



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

Wednesday, 24 November 2021

This is an **EDITED PROOF TRANSCRIPT** of question time proceedings that is subject to further checking. Members' suggested corrections for the official *Weekly Hansard* should be lodged with the Hansard office as soon as possible. Answers to questions on notice will appear in the *Weekly Hansard*.

Wednesday, 24 November 2021

Ministerial arrangements	1
Questions without notice:	
COVID-19 pandemic—testing fees.....	1
COVID-19 pandemic—testing fees.....	2
Legislation—religious discrimination	4
COVID-19 pandemic—testing fees.....	5
COVID-19 pandemic—testing fees.....	6
Health—digital health records.....	7
Planning—ACT Planning System Review and Reform Project update.....	9
ACT Corrective Services—detainee transfers.....	10
Canberra—cost of living	11
COVID-19 pandemic—testing fees.....	13
Municipal services—Yerrabi Pond and Lake Tuggeranong	14
ACT Insurance Authority—actuarial staff	15
Planning—housing choices	16

Ministerial arrangements

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

Questions without notice COVID-19 pandemic—testing fees

MRS JONES: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, this morning on ABC radio you confirmed that Canberrans are being charged \$112 if they require a certificate for COVID testing. You also said that Canberrans are being turned away if they are there for domestic travel. The national partnerships agreement clearly states that the federal and territory governments will foot the bill fifty-fifty if Canberrans are required to have a COVID test for state or government reasons. Why is the government profiteering from this by charging Canberrans \$112 for tests that are meant to be free?

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

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

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

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

Mrs Jones: Point of order. The question was about why people are being turned away;

it was not about the certificates. The Minister has still not answered. The whole question is about why they were being turned away when they needed a test.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

COVID-19 pandemic—testing fees

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Legislation—religious discrimination

MR DAVIS: My question is to the Minister for Human Rights and it relates to religious discrimination protections in the ACT. The religious discrimination bill has today been put before the federal parliament and this has caused genuine and considerable concern among human rights advocates. In 2016, my colleague Shane Rattenbury amended the ACT Discrimination Act to protect people of religious faith here in the ACT. Can the minister describe how the ACT currently protects people of religious faith while also ensuring the rights of other minorities are safeguarded?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

COVID-19 pandemic—testing fees

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

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

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

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

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

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

matter in terms of how ACT Pathology operates.

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

COVID-19 pandemic—testing fees

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

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

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

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Milligan, a supplementary.

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

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: Canberra Health Services is working through a process

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

MRS JONES: A supplementary.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mrs Jones.

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

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

Health—digital health records

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The ability for patients to enter their data digitally is very valuable and means the COVID-19 care at home team have more time to keep in touch with patients while they are at home. The use of the MyDHR system in this way is in the early stages, but it is already proving beneficial to clinicians and consumers alike. So having seen a small

amount of the functionality in MyDHR, Canberrans and health services clinicians should be really excited about the opportunities ahead for the broader digital health record rollout in late 2022, which of course is all about delivering better care closer to home.

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

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

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

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

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

Planning—ACT Planning System Review and Reform Project update

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

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

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

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

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

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

ACT Corrective Services—detainee transfers

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

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

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

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

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

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

MR GENTLEMAN: There has been some advice to me in regard to concerns from

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

Canberra—cost of living

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

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

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

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

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

MR BARR: The cost of living analysis is undertaken and published in the budget each

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

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

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

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

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

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson!

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

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson! Stop.

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

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: You are warned, Mr Hanson.

Opposition members interjecting—

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

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

COVID-19 pandemic—testing fees

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

that certificate, there was a charge associated with that, as there would be in private pathology as well. The testing itself has not been charged for, and there has not been any change the whole way through.

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

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

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

Mrs Jones: A point of order, Madam Speaker.

MADAM SPEAKER: A point of order?

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

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

Municipal services—Yerrabi Pond and Lake Tuggeranong

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

MR STEEL: I thank Mr Braddock for his question. I am also very pleased that we are

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

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

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Braddock.

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

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

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Davis, a supplementary.

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

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

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

ACT Insurance Authority—actuarial staff

MR CAIN: My question is to the Special Minister of State: during the recent estimates

hearing the General Manager of the ACT Insurance Authority confirmed that they have no member of staff with actuarial qualifications or expertise and that actuarial advice is contracted from outside the ACT. Minister, how did ACTIA properly assess actuarial advice before making very significant determinations?

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

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

MR STEEL: It is not uncommon for agencies to go outside of government for specialist advice, particularly in relation to actuarial advice. Indeed, during estimates we had that discussion around the motor accidents insurance scheme and going out for actuarial advice and other advice where necessary to be able to review the filings of insurers. It happens right across the board to make sure that we have the best advice possible to make decisions about a range of different issues that impact the territory.

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

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

Planning—housing choices

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

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

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

The ACT government is ensuring that Canberrans have a wide range of housing options that suit their needs at different life stages. We are responding to community demand

for innovative ideas in housing by testing these ageing-in-place ideas through the demonstration housing project.

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

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

Mr Parton interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Parton, no more.

MR GENTLEMAN: It will enable younger people to get a foot in the door, or upgrade, depending on what their needs are. Providing options for older Canberrans to age in place frees up established housing for younger Canberrans. We understand that individuals and families do not have static needs, so what is appropriate when you are raising a young family might not be with you as you get a little bit older and perhaps become an empty nester.

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

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

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

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

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

But land supply is only one issue affecting housing affordability. As we heard from the Reserve Bank of Australia, and as I outlined yesterday, the main issues are in the tax and transfer system. So the ACT government continues to monitor trends in Canberra's

housing market, and we are certainly committed to continue to release land in excess of forecast population demand to ensure there are no supply constraints affecting the current market.

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