



QUESTION TIME
OF THE
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

HANSARD

Edited proof transcript

Wednesday, 4 May 2022

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*.

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Ministerial Arrangements

MR BARR (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Treasurer, Minister for Climate Action, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism) (2.01): The Attorney-General will be absent from question time today. Minister Cheyne will assist with the Attorney-General's consumer affairs and gaming portfolios, and I will endeavour to assist members on energy, water and emissions reduction.

Questions without Notice Schools—safety

MR HANSON: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, I refer to a *Canberra Times* article titled, 'It's time to confront our shameful record on school violence.' The article states:

Getting an education in a safe, secure environment is a basic right for every child. It is not a right that all children in Canberra have right now.

And:

Escalating violence in schools is a direct result of an underlying teacher shortage.

The Calwell High School incident follows an Assembly committee report on school violence from 2019, the Australian Principals' Occupational Health and Wellbeing survey of 2021, multiple reports in the media, and advice from the Australian Education Union last year. Now one ACT school has been closed by Worksafe ACT and five are being investigated. Minister, why isn't every child in the ACT enjoying the basic right of a safe, secure education?

MS BERRY: I thank Mr Hanson for the question. Members will know that over 50,000 students in the ACT attend Canberra public schools, which are primarily safe and supportive learning environments. We have implemented a number of plans and policies in the ACT over the last couple of years to improve the environment in our schools, including the implementation of Positive Behaviour for Learning, an international and nationally proven program of culture change within our schools to ensure safe schools, free from bullying and violence.

However, there will be circumstances, and there has been in recent months a serious circumstance in one of our public schools. We are working with that school community and all our school communities to continue to ensure that students who come to our schools are safe and that it is a safe workplace for teachers and school staff as well.

MR HANSON: Minister, how many serious incidents have occurred at ACT schools since you have been minister?

MS BERRY: I do not have that level of detail on me today. I will take it on notice and if it can be provided, I will provide that to the Assembly. However, I would note that—as Mr Hanson has rightly pointed out—there has been a number of inquiries in this space. The Education Directorate is implementing nation-leading policies and

plans around occupational violence within our schools. We are working very closely with WorkSafe, and with the school staff and their unions to ensure that they are safe places for our staff and that they are safe places for our school students.

MR PARTON: Minister, why have your actions failed to the point that a school has been closed and another five are being investigated?

MS BERRY: No, they have not failed. There are nation-leading and internationally works to ensure that our schools are as safe as they possibly can be.

Opposition members interjecting—

MS BERRY: I understand Mr Hanson is going to be spending some time today measuring up the curtains of Ms Lee's office while she is not here! But if you could give me the chance to respond without the continued interruptions—

Mr Hanson: I am not sure that interjections are a new thing, to be frank.

MADAM SPEAKER: No, and we all do wish it would stop, Mr Hanson!

MS BERRY: He will know that the Education Directorate has implemented these leading plans and policies around occupational violence within our schools. In fact, the Education Directorate is contacted by state and territory school directorates in other parts of Australia to understand the implementation of our programs here in the ACT. For the majority of students who attend our schools, they are safe, supportive learning environments for more than 50,000 in our public schools and 80,000 across all the schools in the ACT. Of course, non-government schools are not required to report incidents to the ACT government. I see that the focus of the opposition, as usual, is on muddying the waters of our public schools, which are great schools. They are doing everything they can under the most challenging of circumstances over the last couple of years to provide a safer learning environment, both face to face at school—

Mr Hanson: But it is not; that is the point.

MS BERRY: They are safe learning environments, and we will continue to work to ensure that that happens.

Schools—safety

MS LAWDER: My question is to the Minister for Education and Youth Affairs. Minister, under recent questioning and during the no confidence motion in you, you repeatedly stated that serious assaults were “very rare” in Canberra schools. It has since been revealed that before the Calwell closure and before the Assembly motion there had been another alleged assault at a Canberra school. This incident occurred during school hours, in full view of other students and teachers. The footage reportedly shows three male students repeatedly punching and kicking a student on the ground, putting that person in hospital with serious injuries. Minister, were you aware of this incident when the Assembly last sat?

MS BERRY: I will have to take that question on notice and check the dates. As I have informed the Assembly, I am notified of these serious incidents soon after they occur, so I would have been informed about this incident. I am aware of the incident that I think Ms Lawder is referring to.

Violence and incidents of this sort, serious incidents in the ACT, are rare in our schools. However, these incidents occur in schools across the country. Here in the ACT we are doing everything that we can, implementing nation-leading work by changing the culture within our schools through the Positive Behaviour for Learning framework, which has been identified as the best way to change the culture in our schools and have everybody understand what a safe, inviting and supportive school environment looks like.

That is not an easy thing to do when you have an environment surrounding the school and a culture of violence within our community that we are still trying to address as well. We have issues around domestic and family violence. We are dealing with sexual assaults in our community. We have a community that is battling away at resolving violence in all its forms, including bullying and unacceptable behaviour across our community and in our schools as well.

This issue is occurring not just in the ACT. However, the ACT is delivering on its plans and policies across our schools. The issues have been conflated, unfortunately, by COVID. There is no doubt about that. We are working with our schools through these difficult times, making sure that they feel supported, respected and valued as great learning and teaching environments for both our school staff and our school students.

MS LAWDER: Minister, how often have ACT police been called in relation to an incident in an ACT school?

MS BERRY: I do not even think I would have that advice. That might be incidents that are referred to police by individuals outside of school hours as well. I just do not think that data would be available.

MR HANSON: Minister, in what way has the critical shortage of teachers in our schools contributed to violence?

MS BERRY: The ACT is not immune to the national teacher shortage. Schools across the country are experiencing a shortage in the teaching workforce. COVID has absolutely had an impact on how our schools operate and has exacerbated the issues that might occur in our schools. We are working with the Education Union to ensure that we meet the needs of our school staff, to ensure that they are safe, keeping in mind that COVID has definitely had an impact on the teaching shortage in our schools because people, unfortunately, contract COVID and need to take time off work. That also happens in our school communities.

In those circumstances, our schools can temporarily return to remote education, for parts of a school or a whole school, where that is required. We have excellent resources in place, developed by the Education Directorate, for teachers and school staff to access and for students and their families to access during that time when they

need to return to remote education temporarily.

We are managing what is an ever-changing situation that has been in place for over two years now and that has put enormous pressure on our school system. We acknowledge that, and we work very closely with them. We thank them for the incredible work that they have done over the last couple of years in moving from and back to remote education, when that has been required, under incredibly challenging circumstances. We will continue to support them to do that.

Health—hydrotherapy services

MR DAVIS: My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, last year the ACT government stated that it wanted to build a hydrotherapy pool in the south of Canberra. At this time the government said its preferred site was at the Lakeside Leisure Centre in Tuggeranong. Is that still the case, and can you provide an update on the scoping work for a hydrotherapy pool?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Davis for the question. Yes, that is still the case. The government, of course, recognises the value of hydrotherapy as an ongoing therapeutic activity for many people with chronic illness, to maintain their mobility, to manage their pain and to foster overall wellbeing.

The ACT government has committed to delivering a hydrotherapy pool for the south side of Canberra. This was a 2020 ACT election commitment. In the 2020-21 budget the ACT government provided \$250,000 to develop early design and costings work for the development of a new south side hydrotherapy pool. This work included targeted community consultation and has informed the development of a business case for the 2022-23 ACT budget.

Key outcomes of the approach to date have confirmed that Tuggeranong Lakeside Leisure Centre is a suitable location, and has received feedback on important issues relating to design and accessibility. Stakeholders who were consulted and engaged through this process included Arthritis ACT, Health Care Consumers Association, Tuggeranong Community Council, Sharing Places and a small number of individual community members.

In March 2022 two additional workshops were held to support community and stakeholder input into the operation of a future south side hydrotherapy pool. Through those workshops there has been general agreement that building the pool adjacent to a current facility was supported, and the operation of a hydrotherapy pool should be open for similar hours to the public pool. Public access to the pool is important, and the operational model should be flexible to ensure significant access times and an ability to deliver some scheduled classes and bookings at times.

The provision of some useful hydrotherapy exercise equipment will be important and, because hydrotherapy can be expensive, the charging model needs to be conscious of its impact, as good preventive treatment such as hydrotherapy can offset more costly treatment. *(Time expired.)*

MR DAVIS: Minister, as the Lakeside Leisure Centre is currently run by the YMCA,

will the hydrotherapy pool be contracted to the YMCA or run by the ACT government?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Davis for the question. Those are exactly the kinds of issues that the government will be working through in response to the feedback from the community. But it is positive to have that feedback that Tuggeranong Lakeside Leisure Centre was identified as a suitable location.

The government is proposing to write to the participants in the consultation, thanking them for their input and feeding back the important information that we heard, in line with the ACT government's general response to consultation and the production of listening reports, and ensuring that people are fed back what we heard and to double-check that that was what they intended.

Subject, of course, to the outcome of the 2022-23 budget, construction of the pool would be expected to commence in the mid to second half of 2023, and the pool would be operational approximately in the second half of 2024—subject, of course, to development application, contractor availability, market conditions and all of those things. Additional pool user and community consultation as part of the design user group would be undertaken through the construction process. That period would also be used to consider the operational arrangements for the pool.

MS CLAY: Minister, how will the ACT government ensure that the hydrotherapy pool is accessible for those on lower incomes and reduced incomes?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Clay for the question. As I was indicating in response to the first question, we recognise that access to hydrotherapy pools can be expensive, so we are very conscious of the need to develop a charging model that takes account of this impact. As I said we are very much aware of the importance of preventive treatment, so that individuals can avoid having to escalate to more acute care, and because preventive treatment reduces the pressure on the acute care parts of our health system.

We are also aware that some people are not going to have the capacity to pay, and some people are going to have the capacity to pay a small contribution towards their hydrotherapy support. Arthritis ACT, for example, charges clients \$5.90 per session for their group work. Of course, the ACT government already works with and funds Arthritis ACT to provide hydrotherapy services on the south side. In 2021 Arthritis ACT offered 1,814 client-led hydrotherapy sessions and 135 instructor-led sessions. We are already supporting those people who have financial difficulty in accessing hydrotherapy services. Twenty per cent of the places for Arthritis ACT sessions are provided free to clients who are facing disadvantage and cannot afford the services, and other people pay \$5.90 per session.

We will be having those conversations with the community around what is a reasonable charge for those people who can afford to pay. I certainly had feedback from people about models in other jurisdictions where you can buy a series of tickets, and they thought that was perfectly okay, for those who can afford to make that contribution.

Schools—safety

MR PARTON: My question is to the minister for education. Minister, following your claims that incidents of serious assault were “very rare”, one retired principal who worked across ACT government and non-government schools for more than 40 years told the *Canberra Times* that they “didn't know a principal in the public system who had not been assaulted at some point. During their career, they had knives brandished at them, had a student bring a gun to school, received death threats and had their car damaged four times.” Minister, how many principals have reported an assault during their career at an ACT school?

MS BERRY: I find disturbing the focus that the opposition has on our public schools. It is trying as much as it can to talk them down when they are great schools. For over 50,000 students who attend them, predominantly they are safe. They are safe and supportive environments for our school communities, our school teachers and school staff. So I start with responding to that question by making that statement. Very clearly—

Mr Hanson: On a point of order. I would ask the minister to be relevant because the question related not just to government but to non-government schools. It talked about ACT government and non-government schools. The question was specifically about an ACT school, not about public or non-government. I would ask the minister to be directly relevant and cover both school systems in her answer.

MADAM SPEAKER: She has a minute-plus to cover anything else, but she is on track at the moment.

MS BERRY: Thank you. I have already responded to the second part of the question with regard to ACT schools, where school principals in non-government schools are not required to report incidences to the ACT government. So I would not have any detail other than if there were people who were individually reporting to me on that, and I have not heard that. However, what we have seen in ACT government schools since we have implemented our occupational violence plans is that we have an increase in reporting and a really good reporting culture in our schools of incidences when they occur so that they can be addressed. That is what we need to see across our school communities.

This has been complicated by COVID and by the impacts of an international health pandemic. That is the fact of the matter. It has been incredibly difficult for school communities to connect with students and their families over this period remotely, but they have done an excellent job at delivering a great education, whether that is remotely or on the school campus. Implementing our occupational violence plans and management processes has also been complicated during this time.

MR PARTON: Minister, how many teachers have reported an assault during their career at an ACT school?

MS BERRY: That is just a ridiculous question. How long is a piece of string, really? What I have continued to say and what I will continue to say is that our public schools—

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members! The minister is on the floor answering the question.

MS BERRY: Our public schools are great schools and for the over 50,000 students that attend them they are safe and supportive environments.

Mr Hanson: On a point of order, on relevance. The question is a simple one as to how many teachers have reported an assault during their career at a school. I assume the directorate records that information. If the minister does not have it available she can take it on notice. She should not just say that because it is a ridiculous question that is a reason not to answer it.

MADAM SPEAKER: Mr Hanson, she is referring to incidents of assault and violence, as she has done on this question and others. She has a minute to provide more information. She is not out of order. I will give the minister the call if she has anything else to add.

MS BERRY: No, I am happy to take the supplementary.

DR PATERSON: Minister, can you outline how you have worked to encourage a positive reporting culture within ACT schools?

MS BERRY: When we implemented our occupational violence management plan and policy in the ACT since 2018-19, we have seen an increase in the number of reports of incidents in our schools. That has allowed the Education Directorate to work with school communities, including school principals, on how we can overcome and assess these incidences to ensure that our schools remain as safe as they possibly can and encourage that reporting culture, because there are no more supports that can be given to schools unless we know of the incidences that are occurring in those schools. That reporting culture has been supported by school principals and encouraged across their schools as well.

What we are seeing, and what we will continue to see, is a report of these incidences. These incidences can occur across the school community in a variety of different ways. They can include incidences of assault or violence such as swearing, kicking or pushing past teachers to more serious incidences that have been reported recently. Any incident of violence or assault in our schools is unacceptable. That is why we have a plan in place to address these, to work through them, to assess the nature of the violence, to stop the activity, the practice or the procedures that cause that incident to occur and then work with schools to provide the supports to the teaching and school staff or to the students and/or to the students and families, should they need it.

Schools—teachers

MR CAIN: My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, I refer to an article in the *Canberra Times* titled ‘Teachers are leaving the system in droves, but no-one is listening’. This attracted a lot of attention and comment on the ACT teachers’ Facebook groups, particularly the following comments:

What they need is a system which gives them the resources, time and conditions which allow them to do what they love the most ... teach.

Since they are smart enough to know that that is not happening, brilliant teachers are leaving their classrooms behind.

Minister, how many teachers have left the ACT system in the last two years?

MS BERRY: I will have to take that question on notice.

MR CAIN: I have a supplementary question. Minister, how many vital support positions, such as relief teachers and learning assistants have left the ACT system in the last two years?

MS BERRY: I will take that question on notice. If I have that level of detail then I will provide it to the Assembly, but I will have to seek advice from the Education Directorate.

MR HANSON: Minister, how many of the currently advertised positions are actually there simply to refill positions that have been vacated?

MS BERRY: Obviously, when you are recruiting new staff to a workplace, that can be to fill existing vacancies. That could be for a variety of reasons. It could be maternity leave, parental leave, retirement. All are not leaving the system because they are burnt out. I have to say that for our teaching community the lack of respect and the value that they do not get from the members of the opposition around the work that they do, is exactly the kinds of things that they talk about when they are devalued in such a way. Then there are obviously reasons why they would not want to continue when they have to continually defend the great public schools that they work in every day against the constant attacks from the Canberra Liberals. It is unbelievable that there is this constant attack.

Opposition members interjecting—

MADAM SPEAKER: Members! Ms Berry has to floor if she wants to continue.

MS BERRY: I have finished, thanks, Madam Speaker.

Canberra Institute of Technology—Woden

DR PATERSON: My question is to the Minister for Skills. Minister, could you please provide an update on the construction of the new CIT campus in Woden?

MR STEEL: I thank Dr Paterson for her question. I am really excited to update the Assembly that this week we have announced that Lendlease is the preferred tenderer for the design and construction of the new CIT Woden campus. Lendlease has a long history in Woden, having first built the Woden Plaza, and is experienced both locally and internationally in delivering large-scale infrastructure projects. We are very confident that their expertise in design and construction will help to support the

successful delivery of a digitally enabled, innovative and modern CIT campus with vibrant common areas and integrated green spaces.

Negotiations with Lendlease are now underway, and we hope to sign a contract in the next couple of months. Once in contract, Lendlease, in partnership with the ACT government, will progress the current design concept for the new facility towards a final design that meets the needs of Canberra's growing community now and into the future. The design process will be iterative, with community feedback at the heart of the project.

Construction on the adjacent public transport interchange is already underway. Construction of the campus itself is expected to commence next year and create over 500 local jobs. Meanwhile, we have also recently lodged the estate development plan with the independent planning authority. The EDP is currently on public notification and I encourage the community to have their say.

DR PATERSON: Minister, how has community feedback been incorporated into this design so far?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her supplementary question. The views of the Canberra Institute of Technology teachers and students, and the broader Woden community, have been at the very centre of the new campus design as it has evolved. Community consultation undertaken to date has directly fed into the design requirements that we are currently negotiating with Lendlease. This includes the construction of a public east-west pedestrian boulevard through the campus, connecting the Woden interchange to the town square and the rest of the town centre. The pedestrian boulevard will be activated with green spaces, seating and frontage from the campus, including cafes and shelter.

We will also be establishing a new north-south road connection, a local access road, which will be a shared zone as well, connecting Bradley and Bowes streets. The connection will provide access for local vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists. We are installing new public toilets at the adjacent Woden interchange, in response to requests from the community last year.

Last week I released the findings of our most recent round of consultation, which was undertaken over the summer period. This engagement piece highlighted how important activated, clean, open, well-lit and safe public spaces are to the community, as well as clear signage. We will make sure that these considerations remain a top priority as the design progresses. The community can have their say in the estate development plan for the next week. There will be multiple further opportunities to provide feedback, ahead of the development application process later on this year.

MS ORR: Minister, how will CIT Woden support the government's skills and workforce agenda?

MR STEEL: I thank the member for her question. Last week I joined a group of key industry representatives and training partners to launch Skilled to Succeed, a new skills and workforce agenda for the ACT. The document set out the government's ambitions for Canberra for the growth of our economy, the wellbeing of our

community, the capability of our workforce and the great jobs that thriving local industries can offer.

As I outlined in the chamber earlier today, our agenda is focused on the four key priorities of delivering skills inclusively, to provide all Canberrans with a foundation for life-long learning; building a responsible, flexible and future-focused workforce, particularly a skills system that identifies areas of future skills growth like technology, construction and the caring and experience industries; assisting employers to build, attract and retain the right workforce; and strengthening our skills sector foundations.

The construction of CIT Woden will help us to achieve these priorities and provide a huge boost for vocational education and training in the ACT with new hands-on training spaces and immersive work-simulated environments to help students achieve their full potential in areas like IT and cybersecurity, as well as hospitality and business, plus much more. The new campus will be much more than a building. It will ensure that CIT remains a provider of choice and an agile partner to meet industry, business and community needs by delivering quality vocational education and training for the jobs of the future.

CIT, following the development of their strategic compass, are going to be undertaking a reform program, looking at how they can make sure that their course offering meets the skills needs of the future.

Planning—community consultation

MS CLAY: My question is to the minister for planning. Minister, the current planning bill has been out for consultation for around six weeks, and there are about another six weeks left. Community members have told me what good consultation looks like. They think it needs to be transparent, well informed, give plenty of opportunities for questions and involve a diverse range of people and groups. I heard from community members on the earlier sessions that there was not enough time for questions, they could not provide verbal feedback and sessions were not recorded. But I was really pleased to hear that today's session went well. It was recorded, questions were asked mid-session and it focused on the environmental impact provisions. Can you tell me how consultations have been going so far, including the number of people in attendance and whether the recorded sessions will be published?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Clay for the question. I will refer her to the previous answers I have provided to her, and the extensive engagement between my office and hers regarding the consultation for the new planning bill. I have answered a lot of questions for her regarding this. Consultation has been going very well so far. The directorate has held four information sessions on the bill, as well as a facilitated workshop with the Environment and Planning Forum. There is at least one more information session scheduled, along with a second facilitated workshop with the EPF.

I would like to take the opportunity to remind everyone that consultation is open until 15 June this year, which means people have a further six weeks to have their say. Seventy people, I think, have attended so far, and there will be more attending these other sessions as well. This is quite a bit longer than most ACT government

legislation consultation periods, and we have a separate plan of consultation coming up for the district strategies in the Territory Plan, which started earlier this year.

MS CLAY: Minister, will the verbal feedback provided during the information sessions be recorded and be considered as feedback?

MR GENTLEMAN: There has been recording of the sessions, and that is taken into consideration as we consult on the bill.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, are you planning to run additional sessions outside working hours before the end of the consultation period, like you did for the district planning discussions last year?

MR GENTLEMAN: There will be that work, as I said, for the detail stage of the district planning. Of course, if required, we may need to have extra consultation. So far it has been well attended and well received.

Schools—safety

MR MILLIGAN: My question is to the minister for education. Minister, following the closure of Calwell High School, it has been revealed that in total five Canberra public schools were visited by WorkSafe ACT inspectors in term 1. The concerns included similar issues to Calwell, including a chronic shortage of staff, with classes of more than 40 students common and classes of over 60 being reported. Minister, what is the status of these five schools currently under investigation by WorkSafe ACT?

MS BERRY: The status is that WorkSafe ACT has visited those schools.

MR MILLIGAN: Minister, what is the safe maximum class size and will you advise the Assembly when this maximum number is breached?

MS BERRY: We will work with our school communities, our school staff and their unions around making sure that we implement the enterprise bargaining agreement as far as class sizes are concerned. We have a matrix in place to ensure that schools can return temporarily to remote education, should it be required, as a result of staff shortages that have been exacerbated as a result of COVID.

MR HANSON: Minister, were you aware of these other five schools and the issues with them, including WorkSafe visits, and, if so, why did you not refer to this in the last sitting when this was a matter of debate in this Assembly?

MS BERRY: What I understand is that WorkSafe have visited these schools. As a result of the visit there has not been any other action taken at this stage by WorkSafe. I encourage and am very happy for WorkSafe, as an independent organisation, to visit our schools, or any of our workplaces, to ensure that they are safe for our work staff. We will work closely with them to ensure that our workplaces are safe.

This has been a particularly difficult time for our school communities. We have families who have been isolated from support services, where their children have had

complex needs or complicated lives. Our teaching workforce and our school staff have had to pivot back and forth from face-to-face to remote education, meeting the challenges that have been placed on them as a result of this international health pandemic, which is not finished yet. We are still feeling, unfortunately, the impacts of that. That is directly impacting the staff shortages in our schools.

As a result of all of those complex issues that I have described, it is a complicated space for our school staff. What a refreshing thing it would be if this government and all members in this place joined together and supported our school staff, acknowledged the difficult time that they have had and that they continue to have, and actually allowed them to get on with their work. The Education Directorate will continue to work with them closely to do that.

Health Services—PET scans

MS CASTLEY: My question is directed to the Minister for Health. Recently I met with a patient who has stage 4 incurable pancreatic cancer. She and others need regular PET scans. While Queanbeyan patients have the cost of PET scans met by the hospital, in Canberra there is a cost—they have to pay. On December 16 last year, this patient met with your senior adviser to ask why Canberra patients are being charged different fees—anywhere from \$600 to \$800 for the same PET scan. Minister, can you explain why this patient is still waiting for a response from your office four months after this meeting?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Castley for the question. I will follow up. I am very sorry to hear that this individual is in the circumstances that they are, and that they are still awaiting a response from my office. I will definitely follow that up. I will take the question on notice and come back to the Assembly and let them know. Obviously, my office has been very busy, but we do endeavour to get back to people as quickly as possible, particularly in those kinds of circumstances.

MS CASTLEY: I have a supplementary question. Minister, why doesn't the Canberra hospital cover the cost of PET scans like the New South Wales hospitals do?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: There are a range of circumstances in which Canberra Health Services does have patient charges in place. Again, I will take the detail of the question on notice in relation to the PET scans, but there are also arrangements for those charges to be waived in circumstances where people would have financial difficulties. Again, I will take it on notice to provide some further detail to the Assembly in relation to all of that is managed.

MS LAWDER: Minister, why are Canberra's cancer patients being charged different fees for the same PET scans?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Lawder for the supplementary question. The ACT health system and the New South Wales health system are separate systems and there are separate, different arrangements in place between the two jurisdictions.

Hospitals—elective surgery

MRS KIKKERT: My question is to the Minister for Health. Recently, we heard from the mother of a patient whose 17-year-old son was booked for elective surgery at the Canberra Hospital. After a day of fasting and waiting, the surgery was called off and they were told to return the next day. The following day, she stood in a waiting room all day to draw attention to her son's need for surgery. Three times she asked for paperwork, with staff saying they were too busy and would send it. This mother shared her story on social media and people responded by saying, "Yep, that's normal." Minister, how often are elective surgeries cancelled on the day of the surgery in Canberra hospitals?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mrs Kikkert for the question. I do get regular representations from people who have had the experience of waiting for their elective surgery, having attended the emergency department, been sent home and told to come back for their surgery. Unfortunately, either for elective surgery or emergency surgery, they are not able to be fitted in that day.

As I have said in the media on many occasions over the last few weeks, both our hospitals, like many other hospitals around the country, are extraordinarily busy at the moment. Sometimes it is the case that urgent emergency surgery does come in, and unfortunately it has to take priority over the people who have returned for their emergency surgery that could be delayed somewhat, or for their elective surgery; then those people, unfortunately, have their surgery delayed.

It is really distressing when this happens. I am always really concerned to hear about this. I visited the Canberra Hospital theatre area and intake area for surgery the other day, and had a conversation with the senior staff there about the processes for managing people who are waiting for their elective or return emergency surgery, and the way that that is done. I refer particularly to the fact that people sometimes are asked to change into gowns and sit around and wait and, as Mrs Kikkert has indicated, fast and then end up not getting their surgery.

Canberra Health Services is doing some work around how to better manage that process. Unfortunately, it is sometimes the case that people are unable to get their surgery because more urgent matters, where people really need lifesaving or limb-saving surgery, do come first.

MRS KIKKERT: Minister, what other reasons are there that staff are so under-resourced that they cannot provide paperwork?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I cannot comment on the individual circumstances, but if the person has not already written to my office, and Mrs Kikkert or Ms Castley have details and would like to encourage that person to write, we will be able to address the individual circumstances on the day that that occurred. I do not know which day that was.

As I have already indicated and as I have said publicly, there are a range of reasons that our hospitals are under significant pressure at the moment. I refer to the number of staff furloughing, not only because of having COVID or being household contacts of someone who has COVID-19, but because of a range of other respiratory illnesses that are circulating in our community, as well as staff being sick and having caring

responsibilities. We have also recently seen two long weekends in a row and school holidays, and having staff on planned leave during that period. Canberra Health Services worked really hard to not bring staff back from leave who were on leave. Everyone has been working really hard over the last two years, and when staff have scheduled leave, it is really important that they are able to take that.

In addition to those staffing pressures, around the country we are seeing increased demand. All of the reasons for that are unclear, but it is quite likely that some of that is a result of people delaying care during the COVID-19 pandemic; then their situations escalate to require more significant and acute health care. I was talking to one of my interstate colleagues yesterday about the circumstances that they are experiencing. People would have seen the very significant new investments in the Victorian budget to respond to this situation, and people would have also seen stories around the country of ambulance ramping at emergency departments. This is something we are seeing right across the country.

MS CASTLEY: Minister, what do you say to this particular mum who fasted for the first day to support her son, but told him the next day she needed to eat, just so that she would have the energy to physically stand all day in order to be seen?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Ms Castley for the supplementary. As I say to all of the people who write to me, contact me or talk to me about this, I am very sorry to hear about the experience of this family. It is really unfortunate when these things happen. As I say, we have been extraordinarily busy. It is not something that has just occurred; people's surgery occasionally gets delayed because of some significant demands on emergency surgery, and Canberra Hospital is working through that.

It is exactly why, in the budget, we committed additional funding for emergency surgery. We provided additional funding for both the emergency department and for emergency surgery, to ensure that we could increase the number of hours. There was \$39 million to increase emergency surgery capacity and post-surgery care, providing 1,920 theatre hours over the year for emergency surgery, to ensure that we could respond to that increased demand that we are seeing, and increasing the bed base by eight, to support that greater throughput of both elective and emergency surgery.

Planning—technical studies

MS ORR: My question is to the Minister for Planning and Land Management. Minister, there have been many questions about consultation on the Planning System Review and Reform Project, but I would like to know more about the technical planning work that is underway. Can you please update the Assembly on what reports and technical studies the ACT government is using to inform this project?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Orr for her question and her interest in the technical aspects of town planning. The ACT government has commissioned several studies that will help to inform the development of the district strategies and the new Territory Plan. These studies include estate development; best practice greenfield infill developments; achieving improved built form, place design and public realm outcomes; commercial and industrial zones and mixed-use development; and EV-ready developments.

The recommendations from these reports will help to inform future policy decisions. The government recognises that we need to plan for Canberra's future. We are looking at how we prepare our buildings and our public spaces for new technology and of course a changing climate. I have said before that the aim of the new planning system is transparency, and we are applying that principle when it comes to this technical work.

The information that I have mentioned here is all open to the public. Reports are available on the EPSDD website. Anyone with an interest in the technical planning work, such as Ms Orr, can have a look at what the government is considering. We will look at all the information available, along with the technical and community input, in developing a new Territory Plan and the district strategies for the ACT.

MS ORR: Minister, given my interest in mixed-use development, particularly as it relates to my electorate of Yerrabi, can you please explain more about the report on commercial and industrial zones and mixed-use development?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary question. I know that the Gungahlin Community Council have a particular interest in this report. The planning system is a critical part of attracting jobs and investment to the ACT, and ensuring that we have sufficient commercial and industrial land available in the right locations is a consideration for the current Planning System Review and Reform Project.

We are balancing our need for commercial and industrial land with our need to provide homes for our growing population. This is again a challenge for many different jurisdictions, including here in the ACT. The report has looked at different jurisdictions and ideas for managing land uses and makes recommendations to government on what we might do for the future. The report provides advice on best practice planning considerations to limit potential conflict between users, particularly in mixed-use development.

There are recommendations regarding compatibility of uses in mixed-use development and how this can be implemented through the planning system; a cost-benefit analysis of commercial and industrial zones; and recommended processes and frameworks to guide the planned delivery of commercial and industrial zones. These recommendations look at both strategic and statutory provisions to guide our overall thinking about commercial uses, as well as the ideas for site-specific zoning and land use controls. The recommendations from this report will be coordinated and considered as part of the ACT Planning System Review and Reform Project. Outcomes of the process will be provided as part of the community and industry consultation later this year.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, aside from these reports, what other information is the government using to inform the district strategies and the new Territory Plan?

MR GENTLEMAN: I thank Mr Pettersson for the supplementary question. The government will be looking at existing ACT government policies and strategies to inform the direction of this work. These include the climate change strategy, the transport strategy, the housing strategy, the infrastructure plan and the planning

strategy. These strategies include planning-related actions that require an integrated approach. For example, the transport strategy envisages a compact, walkable and livable city. This relies on the planning system to deliver.

The Planning System Review and Reform Project is an opportunity to make these changes and will set up Canberra for the future. There is a lot of good, old-fashioned town planning, to quote Fiona Carrick from the Woden Valley Community Council, going into our district strategies and Territory Plan work.

Once the government has brought together all of this information and assessed it, we will be working with the EPF, in the first instance, to see that it meets community and industry needs. That will be followed by broader community consultation, starting later this year.

Disability—ACT disability strategy

MR BRADDOCK: My question is to the Minister for Disability. Minister, the ACT disability strategy is currently open for public consultation. Can you please provide an update to the Assembly about the strategy and why it is so important for Canberrans?

MS DAVIDSON: I thank the member for the question. The consultations that have recently started for the ACT's disability strategy are incredibly important because they set the work agenda for ACT government for the next 10 years of how we make sure that we are a truly inclusive and accessible city for people with disability.

I would like to note that we are now in our third year of risk and isolation for people with disability, as well as for their carers and their family and friends. While a lot of us have really been enjoying being able to go back to a lot of the in-person things that we have previously done, there are people with disability for whom that is too great a risk.

With that in mind, the Community Services Directorate and the Office for Disability have worked with the disability reference group to come up with a plan for how we do this consultation in a way that is inclusive for people and enables them to participate, whether that is in small groups or from home, as well as in larger groups.

It is incredibly important that we are able to have conversations about things that we have not been able to talk about these last couple of years while people have been dealing with the risks of COVID for people with disability, as well as trying to save the NDIS and keep it true to its original intent of choice and control for people with disability. A lot of those conversations have very much focused on a very medicalised view of what disability means.

What we are able to do with these consultations is have a really broad conversation about what disability means and about the ways in which people with disability would like to engage in our community and participate in employment, education and leadership in our community. Those conversations take courage, both from people who are participating who have disability and from all of us to perhaps sometimes hear some things that are very hard to hear about where we have not been doing as well as we could have and what we can do to change that.

MR BRADDOCK: Minister, from a personal perspective, what is the disability strategy going to do for parents with children who have autism?

MS DAVIDSON: It is incredibly important that we are able to have these broader conversations about what disability means in our community. I have had quite a lot of feedback from people who have autism or from people who have ADHD as well about the ways in which they have had difficulty in achieving a diagnosis and then achieving the supports and services that they need. The NDIS has not been able to provide them with the supports that they need in all of those cases.

It is about being able to have a conversation about what neurodiversity means and how important neurodiversity is for us as a society. The different perspectives that people bring to solving problems that we all face can make all of us stronger as a community. We need all of those perspectives if we are really going to solve big problems like climate change, the future of work and how we engage and communicate with each other in a respectful and effective way.

MR DAVIS: Minister, what specific and tangible outcomes would you like to see come out of the strategy to improve the lives of people with a disability in Canberra?

MS DAVIDSON: I would not like to pre-empt what the outcomes might be, but I have been really excited to hear some of the early feedback that people are having conversations about issues like employment, as well as some of the physical infrastructure and town planning aspects.

I am very excited about the way in which this is being conducted, because that will shift the way that we think about disability in this city. All of the conversations that are being held as part of this consultation are being led by people from our disability community. They have shown great courage and great leadership in being able to do that and in co-designing the process with the Office for Disability.

I am very excited that, with the diverse range of ways in which people can engage, we will be able to hear the full ideas that people have about what we should be working on. That includes being able to complete a survey on the YourSay website that will be open until 31 June. They can attend open forums and there are a series of public consultations on particular topics happening between now and June, also on the YourSay website.

There is also a kitchen table conversation kit, and that is really exciting to me. People will be able to get together in small groups of people that they know and trust and have a group conversation in a COVID-safe way and then contribute that back to this broader consultation, as well as being able to upload submissions, not just written submissions but audio and video submissions as well. With all of those different ways of being able to engage, I am hopeful that we will see a really diverse range of outcomes from this strategy.

Centenary Hospital for Women and Children—neonatal care

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, can you please provide an update on the work of the

neonatal intensive care unit and the special care Nursery at the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children to support premature and unwell babies at the beginning of their lives?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. And it is timely as tomorrow marks the start of nurses and midwives week, tomorrow being the International Day of the Midwife, 5 May; and 12 May being the International Day of the Nurse. And of course, nurses and midwives are part of our fantastic multi-disciplinary teams at the Centenary Hospital for women and children.

The work of the neonatal intensive care unit and the special care nurseries in our health services is important to recognise, particularly as they have continued to care for the most unwell babies through the challenges of the past two years. They are not always mentioned when we talk about critical care, but I really want to acknowledge their crucial work and I thank Mr Pettersson for the opportunity.

The Centenary Hospital for women and children is a regional level 6 NICU, providing neonatal intensive care to the ACT and surrounding region. This includes a neonatal medical emergency team response and emergency retrieval. Each year, up to 800 patients and their families need the support of the NICU or the special care nursery at the Centenary Hospital.

The highly specialised team of nurses, doctors, allied health and support staff provide exceptional care to babies and their loved ones. Family-centred care is central to their work and they provide a range of programs to ensure caregivers can access supports in hospital when they get home. This includes the newborn and parent support service, which provides an early discharge program for families and babies who still require nursing care support and advice at home; the growth and development follow up program for NICU and special care nursery graduates, which provides early identification and referral to appropriate services to help them reach their full potential; NICU cam, a complementary livestream for families to see their baby when they are not in the unit, via phone, iPad or a computer; and further partnerships with non-government organisations who aim to support care givers. Overall, the teams provide an excellent service to some of Canberra's most vulnerable patients. I am sure we are all grateful for the work they do.

MR PETTERSSON: Minister, how are you ensuring this vital service is growing with the Canberra region?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Mr Pettersson for the supplementary and the government is, of course, committed to ensuring that vulnerable babies born here in the ACT from Canberra and the surrounding regions, have the right care, in the right place, at the right time. In the 2021-22 ACT budget, we invested over \$15 million to continue expanding neonatal intensive care beds at the Centenary Hospital for women and children.

This funding ensures we can increase services in the NICU to meet demand now and into the future. Between now and 2023-24, we will deliver additional intensive care cots and more than 20 extra staff to support these critical services. The new cots and additional doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and administration staff will see

the ACT continue to deliver a high functioning NICU for Canberrans and the surrounding New South Wales region. This also means we can significantly reduce the number of babies transferred to other jurisdictions for care and by increasing our investment in the NICU, we can ensure one to one nurse-to-patient ratio is maintained and sustainable.

The ACT government also invested \$50 million for the expansion of the Centenary Hospital for women and children that continues our work of upgrading our health infrastructure right across the Canberra Hospital. This investment includes a series of new builds and refurbishments of a number of areas of Centenary Hospital, including neonatology. I was fortunate to spend a bit of time the other day with some of the NICU team and to see the incredible work that they do every day. They are very passionate about the treatment and care they deliver for the ACT and the ACT government is really proud to support this excellent care.

And I was particularly interested recently to talk to some of them about the research that is conducted in the neonatal intensive care unit as well. And some really great contributions to knowledge about how to care for some of those most vulnerable babies. So thank you to everybody working in the NICU and the special care nursery.

DR PATERSON: Minister, how does this link with the broader expansion of the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children?

MS STEPHEN-SMITH: I thank Dr Paterson for the question. The \$50 million Centenary Hospital for Women and Children expansion is delivering more health infrastructure to the Canberra Hospital campus, dedicated to key maternity, paediatric, and neonatology services. This includes new builds and refurbishments across the Centenary Hospital and builds on the ACT government's almost \$1.3 billion health infrastructure investment over the last decade.

There are a number of upgrades being delivered in neonatology that will refurbish these essential areas for both babies and families. In the special care nursery, we are undertaking refurbishments to create four new cots and two new parent rooming in spaces. There will also be a new family support zone for families whose babies are being cared for in the NICU. Further support services are also being improved to provide a neonatal, paediatric and adolescent nutrition service, a new parent lounge and dining and education facilities. More broadly, the Centenary Hospital expansion has already completed refurbishments in the paediatric high care ward and a new build of the key administration building, supporting the activities of Centenary.

Over 2022-23, further stages of the expansion program will be completed, including: a new build extending the Centenary Hospital that will deliver a new adolescent mental health unit and adolescent mental health day service; refurbishment of the maternity assessment unit; refurbishment of the antenatal ward and early pregnancy assessment unit; new clinical administration spaces; new education spaces to support professional development of our Centenary Hospital staff; and the refurbishment of the gynaecology procedure suite.

The expansion of the Centenary Hospital is a vital piece of work that is demonstrating our commitment to continually transforming health infrastructure on the Canberra

Hospital campus that will benefit the whole Canberra community and surrounding region.

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