



**QUESTION TIME**  
OF THE  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY  
FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

**HANSARD**

Edited proof transcript

Tuesday, 7 June 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) (2.00): Minister Vassarotti is again not present in question time due to quarantine. Mr Gentleman will assist with questions in the building and environment space and the Deputy Chief Minister will assist with housing and homelessness.

## **Questions without notice**

### **Canberra Institute of Technology—procurement**

**MS LEE:** Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Skills. Minister, today it was reported that there have been seven questionable contracts at CIT and that one individual has received a total of at least \$8.87 million since 2017, mainly to provide mentoring services to the CEO. Minister, \$7.21 million worth of these contracts have been signed since you have held the portfolio. The latest is valued at just under \$5 million, or almost \$10,000 per day for two years. Minister, on what date were you first made aware of this series of questionable procurements?

**MR STEEL:** I became aware of the latest contract that was signed and put up on the contracts register yesterday. I have also been aware of some other contracts that have been signed between the individual and a series of affiliated companies since as early as last year, when I also raised some concerns with and asked some questions of the CIT board.

It is important to note that CIT operates under a governing board and executive external to government, in line with the Canberra Institute of Technology Act 1987. So the release and negotiation of external contracts are matters for the CIT board and executive. As I said, the government was only informed of this latest contract yesterday.

**MS LEE:** Minister, what advice did you receive when you asked those questions of the CIT board, and will you table that advice?

**MR STEEL:** Some detailed information was provided to me in relation to the earlier set of contracts. We expect that the CIT uses public funding efficiently and effectively. I have also written to the chair of the CIT board to ask for a detailed explanation of the latest contract and require that information to be provided to government within five working days. Those questions will be around the quantum of the funding and its efficient use and what the deliverables will be for this large contract that has been provided.

CIT have advised me already and provided some high-level information that the services include organisational change management and support, and delivering strategic initiatives, including those associated with transformation under the Strategic Compass 2025. They have advised me that the contract was entered into following an open tender process in which three providers participated. But I will be seeking further explanations and detailed information about this contract. I expect that it will be provided to me within those five days.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, do you think it is appropriate for a government organisation to pay \$10,000 per day for mentoring for the CEO?

**MR STEEL:** I refer the member to the answer to the previous question, where I have outlined that I am seeking answers to those questions from the board.

### **Canberra Institute of Technology—procurement**

**MS LEE:** My question is to the Minister for Skills. Minister, earlier this year, the Canberra Liberals called for an audit of all government procurements over the past five years. These CIT contracts are exactly the kind of anomalies that would have been uncovered by such an audit, but you rejected our call. As the minister responsible for both Procurement ACT and the CIT, what responsibility do you take for this series of questionable CIT contracts?

**MR STEEL:** I refer the member to the governing structure under the Canberra Institute of Technology Act 1987, which shows that the CEO is clearly directly accountable to the board. I will be asking the board for detailed information about the nature of this contract, what it is hoping to achieve and what the deliverables are under the contract. But the matter that the member referred to in Procurement ACT is quite a separate one, and I am not sure that the same issue applies here. I will certainly be asking those questions and getting detailed advice from the board about the nature of this particular contract.

**MS LEE:** Minister, if you, as the minister responsible, are not responsible for the questionable expenditure of taxpayer funds then who is?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for her question. I refer her again to the act.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, what assurances can you provide to Canberrans that this is not happening in other government agencies?

**MR STEEL:** I refer the member to my answer to an earlier question, when I said that we will be seeking an explanation from the CIT board about this contract. Until we have considered that information, it would be too early to say.

### **Canberra Institute of Technology—procurement**

**MR MILLIGAN:** Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Skills. Minister, late last year an Auditor-General's report highlighted systemic issues with the ACT government's procurement culture. In your response to that report, you assured Canberrans that your government's procurement processes had been fixed; yet, the most recent contract CIT signed with one individual is for \$4,999,990. That is \$10 under the Government Procurement Board's \$5 million review threshold. Minister, do you think this is suspicious?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. I note that the questions that I will be asking of the board are through the letter that has been sent through to the CIT board. I will be asking questions about the nature of this contract, and we will find out

CIT has to say about what is being delivered under this contract.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, are you aware that the first payment made to the consultant as soon as this contract was signed was for nearly \$1.7 million?

**MR STEEL:** No, but I will be asking the CIT board a number of questions and I am looking forward to hearing their response to the letter that has been sent through to them in relation to this latest contract.

**MS LEE:** Minister, what are the services that have been delivered for that up-front payment of nearly \$1.7 million, and will you table your letter asking the series of questions to the CIT board, by the close of business today?

**MR STEEL:** I am happy to table that letter. The letter asks a number of questions of the CIT board, and I can provide that for the Assembly's benefit.

**Ms Lee:** I have a point of order. The minister has not answered the first part of my question about the services delivered for the payment on the signing of the contract for \$1.7 million.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** There is no point of order.

### **Tuggeranong—nurse-led walk-in centre**

**MR DAVIS:** My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, last week, on Friday, at my electorate office I had some really positive feedback from constituents who have recently received care at the Tuggeranong walk-in centre. They raised concerns with me about the fact that the centre has been closed at short notice in recent weeks. Are you able to outline why that is and what measures are being put in place to protect the service into the future?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Mr Davis for the question. Indeed, Tuggeranong residents have benefited from the existence of the Tuggeranong walk-in centre, the kind of service that the Canberra Liberals used to vehemently oppose but have now finally and belatedly come on board with. There were 3½ thousand presentations in quarter one of 2021-22, and people only had to wait 23 minutes in the median for that presentation at the Tuggeranong walk-in centre. Unfortunately, there have been a few instances where the Tuggeranong walk-in centre has been closed for either a few hours or a couple of days over the past couple of months due to very high demand across our health services and staffing constraints.

The decision to close the service is based on system pressures, which we have talked about a lot in this place, and includes walk-in centre staff shortages related to team members quarantining at home with COVID-19 or as household contacts, in addition to the usual winter illnesses that result in unplanned leave across walk-in centre services. An exception to that reason for closure was last weekend when staff were redeployed to the Canberra Hospital emergency department to assist with extensive unplanned leave and keep the emergency department operational.

Tuggeranong walk-in centre has, of course, remained open whenever there is a walk-

in centre workforce to provide a safe service to the community. There is also a safety factor for walk-in centres in ensuring there are a sufficient number of staff to maintain a safe environment for both staff and patients.

**MR DAVIS:** Minister, can you confirm that it is the government's intention to retain the Tuggeranong walk-in centre's current service model?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Mr Davis. Absolutely. Walk-in centres provide a very important model of care. We are, of course, also committed to establishing a walk-in health centre in south Tuggeranong, which will complement the services provided by the walk-in centre in Tuggeranong and, indeed, the walk-in centre that is available at Weston Creek. On the occasions when Tuggeranong is closed, people are directed to Weston Creek as the next closest walk-in centre. Weston Creek is the largest walk-in centre in terms of the number of treatment rooms that are available.

This is a very important model of care, supporting Canberrans who have minor injury and illness to get quick care, free of charge, at the point of service and taking pressure off our emergency departments. We remain committed to this model.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, can you tell me the closure rate for the Belconnen walk-in centre and how it compares with the Tuggeranong centre?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I do not recall Belconnen walk-in centre having been closed recently as a result of these same pressures. Belconnen walk-in centre is our busiest walk-in centre. It is an extraordinarily well-regarded service, as they all are, and is very busy. One of our decisions around redistributing staff is to make sure that those busy and more central walk-in centres are able to continue to support our community when we have to adjust our staffing levels. Belconnen, obviously, is a key part of that system.

### **Canberra Institute of Technology—procurement**

**MR MILLIGAN:** Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Skills. Minister, freedom of information documents show that CIT ignored Government Procurement Board advice about improving the tender specifications and processes for CIT's \$8.87 million worth of contracts with one individual. The contracts also look like they were designed so that he would come out as the preferred tenderer. Minister, will you be looking into this series of CIT procurements to see whether the processes were biased?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. I have asked the CIT board to provide me with further detailed information about the nature of this contract. I will be having discussions, following that, about anything that arises, based on the information that is provided to me. If the information is concerning then of course I will escalate that.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, can you assure Canberrans that ACT government agencies do not routinely ignore Government Procurement Board advice and arrange tender processes so that they can hire the contractors that they want?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. That information about the Government Procurement Board advice is not something that ministers get involved with in terms of procurement. It is an arm's-length process. I am not involved directly in this procurement or indeed in other procurements, as is appropriate under probity guidelines. We are just not involved in that process. But I will be asking questions of the CIT board in relation to this particular contract which has been published on the contracts register.

**MS LEE:** Minister, what responsibility do you take, in addition to ensuring that processes are followed, for the culture that is permeating, to ensure that the procurement processes do not continue to be a problem?

**MR STEEL:** We have a procurement reform project underway. That follows a review of Procurement ACT that was undertaken last year. The recommendations of that review will be implemented, together with any findings from recent Auditor-General's reports, to improve the transparency, the probity, of our procurement processes, going forward. I look forward to updating the Assembly as that work continues.

### **Energy—electricity prices**

**DR PATERSON:** My question is to the Chief Minister and Treasurer. Chief Minister, can you please update the Assembly on electricity prices in the ACT?

**MR BARR:** I thank Dr Paterson for the question. We are in the fortuitous position of being the only state or territory in the national electricity market where regulated electricity tariffs will decline in the coming fiscal year. ACT electricity prices will decrease in nominal terms by 1.25 per cent, and the real decrease will be closer to five per cent—4.93 per cent—when accounting for current levels of inflation. This means that an average household will save around \$23, and an average business around \$88. This comes at a time when other jurisdictions in the national electricity market will be seeing increases in the double digits, which will mean hundreds, and potentially thousands, of dollars in increased costs for households and businesses respectively.

Across the border in New South Wales, the average household electricity costs are expected to be \$800 a year higher than in the ACT. This positive outcome for Canberra households and businesses is the reflection of the long-term policy decisions that the ACT government has been pursuing since 2012—policies that were bitterly opposed by those opposite at that time.

**DR PATERSON:** Chief Minister, why isn't the ACT seeing the significant price increases announced in other states and territories?

**MR BARR:** Our transition to 100 per cent renewable electricity has largely driven the decrease in electricity prices here, in contrast to the other states and territories. ACT scheme costs have decreased because of a fall in the large-scale feed-in tariff costs, which account for 86.26 per cent of the ACT government scheme costs for the coming fiscal year.

The ICRC has credited the ACT's long-term renewable energy contracts as "more

than offsetting the increase in wholesale electricity costs”. As we have been progressively entering into long-term renewable supply contracts over the past decade, the ACT has effectively hedged against future price increases. This shields ACT businesses and households against upward pressures that have caused the significant spike in electricity prices elsewhere in the NEM.

The ACT government’s actions in this area have achieved a dual objective—100 per cent renewable electricity, achieved five years ahead of the target I set in 2015, in 2020, as we work towards our target of zero net emissions by 2045, whilst at the same time ensuring price stability for ACT residents and businesses, and shielding us against the sort of impacts that we are seeing in other states and territories.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Chief Minister, what is the ACT government doing to assist those Canberrans who still struggle with the cost of their power bills?

**MR BARR:** I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. We do acknowledge that, even though prices are falling in nominal and real terms, there will be tens of thousands of Canberra households who will still need additional support. We have support through a utilities hardship fund, which supports vulnerable consumers to access essentially instant \$100 vouchers through their eligible energy retailer. We provide a utilities concession of \$750 annually to 31,000 eligible low income households towards their energy bills. We provided a one-off \$250 increase, on top of that \$750, in the current financial year, bringing the total concession to \$1,000 in fiscal year 2021-22.

We have our Vulnerable Household Energy Support Scheme, which has committed \$50 million over the next five years to support low income households to become more energy efficient. We have the Home Energy Support Program, which was launched in March, and which has committed \$3.1 million over four years for solar rebates. Eligible households can receive a rebate of up to \$2½ thousand and access to optional interest-free loans through our Sustainable Household Scheme. Through that scheme we are supporting households to make renewable energy upgrades, and offering zero interest loans for a range of products. As of 3 June, almost 3,700 installations had been completed. Loan applications, including the installations, have reached 5,600, worth a total value of nearly \$61 million.

In addition to these programs, we have the low income home energy efficiency program. We introduced electricity pricing reforms to assist Canberrans to lower their energy bills, with electricity retailers now required to compare their prices against the ACT reference price. *(Time expired.)*

### **Canberra Institute of Technology—procurement**

**MR MILLIGAN:** Madam Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Skills. Minister, in relation to the contracts of over \$8 million to one individual, have you spoken to the chief executive officer of the Canberra Institute of Technology about these procurements?

**MR STEEL:** Yes, I have in the past, in relation to previous contracts. I have also spoken to the board chair Mr Craig Sloan about previous contracts, and now I have written to him again today to raise further questions about the latest contract that has

been notified on the register.

**MR MILLIGAN:** What explanation did the CEO of CIT provide you for the spending of \$8.87 million dollars on mentoring?

**MR STEEL:** As I said, it was in relation to the previous contracts, not the current ones. In relation the current one, CIT has advised me today that the contract, and those before it, are intended to support the delivery of CIT's ongoing transformation and delivery of the CIT's procedure compass 2025. The previous contracts were used to support the previous version of that document, and CIT has advised me that the services include change management, in particular, particularly supporting CIT to change as they move into the new CIT Woden campus in the future. And they, of course, have advised me that they entered the contract to deliver those things, but I will be seeking further information about this latest contract, which is for \$4.99 million. I expect them to provide that information to me for my consideration within five working days.

**MS LEE:** Minister, do you have confidence in the CEO and the chair of the CIT?

**MR STEEL:** I refer the member to my previous answers, where I have said that I am seeking information from the board, which I will then consider.

### **Canberra Institute of Technology—procurement**

**MS LEE:** My question is to the Minister for Skills. Minister, under the latest contract awarded by CIT, some of the services to be delivered include “developing system-wide capabilities of situational awareness, early weak signal detection and noise sorting,” and “developing iterative capacity to cycle through adaptive renewal processes across multiple spatial and temporal scales”. Minister, what does this mean?

**MR STEEL:** I am not sure that ironical expressions are in order, but what I would say is that we are seeking information from the CIT Board about what is intended to be delivered through this contract, which has gone through a tender process and has now been signed and notified on the contracts register. We will be asking about how this is a good use of public funds, CIT funds, and an effective and efficient use of expenditure to achieve the outcomes that CIT is hoping for. They are the questions that I am asking. I will be getting information from the CIT Board, as is appropriate under the governance structure, and I will consider that information.

**MS LEE:** Minister, given that this information is not included, like other contracts, who is providing this service, what are their qualifications, what is their hourly charge-out rate and what are the milestones?

**MR STEEL:** That is the sort of information I am requesting from the CIT, to provide me with further information. The contract provides a level of information there. I would like further detail about what they intend to deliver and what the outcome measures are under the contract and whether it is an effective use of public funding.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, how will CIT determine whether these services have been delivered?

**MR STEEL:** I refer the member to the answer to the last question, Madam Speaker.

### **Federal government—territory rights**

**MR PETTERSSON:** My question is to the Minister for Human Rights. Minister, with the new make-up of the federal parliament, what preliminary work is the ACT government undertaking in preparation for a possible repeal of the Andrews bill?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. It is clear that the ACT is in a much better position to have our rights restored to legislate on voluntary assisted dying, following the federal election in May. We have waited years, decades even, for the federal parliament to repeal the Andrews law, which amended the ACT's and the Northern Territory's self-governing acts. It prevents the territories from making laws with respect to voluntary assisted dying. The ACT can't afford to waste any time on this. The Chief Minister and I are reiterating to our federal counterparts that this is an important issue.

### *Opposition members interjecting—*

**Mr Hanson:** What do you mean “can't afford to”, when you can afford \$8.87 million on mentoring?

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Members! Mr Hanson: inappropriate. Please be quiet.

**MS CHEYNE:** This is an important issue and one that needs to be brought on for debate without delay. It is a simple legislative change that will put us on an equal footing with Australians who live in the states. In anticipation of the Andrews bill being repealed, work is beginning behind the scenes. I have asked officials to begin undertaking a comparative jurisdictional analysis of how the states have legislated. Given that every state has passed its own scheme, we are well placed to learn from their experiences what the various schemes look like, what works and where we can improve. As we are surrounded by New South Wales, I have specifically asked officials to look closely at the New South Wales framework, passed very recently.

The comparative analysis will also be drawing from our own inquiry into end of life choices, as a starting point. This committee inquiry was the ACT's most recent community consultation. It is important that we have genuine community input every step along the way. This work will inform a consultation paper to test some of the key assumptions and questions for an ACT scheme, ahead of a draft bill. We are putting in the legwork early, now, so that when we do have our rights restored we will be ready.

**MR PETTERSSON:** Minister, how does the ACT's approach to voluntary assisted dying compare with the legislative processes of other jurisdictions?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Mr Pettersson for the question. Every state, every single state, has been able to get on with discussing with its communities how to progress a voluntary assisted dying framework, without having to ask the federal parliament for permission. Unlike our state counterparts, the ACT has been hamstrung by the outdated Andrews bill that prevents us from deciding for ourselves about whether and

how to legislate for voluntary assisted dying. This law is compromising our democratic rights, and it may be inconsistent with Australia's international human rights obligations—our own human rights obligations. It is outdated, patronising and unconscionable.

The last federal government did all it could to stall, to ignore and to disregard the territory's rights. Our own then senator Zed Seselja consistently failed to stand up for his constituents. I am relieved that the new federal government is listening to us and has said that it will progress a bill to right this wrong. However, I want to be clear that we will have a strong and robust community consultation process, just like every other state has done, when considering the development of these laws.

**MS ORR:** Minister, how can the community get involved in this issue?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Ms Orr for the question. The first hurdle is to remind federal parliamentarians that they need to restore our rights. We know that the vast majority of Canberrans support voluntary assisted dying, but we will need to have a debate about what Canberrans want that scheme to look like. This is a sensitive and complex issue that necessarily requires significant consultation and community debate. As mentioned earlier, I have already asked officials to start on the preliminary work so that we are ready to constructively begin the community conversation as soon as we are allowed. When that legislative bar is lifted, I welcome the community having their say.

This may well be an iterative process, and I would expect that any draft bill would be referred to an Assembly committee for further examination. While we are currently in a very preliminary stage, we will be engaging with the community closely as soon as we can. The ACT is in the best position it has ever been in to have its rights restored. Canberrans have waited long enough. The ACT government are doing everything we can so that we are ready when it happens.

### **Canberra Institute of Technology—procurement**

**MS LEE:** My question is to the Minister for Skills. Minister, in reference to the series of questionable CIT contracts to one individual, totalling \$8.87 million, the latest contract, valued at nearly \$5 million over two years, equates to a cost to the taxpayer of just under \$10,000 a day. Meanwhile Canberra's teachers, nurses, the staff at Dhulwa, police and first responders experience violence, threats, trauma and stress in their workplaces on a daily basis under your government. Imagine what a difference \$10,000 per day would make to our frontline staff. Minister, what do you say to the teacher who contacted my office this morning after reading this ABC story, shocked that CIT is paying \$10,000 per day for mentoring when they earn \$400 per day as a relief teacher in one of Canberra's schools?

**MR STEEL:** I say that we are absolutely committed to the efficient and effective use of public funding, and that is why I am asking questions of the CIT board about this particular contract that was put up on the contracts register yesterday. I only became aware of it yesterday, and I am asking those very serious questions, and asking for an answer within five working days, to consider the detail of why this contract has been entered into, and what it will deliver for the CIT and the broader community, in line

with community expectations.

**MS LEE:** Minister, what do you say to the members of ACT Policing who are overworked and understaffed, and at the same time your government is spending \$10,000 per day on one consultant?

**MR STEEL:** I refer the member to the answer to the previous question.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Milligan, you can have the call, but it is difficult to hear who got the first call, with all of the noise.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, when your government is spending \$10,000 per day on one consultant, what message does that send to Canberra's nurses, who have been under enormous pressure during COVID-19?

**MR STEEL:** Madam Speaker, same question; same answer.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Members, enough.

### **Municipal services—mowing**

**MS CLAY:** My question is to the Minister for City Services. Minister, we hear a lot about mowing in this Assembly, and there are a lot of different views about where Canberra should be mown and how often. And there is a real yearning to protect our biodiversity in this city. At the moment I am hearing regular reports that City Services sometimes mows over marked Landcare areas by accident. That is a real shame. People have put a lot of work into planting those areas, and it destroys the plants and wildlife that live there. What steps are you taking to ensure City Services does not mow over known Landcare areas?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for her question. I think she has noted in her question some of the competing priorities of our mowing program, which includes safety, amenity and environmental priorities as well as ensuring that we maintain culturally significant sites and also infrastructure. So we need to make sure that we balance those priorities. We work very closely with the conservator, particularly in identifying areas that need to be considered, as part of the mowing program design. Often those areas are marked clearly with bollards to make sure that both passers-by of the public understand that these are areas that may not be mown, but also that the mowing contractors and in-house mowing teams are aware of that. TCCS works collaboratively with our volunteer groups to identify areas that should not be mown. From time to time I realise that they make mistakes in that. To help clarify that, we are undertaking consultation on an open space land management plan later on this year. This new plan will identify areas for rewilding and go into the mowing practices that will be employed on various sites around Canberra to make sure that we can meet the priorities and expectations of the community that I have outlined.

**MS CLAY:** Can you describe some of the challenges that City Services faces when it tries to create a no-mow area?

**MR STEEL:** Clearly, it is some of those competing priorities. Many people in our community expect that areas will be mown, and when they are not—even if it is for a rewilding purpose—some concerns are often raised about that. Setting clear expectations about what areas will be mown is part of the work that we want to do on the open space land management plan—to consult with the community about that and engage in a conversation about what those areas are, but also what needs to be done to more clearly mark some of those areas. I mentioned the bollards before. Is it signage? Is it fencing? Are there other types of initiatives to really clearly set out which areas, are for mowing and which are to be left for rewilding or for planting by various volunteer groups? That is something that is going to be a really useful collaborative exercise, and we are looking forward to engaging with the community on it later on in the year.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Has TCCS trialled any no-mow areas, as part of a demonstration or study?

**MR STEEL:** There are, as I mentioned, a number of areas that are not often mown, and that is for a range of different reasons. Sometimes they are marked out. It still requires, often, a conversation. I know that I have been having a conversation with Mr Pettersson and the residents in Crace about the hill in Crace, which is not necessarily mown as often as people would like. It was intended that that area would be mown less often to support biodiversity outcomes. That is a conversation that we need to have with the community. There are a number of existing sites, and we will be looking at how we can identify more in collaboration with some of those volunteer groups that want to do more planning, and want to care for some of our reserves and undertake more rewilding activities in the bush capital.

### **Canberra Hospital—safety**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the minister for workplace safety. The *Canberra Times* understands that last Thursday WorkSafe issued a workplace safety improvement notice at the Canberra Hospital emergency department. Is this correct and, if so, what were the safety issues that made WorkSafe attend the ED and what improvements have been made?

**MR GENTLEMAN:** I thank the member for the question. It is probably a matter for Minister Stephen-Smith with regard to the location of the WorkSafe issue. Of course, WorkSafe do a lot of work to provide the best safety outcomes for Canberrans and they work across government as well as the private sector in the ACT. I will take the detail of the question on notice and come back to the member.

**MS CASTLEY:** To be confirmed on notice will also be what improvements have been made, if any. My first supplementary question is: has WorkSafe attended the ED in the last four years?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I will take that question, Madam Speaker, as Minister for Health. I am aware that WorkSafe has been attending the emergency department. I do

not think it is appropriate to ask Minister Gentleman to take on notice what improvements Canberra Hospital is making. I am happy to take that question on notice as well in terms of what improvements Canberra Hospital is making.

I understand that WorkSafe has been attending the emergency department to talk with staff about the particular workplace pressures that exist at the moment, which we have talked about many times, in terms of the very high levels of demand and the staffing pressures that exist within the emergency department and how these are being managed.

**MR CAIN:** Minister—and I will let you choose—how many times has WorkSafe attended the Canberra Hospital and emergency department in the last two years, and why?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Obviously, I will have to take the detail of that question on notice. All of our public service agencies are very aware of their responsibility to report matters to WorkSafe. Canberra Health Services not only includes Canberra Hospital but also a range of other facilities as well. Where there are incidents that need to be reported to WorkSafe, they will be reported and where they want to seek advice from WorkSafe and that is appropriate, they will also work collaboratively with WorkSafe.

I think, again, it is a bit of a stretch to imply that because WorkSafe is visiting somewhere that that is necessarily a negative thing. It is actually a productive relationship between many of our directorates and WorkSafe to ensure that we are supporting work health and safety right across the ACT public service, including in our health services.

**Ms Castley:** On a point of order, Madam Speaker, the question was how many times has WorkSafe attended—

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** And I took that question on notice, Ms Castley.

**Ms Castley:** Great.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Members!

### **Government services—culturally and linguistically diverse communities.**

**MR BRADDOCK:** My question is to the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. Minister, we know that certain culturally and linguistically diverse communities face increased barriers in accessing government services. It is said if you do not count it, you cannot see it, and if you cannot see it you cannot make sure the service addresses the specific needs. Bearing this in mind, what demographic data is collected on culturally and linguistically diverse clients of ACT Government services?

**MS CHEYNE:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. And as Mr Braddock noted, we are a proudly multicultural city here in the ACT and we are committed to fostering a city that is inclusive and does recognise that diversity and responds accordingly. So ACT government directorates determine their own scope and methods for data collection

which relates to service users and other interactions and how that is used. And so, I am advised that there is not a consistent collection across directorates. You could probably see why that is, in some ways. And that is not necessarily information that is shared across government. So while there is that data collection which can be captured by the different directorates, it has been a matter for the different directorates and different ministers would be speaking to that.

But I would acknowledge that the lack of centralised collection could be creating a potential knowledge gap, perhaps, regarding the needs of our CALD communities by the ACT government. However, I can confirm that the Community Services Directorate is working with the ACT Data Analytic Centre in CMTEDD to consider options for developing an accurate, detailed and centralised data source in the ACT government on the demographics of CALD people living in the ACT and how we can use that data to better inform our services.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Would that improved data be available to all ACT government services to be able to better understand their clientele?

**MS CHEYNE:** I will take that on notice, Madam Speaker.

**MR DAVIS:** How does the government order and then prioritise what data it collects to best support service provision to the CALD community?

**MS CHEYNE:** I want to thank Mr Davis for the question, Madam Speaker. I went to this a little bit in my previous answer—it is a matter for individual directorates; it is not centralised; I am not the minister for this data collection. But what I can do is talk a little bit about data collection that occurs within Access Canberra and perhaps touch a bit on the Multicultural Recognition Act, the exposure draft of which I tabled today.

So for example, Access Canberra collects some demographic data in its annual survey. For example, we know that when it comes to CALD community users, that generally those who identify that they speak a language other than English at home are more likely to attend a service centre than someone who might primarily be speaking English at home. So, I think what we could then deduce for that, usefully, is that if we ever did see a decline in service centre attendance overall, that there are sections of a community when an in-person service is more highly valued, and that would certainly help guide our service offering. But I would draw members' attention to section 13 in our proposed multicultural recognition bill, which I tabled the exposure draft of this morning. We expect it would, and indeed its intention would, be encouraging the different directorates to be proactively addressing gaps in accessibility, creating more equitable access and working to fulfil the multicultural charter. While it is flexible in how it is designed and how directorates go about that, I could certainly envisage that more considered data collection could be one way of achieving that, depending on the directorate.

### **Federal government—Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders**

**MS ORR:** My question is to the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. Minister, what does the new Federal Labor government's commitment to advance a constitutionally enshrined Voice to Parliament mean for Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT? How will the ACT government support this?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank Ms Orr for her question. Well Madam Speaker, as you know, the Uluru Statement from the Heart was a generous invitation to government from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders across Australia to chart a new path forward in the journey of reconciliation.

It was disheartening that the outgoing Liberal government did not commit to implementing the Uluru Statement in full, and that is just one reason I was so pleased with the recent election of an Albanese Labor government. I recognise that work towards an Indigenous voice was progressing under the outgoing Liberal government in partnership with the states and territories. And I acknowledge and thank outgoing Minister Ken Wyatt for his commitment to this work and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders who had engaged in the co-design process to date.

But this was a different model to what was proposed in the Uluru Statement. It was a—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Members!

**Ms Orr:** I note that Mr Hanson is having a nice conversation across the chamber. It does make it very hard to hear, when the minister is addressing you, with her back to us, as is appropriate.

**MADAM SPEAKER:** Mr Hanson, I think you have the cue to be quiet.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** This was, of course, a different model to what was proposed in the Uluru Statement; it was a second best option. Having a voice to parliament enshrined in the Constitution will provide all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with autonomy of political expression as a foundation of Australian democracy.

As the only jurisdiction with a democratic Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elected body to advise and scrutinise government, the ACT is uniquely well placed to share our experience and contribute to this work. I look forward to working in partnership with the new Labor government, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, and other state and territory governments on how we can advance a constitutionally enshrined voice to parliament that meets the needs of diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia.

**MS ORR:** Minister, what does the federal Labor government's commitment to a Makarrata Commission mean for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT? How does this align with the ACT government's existing work in this space?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. I thank Ms Orr for the supplementary. The other key element of the Uluru Statement from the Heart was the call for a Makarrata Commission as part of the path to treaty. The new Labor

government has also committed to implement the commission. Madam Speaker, Makarrata means the coming together after a struggle.

The Uluru Statement describes the Makarrata Commission as having the remit to facilitate truth telling and oversee treaty or agreement making between government and First Nations peoples.

Treaty is a complex process, the ACT government is committed to supporting traditional owners to undertake a treaty process here in the ACT, should they wish to do so. But there are significant challenges to overcome, to advance this work. We have facilitated some initial conversations, but we know there will be significantly more talking, thinking and healing to be done.

We are, likewise, continuing to work with community leaders on how best to inquire into and address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system. We have heard that truth-telling could be an important part of this process but also that many recommendations have already been made by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led reviews and that we must act on these recommendations as well. While the time frame for the Makarrata Commission is not known, and the Labor government has been clear that it will prioritise the voice process in line with the Uluru Statement, I am hopeful that a focus on truth-telling and agreement-making will support and supplement the ACT government's work in supporting the interest of First Nations Canberrans, which is, of course, also supported by the \$20 million healing and reconciliation fund.

**DR PATERSON:** Minister, how will the new federal Labor government and the ACT government support jobs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Thanks, Madam Speaker. And I thank Dr Paterson for the supplementary. Well Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander public servants are an important part of both our ACT public service and the commonwealth public service here in Canberra. The work they do benefits our community and our nation.

Our public services can, and should, play a significant role in providing employment and economic opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans. The ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028 includes targets to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees across the ACT public service and increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in senior positions with the ACTPS.

The agreement's first impact statement, tabled earlier this year, demonstrates that we are making positive progress in this area. The statement notes that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25 to 64 were 2.09 per cent of all people aged 25 to 64 employed in the ACT by the ACT public service and APS in 2021 and this is an increase from 1.9 per cent in 2018.

Clearly, there is more to be done in this space and that is why I am so pleased that the incoming Albanese Labor government has committed to a target to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment in the APS to 5 per cent by 2030. The Labor government has also pledged to do more work to address the representation

of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in the senior ranks of the Australian public service and acknowledgement that these staff are currently underrepresented in higher positions.

Full commitment to the Uluru Statement, renewed commitment to closing the gap and more local jobs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people right here in Canberra is what Canberrans have voted for, it is what Australia voted for, and that is what they will get from an Albanese Labor government.

**Mr Barr:** I ask that further questions be placed on the notice paper.