effect to this. It will continue to monitor practices in the industry and look to create a guideline in due course.

Our primary focus, however, is on ensuring that the residents of the ACT have the highest quality buildings in Australia. This will be the government's primary focus in the Building Act. I do not make any apologies for that. I will be working to ensure that we have these built well and built in a sustainable way. Having them built well is my area of greatest effort and resolve at this time.

MR WALL (Brindabella) (4.28): I rise to speak to both the amendment and the original motion as amended. I am very pleased to hear Ms Cody's motion being brought into the Assembly today. As a carpenter in a previous life, I am very well aware of the benefits associated with using Australian forestry products in the construction industry and the renewable value that timber provides.

The Canberra Liberals acknowledge that planting trees is an effective way of improving environmental outcomes in terms of cost, ease and causing the least amount of disruption to Canberrans' way of life. We also acknowledge that wood from trees plays a significant role in construction. The use of timber has become a fashionable and premium option, especially as cities around the world are trying to construct buildings that are seen to be more sustainable.

However, let us not think for a moment that the use of timber in construction is a new concept. It has long been a staple of the building and construction industries. It is a

versatile material that is lightweight and that can be cut, shaped and used in almost any application imaginable. When used correctly, it is extremely strong.

The use of timber in construction has evolved over many years. It went from being the primary material used for buildings—framing and structural elements, as well as cladding—to being just one of many options. However, the use of materials that provide consistent and low-maintenance finishes at a lower cost over the lifetime of products has seen a decline in the use of wood, not to mention a need by the construction industry to develop products that are fast and cost-effective to install, particularly in an economy where skills are scarce and affordability and longevity are being demanded by consumers.

There are some great stories of how the use of timber is being showcased in our local area. Canberra itself now has two of Australia's largest mass timber construction buildings at the Kambri precinct at the ANU: the new Fenner Hall building and the Marie Reay Teaching Centre. The Kambri buildings are a great example of using timber construction on a large scale.

Whilst we acknowledge the benefits of timber construction, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the wood must be sourced from somewhere, and it is important that where trees are cut down they are replaced. Ms Cody notes in paragraph (1)(b) of her motion that forests and wood from these forests are a preferable source of energy when compared to fossil fuels.

The inclusion of this line in Ms Cody's motion today is potentially quite encouraging for many Canberrans. Perhaps it signals a change in policy direction in terms of the use of wood heaters as a renewable source of heating. This is one of the very few truly renewable sources of energy. It is bizarre that this line has made the cut in Ms Cody's motion. If the government endorses this view, why has it spent the last 14 years removing wood heaters from some 1,100 domestic homes as a source of heat generation? It is also worth noting that in many instances those wood heaters were removed with a subsidy being offered to install gas heaters. It shows that the environmental credentials of those opposite change from time to time.

It is also worth touching on Mr Rattenbury's comment about the impact of particulate matter. I have long advocated that the subsidy for the removal of wood heaters should be extended to encourage the replacement of much more efficient wood heaters. For many households, wood is one of the most affordable sources of heating in a Canberra winter. With the increasing cost of energy prices, particularly gas and electricity, I think it is pertinent that members on the opposite side consider the hip pocket of Canberrans and their ability to provide a comfortable living environment for their families. Many of the new wood heaters are far more efficient than the old smokers that exist in suburbs such as Tuggeranong, as Mr Rattenbury has touched on. As of this month, the new Australian standards require that wood heaters produce no more than 1.5 grams of particulate matter per kilo of fuel, which is around a 60 per cent efficiency, an evolutionary world of difference from the types of heaters that were installed across Canberra homes in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s.

Paragraph (2) of Ms Cody's motion congratulates the government for the proposed planting of Ingledene Forest. This is nothing more than hubris. This is the same government that has dragged its feet on tree planting, announcing initiatives like this only following an outcry from the community and industry, particularly in the face of the significant loss of trees that our city has faced. The problem was so bad that some commentators have estimated that Canberra was losing about 3,000 trees annually, trees that were not being replaced.

There have long been calls from the forestry industry for more trees to be planted, not just in the ACT but Australia wide, to mitigate future shortages in Australian-grown timber that are heading our way, not to mention the deficit that exists at the moment. We have about a \$2 billion annual trade deficit in timber products right now. This is what has prompted the need to import products from overseas, the same products that are being condemned in speeches by members opposite. The solution to this is to plant more trees and further grow a domestic industry.

Furthermore, some of the products that are currently being imported, as has rightly been mentioned, have question marks over their sustainability. They come from rainforests in other countries, they are not being replanted and they are destroying the habitat of many endangered species. A domestic sustainable timber industry is the best solution. We simply need to be growing more trees to meet future demand and have the ability to build more houses.

I have a couple of questions for Ms Cody and those on the government benches, on the back of this motion. There is food for thought as to whether this is a serious motion and not just political posturing. How much carbon is currently being stored in the ACT's plantation estates, and how much money has been made from timber sales over the past years? I understand that much of the ACT's timber goes to Tumut for processing. How much is actually processed here? How is any of this maximising job creation in the ACT, when there is a significant opportunity for value-add work being undertaken here within the ACT?

The national forest industry plan released last year talks about policy needs for forestry in the future. This plan talks about the need for one billion new trees to be planted over this decade to meet future demand. It estimates that some 18,000 jobs could be created if this were to happen. What is the ACT government doing to get its share of that potential employment, economic benefit and economic growth? The ACT needs to look to the future of the forestry industry in the ACT and focus on supporting and encouraging the building and construction industries to promote the use of sustainable forest products, as well as looking to develop the value-add industries in the ACT that could be supported by an enlarged forestry industry.

It is worth noting at this point that any changes in the use of sustainable or environmentally friendly products in construction that the government might seek to mandate must be weighed up and measured against the impact that they are likely to have on the cost of construction. The construction industry has largely steered away from the use of timber products in previous years because they are labour intensive to use and install, they are costly not just grow to but to process and there is unreliability

and inconsistency in the product once it is installed. And that is not to mention the ongoing maintenance requirements. With a busy lifestyle, people want less maintenance, fewer headaches and less worry about their buildings. That is why we have seen people favouring concrete-based products—bricks, precast concrete and cement-based cladding products—or aluminium in recent times.

For the government to go down this road and develop sustainability guidelines under the Building Act, it must balance any impact that this will have on increasing housing affordability in the ACT, the jurisdiction which currently has some significant problems when it comes to building low cost housing.

The opposition will not be supporting Mr Rattenbury's amendment, but we will be allowing the original motion to pass in its amended form. We look forward to seeing what further work the government does in this space. It needs to not just balance the skills and the expertise that exist within our local construction industry but also make sure that it does not have a detrimental effect on people seeking to purchase a home in the territory.

Amendment negatived.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Rental affordability

MR COE (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (4.38): I move:

That this Assembly:

(1) notes that:

- (a) after years of ACT Labor, thousands of Canberrans are priced out of the housing market;
- (b) according to Domain's June 2019 *State of the Market* report, the median rent in Canberra was \$550;
- (c) annual rent of more than \$28 000 is out of reach for many of Canberra's "working poor";
- (d) ACT Government rates and levies disproportionately impact poorer households; and
- (e) the Government's land supply, planning system and tax regime has stifled the supply of new rental properties; and

(2) calls on the Government to bring down the cost of renting in Canberra by:

- (a) stopping the unfair increases to rates and taxes;
- (b) bringing clarity and confidence to the planning system;
- (c) delivering certainty to the land supply; and
- (d) ensuring that the rate of construction of townhouses and free standing homes keeps pace with demand.

I come here on behalf of thousands of Canberrans who are struggling with the cost of living in this city, and so much of that is because of pain that has been imposed on them by the ACT Labor government. In particular, it is the rates, taxes, fees and charges that all compound to drive up the cost of living in this city.

Where it is absolutely evident is at any open home in the territory for a rental property; you have dozens of parties turning up, dozens of applications, with everybody desperate to get a property in Canberra. It just should not be that way. It should not be that we have an acute shortage of rental properties in the ACT. It should not be that we are driving people over the border into New South Wales because we in the ACT cannot support our own population. That is what it comes down to. We have a government that cannot support its own population.

There are thousands of people that are doing it tough because of the cost of rent in Canberra. It is so bad, in fact, that the ACT has the highest median rent in the country—more than Melbourne, more than Sydney, more than Perth and more than Adelaide. It is the highest in the country.

This is meant to be a planned city. We have a government that have been in power for 18 years and have had every single opportunity to deliver the Canberra that people expect. Instead, all they are doing is driving people over the border into New South Wales. Nobody has done more for the city of Queanbeyan than Andrew Barr. Nobody has done more for property prices over the border than Andrew Barr.

The reality is that this government is very happy to drive up the cost of living and to push poor families out of the ACT. We have working poor in this city. I am sure the government will come in here and try to respond with a public housing solution. That may well be part of a solution, but it is not solving the problem that is before us today, which is all about the working poor of Canberra.

How is it that Canberrans afford \$570 a week for a property? The idea of paying almost \$30,000 a year in after-tax income to get an average property in the ACT is what it has come down to—almost \$30,000 a year in after-tax income. This government is driving people into poverty. This government is sending families, sending kids, below the poverty line. After 18 years of Labor, this is what it has come to.

I am sure the government will have every excuse in the book as to why we are in this position, because they are masters at buck-passing, they are masters of deception and they are masters of deceit. What they are not masters of is looking after Canberra's poor, looking after the working poor, looking after the working families of the ACT. The truth is that the rates, taxes, fees and charges that this government put on every single household are, quite frankly, unbearable for many people. They are unbearable. They cannot pay them. They are absolutely unaffordable.

I am sure this government will now try to spin about us trying to help investors and giving a free kick to someone. The reality is that investors are not winning in the ACT either. The net return on investment property in the ACT very rarely stacks up.

Because of that, we are not getting much by way of supply of new rental properties either. There are no winners other than the ACT Labor-Greens government, who are raking in the cash as a result of their rates, taxes, fees and charges.

For a pretty average house with rates of about \$2½ thousand, it would then have a land tax of maybe \$3½ thousand—a \$6,000 bill before you get to the risk of owning that property, before you get to maintenance, before you get to the property management fee and before you get to the finance and the opportunity cost. That is why investors are deserting the ACT. That is why we have so few rental properties in Canberra. That is why rent is going up. It is quite straightforward.

Where it is particularly acute is in the freestanding housing market and in the townhouse market. There probably is a reasonable supply of apartments in certain parts of Canberra, but if you are trying to get a townhouse, a single-level townhouse or a freestanding home with a backyard, you are pretty hard-pressed in the ACT. They are the ones where you have dozens of people turning up for the open home and making applications.

There are some very practical things that the government can and should do. First of all, they should be abandoning their unfair, punitive rates and tax regime. The land tax and rates that this government imposes are driving so many people out of this market. At the very least this government should be freezing rates and taking the pressure off Canberra households.

Secondly, there needs to be some confidence in the planning system. There needs to be a regular supply of land so that the good builders of Canberra can build the housing stock that we desperately need. At the moment we do not have a territory plan. We just have a point-in-time description that is up for negotiation. Everything is negotiable about our Territory Plan. There is no certainty whatsoever with our Territory Plan. It is not a territory plan; it is a territory current land use description that gives no confidence about the future of this city in five, 10 or 20 years time.

We need to make sure that there is a steady land supply program, not one that goes in fits and bursts according to treasury demand for cash but one that actually meets the demands of a growing city. What is more, it is a predictably growing city. This government will talk about a surge in population; population growth in the ACT, at least since 2007, has been pretty constant. This government seems to be surprised by the population growth. They are not surprised when they get the money from stamp duty; they are not surprised when they get the money from rates, yet they seem to be surprised by the population growth. All of the figures seem to suggest that population growth as a trend has been pretty consistent.

Finally, we need to make sure that we are supporting the good builders of Canberra to bring online the housing stock that we desperately need. We do need more townhouses; we do need more units. We particularly need single-level units for an ageing population, and we need freestanding homes.

We on this side have no problems whatsoever with suburbia. We have no problem whatsoever with people striving to own a house on a block of land in the ACT. We do

not think it is unethical; we do not think it is immoral that somebody has a block of land in the ACT. Those opposite seem to think it is unethical and immoral, whilst at the same time they all own a piece of this very unethical and immoral land. Time after time we hear from those opposite that Canberra cannot keep growing forever. “We’ve got to stop the urban fringe.”

We on this side of the chamber simply want, for all Canberrans, the same opportunities that the 25 members of this place are afforded. It is not too much to ask. We actually think that the aspiration to have a block of land, to have a house, should not be a pipedream. We think it should be a reality. It used to be a reality. Now, for so many people in Canberra, they have simply given up hope.

We are confident that we can turn all of this around, but I am not confident that they are going to turn all of this around. I have no confidence that the Labor-Greens coalition will do anything other than what they have been doing for years; that is, gouging Canberrans. I very much hope that in the debate today we will get an epiphany from those opposite, an admission that they have driven up the cost of living, they have driven up the cost of land, they have driven up the cost of rent and they are going to change their ways, but I am not hopeful. I look forward to the contribution of those opposite.

MS LE COUTEUR (Murrumbidgee) (4.50): I move:

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

“(1) notes that:

- (a) thousands of Canberrans are priced out of the private rental housing market;
- (b) according to Domain’s June 2019 *State of the Market report*, the median rent in Canberra was \$550; and
- (c) an annual private rent of more than \$28 000 is out of reach for many on low incomes and people relying on Federal Government income support such as Newstart;

(2) further notes that the Federal Government is responsible for many of Australia’s housing affordability problems, for example:

- (a) as a result of Federal Government taxation policies and failures in banking regulations, Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra have suffered chronic house price inflation since 1999, putting buying a home out of reach of many;
- (b) the Federal Government no longer provides the historical level of financial support for states and territories to provide public housing and housing infrastructure, putting pressure on housing supply for the lowest income households; and
- (c) Newstart and Rent Assistance are too low to cover reasonable costs of living, including rents, for unemployed Australians;

(3) further notes that, within the limitations resulting from Federal Government policy, the ACT Government is taking action on housing affordability, including:

- (a) delivering on a 2016 election commitment to develop a new ACT housing strategy in October 2018;
 - (b) investing in public housing by:
 - (i) committing \$100 million to grow public housing;
 - (ii) completing the renewal of 1288 homes under the Public Housing Renewal Program; and
 - (iii) over the 10 years to 2024, investing more than \$1 billion in public housing and renewed approximately 20 percent of the portfolio;
 - (c) under the Labor/Greens Parliamentary Agreement, the Government has broadened its affordable housing land release targets to cover community and public housing, as well as both greenfield and urban renewal land releases;
 - (d) commencing a 'Housing Choices' review of planning rules to encourage supply of 'missing middle' housing such as townhouses; and
 - (e) seeking a waiver of historical housing debts from the Commonwealth Government to redirect the savings into social and affordable housing, in line with deals reached with Tasmania and South Australia over their housing debt to the Commonwealth;
- (4) further notes that, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the ACT's tax per capita is in line with the national average and significantly lower than New South Wales and Victoria;
- (5) calls on the ACT Government to further assist rental affordability by:
- (a) extending the pilot land tax concessions program for property owners who make properties available at less than 75 percent of the current market rate while keeping the cap at 100 properties until an evaluation of the program is done;
 - (b) providing certainty for the community housing sector to grow by including a four-year pipeline of community housing land release in the 2020/21 Indicative Land Release Program and pricing this land appropriately considering conditions of sale; and
 - (c) commencing community consultation on the first draft Territory Plan Variation under Housing Choices prior to the end of 2019; and
- (6) further calls on the parliamentary leaders of ACT Assembly parties to write a joint letter to the Prime Minister to support the waiver of historical housing debts from the Commonwealth Government.”.

The Greens cannot support Mr Coe's motion because it is wrong on the causes of housing unaffordability and therefore wrong on the solutions. I have to agree: housing is unaffordable for many people, particularly those who are renting. Rental vacancies are at near historical lows in the ACT, and of the rental properties that are available very few are affordable for those on lower incomes. The most recent Anglicare rental affordability snapshot on 23 March this year found only 22 individual properties in Canberra and Queanbeyan that were affordable for people living on income support payments without placing them in housing stress. Perhaps more surprisingly, only 2.4 per cent of rental vacancies were affordable for a family of four with two parents earning the minimum wage.

This is not unique to the ACT. These figures reflect a national trend highlighted by the Anglicare report, and that is the problem with this motion. It incorrectly draws a straight line between housing affordability and the ACT government's tax, planning and land supply policies. If it is all the ACT government's fault, how do you explain the situation in Sydney, Melbourne and Hobart? Across Australia hundreds of thousands of people are priced out of the housing market. The housing affordability crisis is instead a textbook example of market failure made worse by over two decades of federal government policy failure.

Australia has had chronic house price inflation since 1999. That was the year the Howard federal Liberal government introduced the 50 per cent capital gains tax discount which, coupled with negative gearing, turned housing into a speculative investment rather than a necessity of life. The sad and frustrating thing is that in 1999 groups like the Australian Council of Social Service and the Greens said the result of the capital gains tax change would be rapid house price inflation that priced out lower income people. That is exactly what has happened over the 20 years since.

There is also the fact that federal governments over the last three decades have let down low income Australians on funding for public housing. A proportion of Australians have never been able to afford decent housing on the private market. From World War II state and territory housing commissions around the country were mostly funded by the commonwealth. This funding built housing for those most in need, housing for working families and infrastructure for housing development.

Sadly, this federal funding is now much less generous. The 1984 agreement provided \$1.1 billion to state and territory governments. The Howard government decreased this funding to \$926 million in 1996 and \$898 million in 1988. The agreement which incorporates what used to be the supported accommodation assistance program is currently at \$1.6 billion a year. However, once inflation and population growth are accounted for, that is far less per capita than in 1989.

Then there is the historic housing debt. Some federal funding was in the form of low cost loans. In recent decades this debt has been packaged up in a way that means interest payments by state and territory governments will greatly exceed the principal repayment.

The ACT pays \$5 million a year in interest on these historic housing debts from before self-government and will do so until 2048. There is no option for us to pay it off early, even though it would be much cheaper to refinance the loans on the market. These historic housing debts are no longer low cost loans and should be either cancelled by the federal government or at least changed to allow refinancing, as was discussed in estimates extensively in a discussion led by Mr Coe. It is disappointing that this was not part of his motion.

Income support and rent assistance have also been whittled away by federal governments year after year. Indexation of most benefits, including Newstart, youth allowance and rent assistance, has been well below the costs actually faced by low income people. The result is that recipients of these benefits are unable to meet basic

costs of living such as housing, food and transport. As the Australian Council of Social Service said recently, the reality for people on Newstart is that they are living in deep financial crisis, which severely restricts their chance of finding paid work. There is now overwhelming community support for an increase to Newstart, including from the Reserve Bank, the Business Council of Australia, John Howard and Barnaby Joyce.

While we acknowledge that it is difficult to adequately respond to the housing affordability crisis with limited federal government financial support, the ACT government needs to act as best it can. The good news is that housing has been getting some local government attention. The housing strategy provides a useful framework for action. The recent ACT budget funding for 200 new public housing dwellings over five years is a start on what is required, but it is only a start. At 40 houses a year, it is not enough.

Housing renewal, though, is positive. Newer dwellings can be both better designed for current public housing residents and more energy efficient, which reduces utility bills. By 2024 around 20 per cent of the public housing stock will have been renewed. It is worth noting, however, that, unfortunately, the investment of \$1 billion in the 10 years to 2024 is largely coming from the sale of existing, well-located properties to fund new properties.

Through the parliamentary agreement the affordable housing target for land release has been expanded to include infill land release as well as community housing. I acknowledge that the government has responded to my criticism in previous years that affordable public and community housing was excluded from inner suburbs land release. This year even the first city to the lake land release includes affordable housing for sale and small amounts of community and public housing. This is very good.

I am most critical, though, of the limited growth in public housing stock. The ACT currently has around seven per cent of all dwellings as public housing. To maintain that we need to grow the public housing stock by roughly one dwelling a day. I acknowledge that this is difficult to do with the grossly inadequate federal government financial support. However, growth of 40 dwellings per year is far too little.

Mr Coe's motion partly blames housing unaffordability on problems of land release and restrictive planning rules. This is very hard to justify if you look at national housing data, which shows synchronised surges and drops in housing prices in most capital cities including Canberra. Unless there is some secret agreement between state and territory ministers to simultaneously restrict land supply, the argument does not stack up.

Similarly, a couple of years ago when some lobby groups were arguing that there was a national shortage of dwellings, the most respected researchers in the field, at the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute, found that there was actually an oversupply. There was just a mismatch of supply for demand. This does not mean that there is nothing that the ACT government should do. Our planning rules currently

discourage the building of smaller, more affordable houses such as dual occupancies, duplexes and townhouses. This is a big problem for older people who are looking for somewhere more manageable than a whole suburban block but who would like a small garden and definitely would not like steps.

We need to find ways to build smaller, more affordable houses while at the same time protecting Canberra's garden city character. The best way to do this is through planning changes that reduce the amount of block that can be built over and protect trees and houses while at the same time encourage smaller houses such as duplexes and townhouses. It is possible on the basis of Mr Coe's speech that we are in agreement on this one. The government started the housing choices process to fix this problem in early 2018, but the community has seen no progress for almost 12 months. This process needs to get back on track.

I will now talk about the calls in paragraphs (5) and (6) of my amendment. I have designed these to be both worthy and supportable by—I hope—both the Labor and Liberal parties. I acknowledge that they are only modest changes. There is, of course, a lot more I would like to do, but I was trying with these calls to land on things the Assembly could agree on that we really could do to improve the supply of affordable housing in the ACT. Supporting the community housing sector to grow represents good value for government investment, and there is considerably more the government could do in this area.

Paragraph (5)(a) calls on the government to extend the pilot land tax concession program. This program has support from across the Assembly, but I am concerned that in its current form it is being set up to fail. The two-year limit on the trial will limit uptake. Landlords will only be able to offer limited leases and they will in general be forced to evict their current tenants and move to a community housing provider as their property manager. Then they will not know what they are going to do at the end of the two-year period, which would be getting down to a 19-month period. It really is not going to work for a landlord. I know only about a dozen houses have been rented via this program and I think that is the major reason why.

Paragraph (5)(b) deals with creating a four-year pipeline of land release to community housing providers so that they can plan for the future and Canberra can attract interstate providers. Paragraph (5)(c) tries to get the housing choices process back on track or at least started. A lot of work was done by many members of the community and, I am sure, ACTPLA to look at things we can do in Canberra that will have community acceptance to improve the affordability and environmental and social sustainability of our housing stock, and a degree of consensus was reached. That is what the housing choices process did.

It would benefit younger people and older people looking for smaller, more affordable homes, as well as the building industry. I am really hopeful that both the ALP and the Liberal Party can support this. My understanding is that the Master Builders Association would like to see the housing choices process back on track for the reasons I have just spoken about.

Finally, I am proposing a letter from Mr Barr, Mr Rattenbury and Mr Coe to the Prime Minister asking for relief on the historic housing debt or at the very least an agreement that the ACT can refinance on the open market. As I mentioned earlier, Mr Coe asked a lot of questions about this debt in the estimates hearing. I am hopeful that this is a sign that he is interested in talking to his federal colleagues about how this could be waived. This would be in the best interests of the ACT.

I hope Mr Coe will support this letter, because I know it would have a lot more weight with his federal colleagues if he supported it, rather than if it were just supported by the Labor Party and the Greens. Even if the Chief Minister signed such a letter, in this instance the signature of the Leader of the Opposition would have a lot more weight.

I take the Leader of the Opposition quite seriously as being concerned about affordable housing in the ACT. One of the most obvious ways to do it is—like Jacqui Lambie just achieved for Tasmania and previously the South Australian government achieved—waiving the historic housing debt of the territory to the federal government. If that came with some conditions about increased investment in housing, that would seem to be basically a good idea.

I am afraid the Greens cannot support Mr Coe's motion unamended because we think it wrongly places the blame for housing unaffordability on the ACT government. It is a national problem. The ACT government has only a small role in this. The ACT government does not determine federal taxation policies. Whatever you say about the ACT government, it does not determine population policies.

I have put forward an amendment that highlights the role of the federal government in this issue. My amendment proposes four modest actions that would make a small but positive difference. While I would like to do more, the actions I have proposed are intended to be politically acceptable to both the Labor Party and the Liberal Party. Given this, I welcome support from all members of the Assembly who are interested in affordable housing for the people of Canberra, and I think that has got to be all members of the Assembly.

MR PARTON (Brindabella) (5.05): Ms Le Couteur is right in regard to a number of things in her amendment, but we will not be supporting it. It is impossible to get away from the fact that this government's land supply, planning system and tax regime are the major drivers of housing affordability in the ACT. One thing that is different from all the other jurisdictions that Ms Le Couteur spoke of is that this government is in control of the land supply and the planning, which of course is not the case in all those other jurisdictions.

There is no question about the fact that this government's land supply, planning system and tax regime are the major drivers of housing unaffordability in the ACT. I know it. Mr Coe knows it. Mr Stanhope knows it. Mr Stanhope and Mr Ahmed have been trumpeting from the rooftops this very fact. The former Labor Chief Minister has been articulating very clearly and very loudly that so many of the problems that we see in this space are caused by the manipulation of the market by this government. Again, this is the place where the government has all the levers in

terms of supply and planning. It is impossible for us to support this motion with that undeniable fact stripped away from it.

I can understand why Ms Le Couteur does not want that undeniable fact in this motion. I can understand why she wants to just look the other way, because that is what the Greens have done ever since they jumped into bed with Labor in this curious ongoing power-sharing agreement. The Greens are happy to run a protection racket for Labor. They are happy to just sit back and watch it all happen, because the Greens are complicit. This housing affordability crisis is a result of planning initiatives and planning policies that have been adopted by Labor and the Greens. The unfair rates and charges are also a product of this Labor-Greens government. If I were Ms Le Couteur I would not want anyone talking about it either. I would look the other way.

Let us have a look at some nuts and bolts here. We went to Allhomes to look at homes for sale in the ACT. We found a place at Wanniasa. It is not really pertinent for me to mention the address. It is a three-bedroom house and it is for sale at \$509,000. That is quite reasonable. We have done the sums on the rates and land tax bill. They come in at just under \$5,000 per annum. That equates to \$95 per week. It is 95 bucks per week before we get started. Let us say the investment loan to purchase the property sees the investor borrowing \$400,000. Over 30 years, with variable rate payments going to both the principal and the interest, we are talking about \$1,794 per month. That equates to \$414 per week. Before we start, we have got outgoing costs of \$509 per week. We have not factored in maintenance. We have not factored in agents' fees. We have not factored in the risk.

I want to know how on earth anyone is going to offer this property to market at \$500 per week. They are not going to. They cannot. They just cannot. The mathematics say that it is not possible. The numbers do not lie. Landlords are not making a fortune here in the ACT. In fact, many of them are barely breaking even or are running things at a loss. The biggest reasons for that are the government's land supply, planning system and tax regime.

Ms Le Couteur can try to deflect as much as she likes, and I am sure that Ms Berry will nod quietly and roll with this amendment. You can guarantee that it will get up. Of course it will get up. And you can guarantee that once again the ACT community will be duded because the Greens are successfully riding shotgun for their Labor mates. Ms Le Couteur can glare up towards the house on the hill and she can suggest that all the solutions are to be found up there with the feds, but it is simply not the case.

Investors are pulling out of the market and skipping over to New South Wales. I should point out that over the border in New South Wales they are dealing with the very same federal taxation policies as we are. All you have got to do is talk to any real estate agent about their rent roll and the fact that it is reducing on a week-by-week basis and ask them where these people are actually investing their money. They are just skipping over the border. Newstart is the same in Queanbeyan. It is exactly the same. The federal policies are exactly the same. It is not holding them back.

In her speech Ms Le Couteur referred to house and rent prices in Sydney and Melbourne. They are markets that simply cannot be compared to Canberra. The only true comparison is land and rent prices immediately over the border. The people we are losing are skipping over the border. They are buying houses at Googong and Murrumbateman. We are losing their land purchase price, we are losing their ongoing rates and we are losing their stamp duty—because of course it is still going gangbusters, the old stamp duty, is it not? But they are still using all our services. It is a pretty good deal, is it not? It is a pretty good deal.

There are some aspects of the Le Couteur amendment that we could have, on another day, lent support to, but the fact is that it hijacks the original motion and completely changes it. No, I am sorry—we are not there.

Visitor

MADAM SPEAKER: I recognise and welcome Mr Pratt, who has come back to the Assembly. Enjoy your time here, as we all do.

Rental affordability

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women) (5.11): I am glad to have the chance to speak to Ms Le Couteur’s amendment to Mr Coe’s motion today and the work being done by the ACT government to increase social and affordable housing in the ACT.

Last year I launched the ACT housing strategy, which sets out a plan for the government and the community to follow, providing more affordable long-term housing for Canberrans who need it. At the summit and throughout the consultations leading up to the strategy the government heard from people from across the housing and community sector and discussed the challenges that Canberra faced. They are not unique and are not just occurring in the ACT; they are also occurring in capital cities all across the country.

Canberra is a growing city, and more and more people are moving and staying here. On most measures, Canberra is one of the most affordable cities in Australia, but our higher than average incomes hide the challenges some people face in finding long-term affordable housing. This is where government action and the housing strategy come in. The strategy reflects an overarching vision which is reinforced by five strategic goals, from reducing homelessness to affordable ownership, covering the full housing spectrum.

In the year since I launched the strategy, I can report that the government has made good progress on its implementation. I look forward to providing a more detailed update about that soon. For now, I highlight some of the government’s key achievements in relation to social and affordable housing and outline why it is crucial that we continue to work together with the community to raise the bar, delivering

outcomes that strengthen housing assistance and increase affordability across Canberra.

Around seven per cent of ACT households are in some form of social housing. The ACT has the highest ratio of public housing in the country, and each year the ACT government provides around \$144 million in rental subsidies to tenants in public housing, which provides a long-term affordable home for many families.

To provide more people with the opportunity of an affordable home, the government announced a commitment to grow and renew public housing by investing an additional \$100 million into the public housing portfolio over five years. This program will grow the public housing portfolio by at least 200 additional homes and provide homes for more people who need it. It will rebuild or replace more than 1,000 existing older properties to help improve quality of life for our tenants and ensure that the houses are more sustainable and affordable to live in. This is the biggest per capita investment in public housing in the country. If all states and territories made the same amount of investment, there would be an extra \$6 billion put into public housing.

The government is also making more land available for social and affordable housing, with 15 per cent of all land releases, both infill and greenfield, being set aside for public, community and affordable home purchase. With over 15,600 new homes planned for release over the next four years, a significant amount is being set aside for affordable housing. Expressions of interest for new affordable and community housing blocks in Taylor are currently open for builders and community housing providers to bring their proposals to build this new affordable housing for Canberra.

Under the housing strategy, the affordable housing innovation fund is bringing new ideas and projects that have been successful in other parts of the country to Canberra. The ACT government provided funding to Community Housing Canberra to start HomeGround, a not-for-profit real estate agency that will manage homes on behalf of property investors providing affordable rentals for Canberrans who need it. A similar program run by the YWCA, called Rentwell, has also started, targeted towards older women, who are more likely to find themselves without a secure home, and with lower amounts of savings and superannuation. I ask anyone in this chamber or anyone they know to consider participating in this program to provide more affordable housing for people in our city. In recognition of this contribution, the ACT government will exempt properties who participate in programs like these from land tax, in line with the arrangements with other community housing properties.

In relation to community housing, the ACT government has committed to growing community housing in partnership, on projects that provide that social mix and better outcomes for tenants. One hundred and fifty-one more homes will be added to community housing and will provide more affordable rentals for eligible Canberrans. The first of these projects is for 33 units in Kaleen, which is to be part of a mixed public and community housing complex with 66 units overall.

Another project, in partnership with community housing, will be Common Ground Dickson. Last week, I joined with Minister Stephen-Smith and Diane Kargas Bray from the Common Ground board to launch the pre-DA consultation for the designs

and plans for the development of the former Downer Club site in Dickson. Greg, a resident from Common Ground Gungahlin, joined us for the launch. As the second tenant in Gungahlin, it was great to see the changes that have happened in his life with the stability and security that have come from being a part of Common Ground. I look forward to the completion of this project and have joined with the Common Ground board to call on all the community, builders and businesses to be a part of this special project.

These are just some of the actions that have been happening under the housing strategy over the last year. I look forward to updating the Assembly further on its progress.

The Chief Minister and I are pursuing a waiver of relief from the commonwealth for the historic housing debts dating back to self-government. The Chief Minister has written to the Prime Minister on this matter and I have written to the federal housing minister in support. The \$13.4 million paid per year, \$115 million in total, that is paid to the federal government would be much better redirected into more social and affordable housing here in the ACT. In line with the deal that Tasmania has struck, the ACT government is hopeful for a similar deal for the ACT. We look forward to Mr Coe's support in encouraging the federal government to change its mind and to waive our \$115 million housing loan.

In relation to Mr Coe's original motion and the support for people on lower incomes, I have outlined a number of actions being taken under the strategy to support people who need it and get them into a safe and affordable home. ACT Labor and the Labor Party more generally are keen to ensure that people in the ACT and across the country get the chance to live a decent life, that they have a wage that they can live off to buy food, pay rent, and study or work.

Mr Parton mentioned in his speech that we are trying to pass blame to the federal government. Certainly if the federal government could support the people that Mr Coe referred to in his speech, the working poor in our city, by making sure that there was an increase in Newstart, that would be a wonderful start for the federal government's support for poorer people in the ACT and a real sign that Mr Coe and the Canberra Liberals actually cared about these people in our city.

The federal government could be taking great steps to boost the wages of thousands of low paid workers as well by restoring penalty rates that were cut over the last two years. Those Canberrans who are working in our shops, bars and restaurants, who are giving up weekends to run the services that we all use, have had their pay cut. I call on the leader of the Canberra Liberals to join with ACT Labor and the Greens, if they wish, to write to the federal government to return penalty rates to low paid workers in the ACT, to increase Newstart to a level that people can actually survive on, and to ask the federal government to remove the ACT government's housing loan so that we can make a real difference to the working poor in the ACT. I support Ms Le Couteur's amendment to Mr Coe's motion.

MS LAWDER (Brindabella) (5.20): I would like to make a few brief remarks in this debate. I would like to thank Mr Coe for bringing this motion to the Assembly today.

I have always felt that homelessness and housing are like two sides of the same coin. Affordable housing, whether it is purchased or rental, is a big part of that. But there is no doubt that the government of the day—in this case the Labor-Greens government—hold many of the policy levers, and they can influence and control many of the structural elements that are making housing so unaffordable in the ACT.

Mr Coe referred to the fact that the Chief Minister, Andrew Barr, has done more for Queanbeyan than many other people. At this point I would like to commend Tim Overall and his colleagues for all that they have done for Queanbeyan, because many people understand that life is more affordable in Queanbeyan, New South Wales.

I noticed today that Mix 106 in Canberra, who do a suburb song every few weeks, have done one about Queanbeyan. It mentions the fact that you move to Queanbeyan because life is so much cheaper there. They say, “Go there and buy a house; you’ll be much better off.” That is not verbatim but that is what this suburb song says about Queanbeyan versus the ACT today. Save money; go to Queanbeyan. Is that what we want? No, of course that is not what we want.

We want people to stay in Canberra. We want a vibrant Canberra where people are paying their taxes, albeit far too much in taxes, fees, rates and charges—far too much. Even if they are paying that amount, or less, they would be spending it here in the ACT, not across the border in Queanbeyan, in New South Wales. This is the message I would like to get across: we are losing those people. We are losing their disposable income that they would be spending in the ACT. These are people, the working poor who obviously can manage in Queanbeyan. They cannot manage in Canberra but they can manage in Queanbeyan. Why is that? It is because the cost of living is less. People in Canberra, who are paying the highest rents in the country—higher than Sydney, higher than Melbourne—are struggling because they have far less income to spend on other things that they need.

They are in housing stress; indeed, in many cases, they are in housing crisis. These are the things that we need to address here in the ACT. The government has control of those levers: land supply, planning and the tax regime, as Mr Coe spelled out in his motion.

Once again I commend Mr Coe for his motion today. I absolutely agree that we are forcing people out of Canberra after years of ACT Labor. Thousands of people in the lower quintile, and even the lower two quintiles, are being forced out of our beautiful city because of the fees, charges, rates and taxes, and the policy decisions of this government, which make housing, whether purchasing, or, in this instance, renting, so unaffordable. I would like to thank Mr Coe for moving this motion today.

MR COE (Yerrabi—Leader of the Opposition) (5.24): Once again we have seen another demonstration of the Labor Party and the Greens teaming up to deny reality and to blame the federal Liberal government, because that is how they roll. We hear all the time from Mick Gentleman that everything is Tony Abbott’s fault; everything is Mr Abbott’s fault. Now, of course, after 18 years of Labor, somehow it is Mr Morrison’s fault that we have the housing crisis that we have. It has nothing to do with this government’s land supply, nothing to do with their planning system, nothing

to do with rates, land tax and all of the other disincentives to providing properties to the market. It is a delusional government which, after 18 years, do not accept responsibility for the city that they govern.

My colleague Ms Lawder was absolutely spot-on when she made mention of Kristen, Nige and Kate and their song this morning, because they were spot-on. Everyone but the Labor Party knows that you can get a better deal in Queanbeyan. Andrew Barr may as well be the New South Wales, or Queanbeyan, minister for economic development, because he is doing a great job; he is doing a superb job. He is doing a pretty good job of driving people to Murrumbateman and to Sutton, and to Queanbeyan as well. The reality is that there is no reason why land seven or eight kilometres that way should be so much cheaper than land on this side of the border.

As Mr Parton said, these people are still going to use our hospitals, they are still going to use our schools and they are still going to use our roads. Why don't we harness this growth in the ACT? Why is it that those opposite seem so determined to drive people over the border? It makes me wonder what their dream for Canberra really is. It makes me wonder what their vision is for Canberra in 10 or 20 years time. It certainly does not seem to be one of suburbia, it does not seem to be one of family and it does not seem to be one for the working poor.

They talk about the difficulty this government is having in attracting bus drivers in the ACT. They talk about the problems of getting somebody to drive a bus on the weekend. This sort of problem will only increase in the ACT if we keep pricing them out of Canberra. With respect to the services that we depend on, all of the hardworking people of Canberra who deliver services for people in this building are being absolutely rejected by Labor and the Greens.

We do not think that it is unreasonable that somebody should strive to have their own house. We do not think that it is unreasonable that somebody can afford to rent in this city. What we do think is suboptimal is to have people move into public housing as their only option. We need to have social housing. We need to have that safety net. But we should not be actively trying to push people into social housing. That should be the housing of last resort. Instead this government's policy is driving more and more people below the poverty line. Median rents of \$550, \$560 or \$570 a week, nearing \$30,000 a year in post-tax income, are absolutely outrageous.

It is absolutely outrageous that after 18 years of Labor they have priced the working poor out of the national capital. There is no denying this fact. The Labor Party claim to be socially progressive. The Labor Party claim to be one for workers. They are not. The Labor Party are for elites. They are an intolerant Labor Party that only stand for people with their very narrow world view. They are not a Labor Party that are welcoming of thousands of Canberrans who are doing it tough.

As Mr Parton mentioned, Ms Le Couteur's amendment does have some reasonable points, but, of course, in amongst them are many unreasonable points, and if she were serious about trying to get a tripartisan amendment up, surely she would have left out all of the political attacks on the federal government and/or the Liberal Party. It shows that this government, including the Greens, have no genuine response to the housing

crisis that we have in the ACT. They think that by somehow getting a \$100 million lump sum in the ACT it will make rent cheaper. Are you going to start doling out that \$100 million in rental subsidies? Is that the plan?

Ms Berry: It would be better if we had it—

MR COE: Is that the plan?

Ms Berry: We would rather have it in our pockets than the feds’.

MR COE: The solution here is: get \$100 million in her pocket, as she said—

Ms Berry: Oh, come on! Madam Speaker, a point of order.

MADAM SPEAKER: A point of order, Ms Berry?

Ms Berry: Madam Speaker, that is an outrageous verballing of me. That is not what I said, and he should withdraw it immediately.

Members interjecting—

Ms Berry: They are all laughing at me; this is great.

MADAM SPEAKER: Please sit down. I will take your point of order. Mr Coe, you were sailing very close to the wind, so be very mindful of your language.

MR COE: Sure; I will, Madam Speaker, and I will note that the interjection was, “It’s better in our pocket rather than theirs,” then to deny—

Ms Berry: The ACT government’s.

MR COE: Then to deny that it is their pocket is pretty interesting. But the reality—

MADAM SPEAKER: You need to be mindful that there should be no inference, though, Mr Coe. Thank you.

MR COE: I will be mindful, but she did say “our pockets”.

MADAM SPEAKER: There is no need to labour the point. Thank you, Mr Coe.

Ms Berry: You are such a clever guy.

MR COE: Thanks, Ms Berry. The reality is that a \$100 million lump sum is not going to do anything for private rentals in the ACT. It will do nothing at all.

Ms Berry interjecting—

MR COE: Therefore—

Ms Lawder: A point of order, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: Ms Lawder.

Ms Lawder: I am trying to listen to Mr Coe; Ms Berry keeps interjecting and I am finding it difficult to hear.

MADAM SPEAKER: Thank you. Everyone knows my thoughts on interjections. Mr Coe, continue.

MR COE: Madam Speaker, to get an economics lesson from the Deputy Chief Minister is pretty much the very reason that we are in the crisis that we are in right now, because it is a government that does not understand demand and supply, it does not understand the housing market and it does not understand the pain that thousands of Canberrans are enduring on a daily basis because of the rates, taxes, fees and charges that this government is imposing on them.

It is unfair, and the Canberra Liberals will keep fighting for these people. We will keep fighting for them because those on that side of the chamber are not. Those on that side of the chamber are far more interested in pursuing their own pet projects than they are in making the aspirations of tens of thousands of people in Canberra a reality. They are governing for themselves, not for the people they are meant to represent.

After 18 years of Labor, we have 35,000 people living below the poverty line. There are 8,000 children living below the poverty line in the ACT after two decades of Labor. For them to deny that there is a housing problem in the ACT speaks to just how out of touch, how disrespectful and how arrogant this government have become.

Amendment agreed to.

Original question, as amended, resolved in the affirmative.

Adjournment

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

That the Assembly do now adjourn.

ACT library membership

MS LE COUTEUR (Murrumbidgee) (5.34): I rise today to speak about an issue that was raised with Assembly members by a person who lives in Gundagai. This person has given me permission to share his story. He is a visually impaired person looking to borrow audio books from the ACT library system. You might well say, "It's not our responsibility to provide a New South Wales resident with access to such resources." I would like to remind us all that Canberra, aside from being the nation's capital, is a large regional centre surrounded by New South Wales. Many New South Wales residents actively contribute to the prosperity of our region and many New South Wales residents work in Canberra. We had some discussion on this in the last motion.

The New South Wales government has sought to improve travel access to Canberra to enable New South Wales residents to take advantage of the services provided in the larger regional centre that is Canberra. In April this year they announced a trial coach service linking Cootamundra, Junee, Wagga and Gundagai to Canberra. This is because they recognise that Canberra, as a large regional centre, has facilities that do not exist in smaller New South Wales towns.

This gentleman was refused membership of Libraries ACT. In seeking a response from Libraries ACT, this gentleman was told that since ACT taxpayers fund the ACT library system they should receive the primary benefit of ACT library services. This decision to refuse to accept Mr Morton as a member of Libraries ACT was made in accordance with the Libraries ACT membership and loans policy, which clearly sets out in section 2:

Library membership is freely available to all persons who live, work or study in the ACT, and who provide adequate proof of identity and residential address. Library members must produce their library card to borrow items.

Residents of NSW who live within 50km of the ACT border may be accepted for membership. We are unable to otherwise accept membership applications from interstate or overseas.

This is justified by Libraries ACT on the grounds that ACT taxpayers fund the services provided by Libraries ACT and so should receive the primary benefit of the services, and that this is applied throughout Australia. Supposedly solutions concerning access to particular library resources are mitigated by interlibrary loans. I have checked on the availability of interlibrary loans, only to find they cost \$16.50 for each item. For a person with a disability, this is prohibitive. Even asking for a waiver of such costs would be more expensive than the library simply granting the person membership.

In all seriousness, how can the cost of this impact negatively on Canberra's economy? The issue for this person is, as I said at the beginning, that he is a visually impaired person. He wants to borrow audio books from the ACT library system. He does not have a library near him closer than ours that he can borrow these books from. While the rules exist, often for good reasons, there needs to be some exception for individual circumstances. We currently make exceptions for New South Wales residents who study or work in the ACT but not for New South Wales residents who are disabled and would benefit from accessing a greater range of resources.

It is clear in this instance that the ACT government regards extending library borrowing rights to a visually impaired person who only asked for the same borrowing rights that are currently afforded to New South Wales residents who either study or work in the ACT as being an unreasonable financial burden on the ACT. I just cannot see how we can think this is the case. The ACT is supposed to be a human rights compliant jurisdiction. Given that, we can do better.

I encourage the ACT government and Libraries ACT to find some humanity and to grant this person membership of Libraries ACT so he can become more engaged and

connected to the community in which he lives, the society in which he lives. He lives in a place in New South Wales without a big enough library to provide this service. Surely we could provide this service to our fellow human being, or at least Libraries ACT could give him a hearing.

Reclink Australia football match

MS CHEYNE (Ginninderra) (5.39): Growing up in Queensland, I have always been more of a Rugby League fan, but for one Sunday earlier this month I was happy to switch codes and support Australian Rules for the Reclink Community Cup at Jamison Oval. For the third year in a row the Community Cup pitted the Lime Stones, a team of local musicians and supporters, against the Noise, made up of media or former media personalities, in a footy game to raise money in support of Reclink.

Despite the wind, it was a fantastic day full of AFL, live music, a healthy dose of rivalry and plenty of dogs. I attended with my own dog, Bailey, and my other little Italian greyhound house guest, Echo. It was great to be out and about in the community speaking to spectators and cheering loudly for both teams. I was very torn on who to support.

The game was a lively one with a strong turnout of enthusiastic spectators dressed in their team's colours. True to their name, the Noise's players and supporters were very loud, but the Lime Stones were determined not to be outdone. The commentators did a great job of amping up the ground, adding lots of laughs, energy and vibrancy to the atmosphere.

I was impressed by how many players were in each team, a testament to the strong support for Reclink. Some players had never kicked a footy before and others were AFL veterans, but everybody was displaying their generosity, keen to support the good cause. No matter their ability, each player gave it their all. The final quarter was a nailbiter.

The Lime Stones narrowly won by three points, with the final score 52 points to 49. It is clear the media team and their supporters were disappointed. The Lime Stones remain undefeated. Despite this unfortunate streak, everyone was in good spirits because at the end of the day it was all for charity. Commiserations go to Mr Parton, who played valiantly for the Noise despite a very painful injury, and very special credit goes to stellar umpire Mr Rattenbury.

The cup was not all about footy. Local musicians participated on and off the field, providing excellent pre-game and half-time entertainment. The crowd enjoyed special appearances by the Burley Griffin, the Barren Spinsters, Hope Wilkins, Mixtape Chorus and Babyfreeze.

Music and footy aside, the biggest win of the day was the \$5,000 raised for the very good cause Reclink. Reclink provides sport and art programs to disadvantaged Australians across the country. Through these programs, Reclink is improving health, social and economic outcomes for people who are experiencing mental illness,

disability, substance abuse issues, addiction, homelessness and social and economic hardship. This is making a tangible difference in people's lives.

I conclude by putting on the record my thanks to the organisers, in particular the co-captain of the Lime Stones, Chris Endrey, who goes to an extraordinary effort to make it and the lead-up to it a real festival of spirit. Here's to next year's cup.

Mirjana Wilson—tribute

MS BERRY (Ginninderra—Deputy Chief Minister, Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development, Minister for Housing and Suburban Development, Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Women) (5.43): Madam Speaker, today I take the chance to use this adjournment to acknowledge Mirjana Wilson, who has been working as the Domestic Violence Crisis Service CEO for the past seven years and has been employed there for the past 15 years.

DVCS provides support to members of the ACT community who have experienced intimate partner domestic and family violence and those who have been engaged in it and want it to stop. Mirjana steps down after successfully leading DVCS through a period of significant change and transition to a holistic service provider for all of those affected by domestic and family violence. DVCS is more than just a crisis delivery organisation, because the entire family affected by domestic and family violence can access support.

On domestic and family violence and Mirjana's work at the service, Mirjana was interviewed for the *Canberra Times* when she announced her retirement. She was frank—as we all know Mirjana can be—and to the point. She said:

We need to call it out and name it openly, and make it a priority to identify those men who use violence ... But equally we need to better understand why they do it.

Seeking a career change from education 15 years ago, Ms Wilson joined the non-government not-for-profit support service firstly as a front-line counsellor. She quickly rose up the ranks. She says that there needs to be a holistic response. She said:

I got a bit sick of mopping up the damage ... I thought what else can we do here if we just work in the pointy crisis end all the time and just respond to people who are in immediate crisis?

We still need to do that and we do it very well, but what about the people who use violence?

So we've expanded into that area, as well as others such as providing long term therapeutic support for children that have witnessed violence in their families.

On Mirjana Wilson's work with the ACT government, in my time as Minister for Women and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, Mirjana Wilson has been an incredible and very knowledgeable sounding board in providing

her expertise in assisting the government to develop domestic and family violence policy as well as an incredible program, the room for change program, where perpetrators are supported to change their behaviour and women and their families are supported to stay safely in their home. That is a nation-leading approach.

I am very proud to have been able to work with Mirjana to provide that program to the ACT community and continue that important work. It goes very much to building the fence at the top of the hill, at the top of the cliff, so that we can stop people falling off, hoping not to be the ambulance picking up and cleaning up the mess at the bottom. That is the challenge and the way ahead that Mirjana saw a couple of years ago when she came to the government with the idea for that program.

The DVCS board chair, Judy Putt, said that the organisation was indebted to Ms Wilson for her commitment, courage and leadership. I absolutely concur with those statements.

Mirjana was nominated for the 2017 Australian of the year award in the ACT and was winner of the 2016 ACT violence prevention woman of the year.

I thank Mirjana for her support and service to the ACT community. I acknowledge the significant change she has made and contributed to in the domestic and family violence space. I look forward to continuing to work with her in whatever role she chooses in supporting victims, changing behaviour for perpetrators and supporting children in our community.

Question resolved in the affirmative.

The Assembly adjourned at 5.48 pm.