



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

**HANSARD**

Edited proof transcript

Tuesday, 8 April 2025

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.

## Tuesday, 8 April 2025

Ministerial arrangements .....	1
Questions without notice:	
Minister for Health—conduct .....	1
Minister for Health—conduct .....	1
Transport Canberra—MyWay+ .....	2
Transport Canberra—MyWay+ .....	3
Canberra Health Services—elective surgery.....	5
Primary health care—bulk-billing.....	6
Federal government—budget.....	8
Taxation—short-term rental accommodation levy .....	10
Primary health care—bulk-billing.....	11
Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre .....	12
Australian Federal Police—professional standards investigations .....	14
Planning—Ginninderra Falls.....	15
Planning and development—Molonglo .....	16
Vocational education and training—fee-free courses .....	17
Crime—firearms.....	19
Roads—speed limits.....	20

## **Ministerial arrangements**

**MR BARR** (Kurrajong—Chief Minister, Minister for Economic Development and Minister for Tourism and Trade) (2.01): As members would be aware, the Deputy Chief Minister is absent from the Assembly today, so I will endeavour to assist members with questions in her portfolios for question time.

## **Questions without notice Minister for Health—conduct**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Chief Minister.

In the last sitting week, you were asked if you had confidence in the health minister's ability to prevent further resignations, and you said yes. Since then, there have been a number of additional resignations. Chief Minister, do you continue to have confidence in the health minister's ability to prevent further resignations?

**MR BARR:** I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. Yes, I retain confidence, as do all of my colleagues and the broader Canberra community, in the good work of the health minister.

**MS CASTLEY:** Chief Minister, are you also confident that the health minister has always acted with integrity and honesty?

**MR BARR:** Absolutely confident.

**MS MORRIS:** Chief Minister, would the minister's position in your government be tenable if it was shown that she had not acted with honesty and integrity?

**MR BARR:** I am confident that the minister conducts herself in accordance with the ministerial code of conduct.

## **Minister for Health—conduct**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Chief Minister. A number of resigning orthopaedic surgeons have expressed anger about degrading and defamatory remarks that the health minister's office has made by way of background to media, following the announcement of their resignations. Chief Minister, do you agree with the health minister's attacks on those choosing to leave the public service?

**MR BARR:** I think that the background of the matter is well known.

**MS CASTLEY:** Chief Minister, is it ever appropriate for the minister to make degrading or defamatory attacks on those choosing to leave the public service?

**MR BARR:** I think that the accusations that the Leader of the Opposition is making in these questions—

**Mr Cocks:** A point of order.

**MR SPEAKER:** If we can just stop the clock.

Mr Cocks?

**Mr Cocks:** The Chief Minister has suggested that the Leader of the Opposition made an accusation. She has only asked a question. I ask that you direct the Chief Minister not to comment—

**MR SPEAKER:** We are 15 seconds in. I think that the Chief Minister's earlier response is warranted.

**MR BARR:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I reject the implication in the question.

**MS BARRY:** Chief Minister, do these attacks from the Minister for the Public Service help or hinder public service recruitment?

**MR BARR:** Again, I would refer the member to my previous answer.

### **Transport Canberra—MyWay+**

**MR BRADDOCK:** My question is to the Minister for Transport.

Public transport is an essential service, particularly for people with disabilities who may have no other travel options. Minister, the inquiry into the bungled delivery of MyWay+ heard that the system has effectively locked out or seriously hampered people with disabilities. During the hearings, we heard of people with vision impairments who are unable to top up their account or do not even know when their bus is due to arrive, and of people who are deaf who are missing their stops. As one disability advocate and witness said during the hearings:

All people with disabilities want to live independently. It is a right to live independently, and now they are forced to ask for help.

Minister, how is this acceptable?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. MyWay+, which is in the delivery phase with our partner NEC, is required to meet accessibility requirements, particularly the WCAG 2.1 requirements. That is part of the contract that we have with NEC Australia. During the inquiry, we did share our collective disappointment that they had not fully met but were taking steps to achieve those requirements. That includes an audit that got underway last month through a provider who will be assessing their compliance with WCAG standards. It is certainly our expectation—and we will be holding NEC accountable—that NEC will meet those requirements under the contract.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Minister, why did you knowingly launch a transport system that did not, still does not and will not for another six months comply with the ACT's Disability Discrimination Act?

**MR STEEL:** We certainly had the expectation that they would comply with the requirements. They are now auditing that. I am sure that there will be improvements

that can be made for them to achieve a higher level of compliance with WCAG standards. There are a range of different components to the MyWay+ system, and many of those accessibility features have been rolled out over the last few weeks, including on-board announcements. It is certainly our expectation that NEC will take further steps to improve accessibility, and the audit will provide a good basis for doing so.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Minister, will you apologise to Canberra residents and visitors with a disability who struggle to use public transport because of your decision to launch MyWay+ before it was ready?

**MR STEEL:** We encourage them to get in touch with Transport Canberra if they are experiencing any issues so that they can work through that. We have expressed a level of disappointment that some of those features for the higher level of accessibility were not available at launch. But NEC is still in the delivery phase of the contract. It is a new system, and they are taking steps to address those issues—

**Mr Hanson:** On a point of order, Mr Speaker: the question from Miss Nuttall was pretty clear. It was whether the minister will apologise or not. I ask that he be directly relevant.

**MR SPEAKER:** I hear your point of order, Mr Hanson. I think that Mr Steel is genuinely answering the basic subject matter of the question. I would note that he has still got a minute and 40 seconds to go.

**MR STEEL:** I have answered the question, thank you.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Steel, have you finished your answer?

**MR STEEL:** Yes; thank you.

### **Transport Canberra—MyWay+**

**MR EMERSON:** My question is to the Minister for Transport. The brand new MyWay+ website does not meet accessibility guidelines requirements, which seriously disadvantages some of the Canberrans who are most reliant on public transport, like people who cannot see and therefore cannot drive. Is the ACT government currently in breach of the commonwealth's Disability Discrimination Act's disability standards for accessible public transport, the ACT's Disability Inclusion Act, the Human Rights Act and obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. As I said in the previous answer, the ACT government is introducing a new system, which is in the delivery phase, and we are confident that the NEC is taking steps to make sure the system is accessible and satisfies the requirements under those pieces of legislation.

**Mr Cocks:** Point of order.

**MR SPEAKER:** On a point of order, if we can stop the clock.

**Mr Cocks:** It is essentially the same point of order as the last question, in that I would

ask that the minister be directed to answer this question rather than a different question, particularly in the context of his actions following the last point of order, where he elected to no longer continue.

**MR SPEAKER:** I am going to suggest that I do not know that the minister is being directly relevant to the question here, because the question was very specifically about whether Transport Canberra, the ACT government is in breach of various—

**Ms Orr:** Point of order, Mr Speaker. If the question is offering a legal opinion, I would seek your guidance as to whether that is appropriate.

*Members interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** If people can just have a drink or something and talk amongst themselves for a bit! I am going to seek advice from the Clerk. I am going to suggest that the question does not ask for a legal opinion; it asks whether the policy is compliant with the law. So I am going to let the question stand.

**MR STEEL:** I think I answered the question.

*Members interjecting—*

**MR EMERSON:** Minister, as previously stated, are you still very confident that the MyWay+ procurement process “Will provide us with a fit-for-purpose ticketing system,” given this procurement process has resulted in your government being in breach of several pieces of anti-discrimination and human rights legislation.

**MR STEEL:** That is a statement of opinion. I have been very clear that it is a requirement under the contract that we have with NEC Australia that they conform with the WCAG 2.1 guidelines. A range of accessibility measures have already been introduced. NEC are still in the delivery phase of that contract and they are undertaking an audit, through a third party, who undertakes disability access audits on a range of different systems around Australia. It is an organisation that is connected with a well-respected disability leader, Dylan Alcott AO. I believe that audit will assist NEC to make sure they are conforming at a higher level with the WCAG 2.1 requirements, noting that some of those requirements are subjective. But we would like to see them conform to those at a higher level.

A range of accessibility requirements have come online as the system continues to be rolled out and that has included the audio announcements of bus stops, which has been a welcome feature. There are a range of other measures that have been introduced and we expect there will be further improvements that will be made and we will be holding NEC accountable to make sure they comply with the requirements that are expected of them.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Minister, will you apologise to Canberrans who are living with a disability for the struggles they are having in using the MyWay+ system?

**MR STEEL:** I encourage them to get in touch with Transport Canberra. Each situation will be different for a person using the system, and, if they have issues, Transport

Canberra is there to work with them to overcome any barriers that they may be facing in using public transport. So there is, of course, a helpline available for people to get in touch with—

**Mr Hanson:** On a point of order of relevance. The question was very clearly, will he apologise or not. What, again, Mr Steel is doing, is answering a different question. He is answering it very well, but it is not the question that was asked.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Steel, I think there are a number of members in this chamber who would be appreciative if you would have a crack at answering it, but I am not going to direct you how to answer it. Are you finished?

**MR STEEL:** Thank you, I am finished.

### **Canberra Health Services—elective surgery**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Minister for Health. The resignation letter of one highly regarded orthopaedic surgeon said the number of patients he is able to see at each clinic has halved in recent years. The letter claims this has been done deliberately to limit his ability to recommend surgery, so as to reduce the number of patients on the waiting list. He says this means some patients now wait for more than a year to see him and get on the waiting list, in which time they must deal with agonising and unnecessary pain. Minister, is the surgeon wrong?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the question. I have asked Canberra Health Services specifically about that claim. They have stated that that is not their understanding. But that, to the extent that the number of appointments in clinics has been reduced over the years—which they were surprised to read, and we are going to follow up on—that would be a decision that was taken by that clinical service area in that specialty of orthopaedics, because they are actually responsible for managing both their outpatients as well as their elective surgery list.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, is the goal of your policies to improve the quality of life of Canberrans or to massage the numbers?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** The goal of our policy is very clearly about ensuring that we can deliver an equitable and accessible outpatient and public elective surgery service. I refer Ms Castley to the ministerial statement I made this morning about planned care. The entire purpose of our planned care changes is to ensure that we can deliver greater equity and ensure that people are being seen for their planned care, whether that is an outpatient appointment, or, particularly once they have had that outpatient appointment and a clinical urgency category has been determined, that they then receive their elective procedure—we all know that is a misleading term; it is urgent and it is important care—and that they can be seen on the basis of their clinical urgency and seen in turn.

We know that in some specialties that has not been the case, and that some people have been waiting longer than others because of the surgical waiting list—the surgeon's waitlist—that they are allocated to. That is how these specialties have worked. That is not a criticism; it is a concern about that practice, and there is a need to move forward

to a practice that provides greater equity. That is what our planned care reforms are seeking to do: if you are a category 2 or a category 3 patient waiting for your elective surgery, you will be seen in turn, according to the longest wait—taking into account your clinical urgency category, which will always be determined by the specialists.

**MR CAIN:** Minister, will you provide on notice the average waiting time for each clinic?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I do not understand Mr Cain's question, unfortunately—

**Mr Cain:** The average waiting time for each clinic.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I am not sure whether Mr Cain is referring to each speciality or each individual person that provides outpatient clinics. If the opposition would like to clarify their question in further questioning, then I would be happy to take it on notice. But, with the way that Mr Cain has phrased his question, I cannot take that on notice, because it would be impossible to answer.

### **Primary health care—bulk-billing**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Minister for Health. With increasing concern, I note today's story in the *Canberra Times* regarding the closure of a 100 per cent bulk-billing practice in Tuggeranong. Minister, despite your continued claims that health and hospital services in the ACT are improving, what has either your government or federal Labor done to prevent the 4,900 patients in Tuggeranong from losing access to bulk-billing medical treatment, at the same time that Labor is responsible for the biggest increases in cost-of-living expenses in a generation?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** What I can say is that, despite primary care being a commonwealth responsibility, the Interchange Health Co-operative was established with the support of the ACT government. Half a million dollars went towards the establishment of the Interchange Health Co-op as a bulk-billing practice in Tuggeranong, specifically to address a gap that was identified through a previous ACT government initiative that we are now building on with an election commitment for \$11 million to support the expansion of bulk-billing in the ACT, including the establishment of new bulk-billing clinics. We have also continued to support the Interchange Health Co-op through the life of that organisation, including this year, having committed \$353,000—as is my understanding—of ACT government money to the Interchange Health Co-op, seeking to support them with the financial challenges that they have been facing as a result of 10 years of neglect of the Medicare system by the previous coalition government, which saw MBS rebates frozen for years and years and made it very difficult to sustain a bulk-billing practice.

I am very concerned for the Interchange Health Co-op patients who will be affected by this closure. The ACT Health Directorate and Canberra Health Services will work with patients individually. We already have information about one patient who called ABC Radio Canberra. We have that information.

**Ms Castley:** Yes, because I went to your office to tell you about it, because you wouldn't get on the phone.



**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** We were listening to the radio as well. We have that information and Canberra Health Services will make direct contact with that patient. We do not have information of those patients, but we will work with the Interchange—*(Time expired.)*

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, despite your claims that the ACT health system is fine, why is the bulk-billing rate in the ACT the worst in the nation, with fewer than two out of three Canberrans—66.1 per cent—able to access bulk-billing?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Primary care is the responsibility of the commonwealth government. State and territory ministers have been saying for years that we want the commonwealth government to lean in and provide more support for primary care. That call fell on absolutely deaf ears—

**Mr Hanson:** Mr Speaker, on a point of order going to relevance—

**MR SPEAKER:** Well, she has not started debating yet!

**Mr Hanson:** She is clearly going down the track of debating the question, which is one point of order. The second is on relevance. It is not about the issue of bulk-billing across Australia; it is the specific issue of why the ACT is the worst.

**MR SPEAKER:** I think the minister is doing her best to be relevant to the question. Perhaps she is not answering it in the way that you want her to. Minister, if you have more for us, please share.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** It is as a result of the lobbying of state and territory ministers, like me, that the Albanese Labor government have continued to commit more funding to primary care, including the commitment to expand the tripled bulk-billing incentive—which they implemented for children, young people and concession card holders—to all patients attending general practice, which is something that, of course, the Liberals jumped on board with, but nobody believes—

**Mr Hanson:** Mr Speaker, on a point of order going to relevance, the question was about why the ACT is the worst in the nation. The minister is not going to that point; she is answering a different question.

**MR SPEAKER:** I kind of agree with Mr Hanson, but I am not going to direct the minister on how to answer the question. I am wondering whether there is the ability to be more relevant to the question.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** The ACT has long had challenges in relation to bulk-billing rates, but the reason that they are so low is the 10 years of neglect of the previous coalition government.

**MS MORRIS:** Minister, why do Canberrans pay, on average, over \$80 per GP visit at the same time that they are struggling to pay their grocery bills, their electricity bills and their fuel bills?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I would suggest that Ms Morris might direct that question to her colleagues in the federal Liberal Party, including the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Dutton, about what the previous coalition government did and what that has contributed to—

**Mr Cocks:** A point of order, Mr Speaker: the minister is, once again, debating the question and seeking to bring in issues which are not directly relevant to the question.

*Members interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** I am not sure that she is. I think she is answering it, just not in the way that you would like her to.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** If the opposition are going to continue to ask questions that are specifically in the realm of commonwealth responsibility, they cannot be surprised when the minister answering talks about commonwealth responses to that matter.

### **Federal government—budget**

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** My question is to the Treasurer.

Treasurer, how does the federal budget handed down on 25 March help Canberrans with the cost of living?

**Mr Hanson:** A point of order on relevance. The minister just said that we should not be asking questions that are not related to the ACT government. Surely, if it is a question about the federal budget, how can it be relevant?

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

**Mr Cain:** A point of order, Mr Speaker. This is a time for questions without notice. Clearly the minister is about to read a prepared statement. That is not permitted. That is not a question without notice, surely! It does not qualify

**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you, Mr Cain; there is no point of order.

Mr Steel, we are all waiting for your reply.

**MR STEEL:** What happens on the hill and what happens in the federal budget does matter to the ACT's economy, and that is why we welcome—

*Members interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Members, order! I will start naming people!

**MR STEEL:** What happens in the federal budget matters. That is why we welcome the Albanese Labor government's investment in our city. It provided a range of strong and important measures to help Canberrans with cost of living. We welcome that. Further to the tax cut that the Albanese government will provide to every single Canberran, they are also providing 190,000 ACT households with cheaper electricity, helping to drive

down prices and deliver outcomes for cost of living.

We also welcome the investment the federal government is making to further cap the cost of prescription medicines at \$25 and investments they are making to make it cheaper to see a doctor here in the ACT. Canberrans have already saved hundreds of thousands each year on cheaper prescriptions under the Albanese Labor government.

We welcome the continued investment by the government, particularly the cuts that they have made to taxes, which will mean a benefit of around \$50 a week, or almost \$2,900 a year, for the average taxpayer, which will be welcome further relief for Canberrans.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Treasurer, which of these measures will have the greatest impacts on Canberra?

**MR STEEL:** It depends who you are. But what we do know—

**Mr Hanson:** On a point of order on relevance. Mr Werner-Gibbings just asked for an opinion. The Minister said, “It depends who you ask.” This is asking for an opinion.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Hanson, I am done! There is no point of order. Mr Steel?

**MR STEEL:** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I want to particularly highlight the Albanese Labor government’s further investment in Medicare that will make it cheaper and easier to see a GP. That will be greatly welcomed by our community, as it builds on the work that they have already done after 10 years of neglect by a federal Liberal government, as we have been discussing in the Dorothy Dixier asked by the Canberra Liberals to the health minister.

Every Canberran will benefit from the \$7.9 billion program to significantly increase the bulk-billing incentive, with the commonwealth’s goal being nine of 10 GP visits bulk-billed by 2030 across Australia. We know how important it is for Canberrans to see a GP, to get earlier care and to stay out of emergency departments and hospitals. It is why our government has made investments in nurse-led walk-in centres and community health services for all Canberrans to access. It is great to see the Albanese Labor government investing in the commonwealth’s responsibility of delivering primary health care. More bulk-billing, cheaper medicines and better healthcare services are an important priority for a Labor government federally and an important priority for us to deliver the important acute healthcare services that we have responsibility for.

**MS TOUGH:** Treasurer, how do these measures build on the existing measures being pursued by the ACT government?

**MR STEEL:** I thank Ms Tough for her question. As I have outlined, there is continued strong investment in health and Medicare and it builds on our government’s strong record of investment in free healthcare services that Canberrans rely on.

Beyond health care, the \$150 electricity rebate for all households will, of course, be added to the existing \$800 energy rebate for low-income Canberra households,

supporting them with \$950 this year in total. Canberrans will continue to benefit from a strong and early investment in renewable energy, which is supporting Canberrans to have the lowest average household electricity bills in the country. We expect that to continue.

Eligible apprentices across the country will be particular beneficiaries from the budget. Those involved in residential construction will see a \$10,000 financial incentive, which is critical to help both our government and the federal government in our combined efforts to deliver the national housing targets to build 1.2 million homes across the country and our fair share here in the ACT.

Our government will continue to support residential construction, and the workforce required to deliver it, through our planned housing reforms and our work to continue to invest in the skills sector, after a decade of neglect under the coalition, when they had not signed a new national skills agreement. We will continue to invest in apprentices here as well, and we will continue to work together with the federal government to support continued cost-of-living support for the community.

### **Taxation—short-term rental accommodation levy**

**MR COCKS:** My question is to the Treasurer.

Your government is pressing ahead with yet another new tax—the five per cent so-called short-term rental accommodation levy. According to your own explanatory statement, this levy will have little to no impact on housing affordability. Its sole purpose, as explicitly stated, is to raise revenue. How do you justify introducing a tax that does nothing to improve housing affordability, while piling additional costs and red tape onto small-scale accommodation providers, just to plug holes in your own budget?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. I reject the premise of the question. We said that the primary purpose is to generate revenue to support critical government services, but we have also said that it may have a modest incentive for short-term accommodation providers to provide more longer term rentals. We do think that that will be modest, but it will also have the effect of making sure that there is a fairer or more level playing field when it comes to the broader accommodation sector, because we acknowledge that hoteliers do pay a range of taxes that short-term rental accommodation providers do not have to.

The important thing about the structure of the levy provided for in the bill is that it is a tax on the short-term rental accommodation platforms. There are very few of those. They will be the providers that have to pay the tax, not directly the people who are letting out their accommodation on a short-term basis of less than 28 days. We have been engaging this year with those platform providers around the implementation. That has been a good discussion. We are confident that we will be able to implement that, without having a significant distortion of the market, from 1 July.

**MR COCKS:** Treasurer, isn't it the case that this levy has nothing to do with housing and everything to do with squeezing revenue to make up for your government's inability to rein in spending?

**MR STEEL:** No. A range of governments across the country have introduced this levy, specifically to provide revenue to support important services like health and hospitals, and important services like education and schools, community services, and housing as well, with the investments that we are making to build more homes. Yes, it is important that we have a sustainable revenue basis. We have said that that is the purpose of the levy. The Liberals cannot have it both ways. There may be some modest benefits as well, in terms of the longer term rental market. We have also said that it will create a more level playing field for accommodation providers more broadly.

*Members interjecting—*

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Barr and Mr Hanson, there are anterooms here, if you want to have a discussion.

**MS CASTLEY:** Treasurer, was any modelling undertaken on the impact that this levy would have on Canberra's tourism sector and local accommodation market? If not, why was that overlooked?

**MR STEEL:** We have certainly looked at what has occurred in Victoria, and we do not think that it will have a very significant impact. We expect that the levy will be passed through to the cost of booking that short-term accommodation. Ultimately, largely, that would be paid by people coming from interstate to visit here. Over the last 12 months, since the announcement of the new levy in the last budget, there has been an increase in the number of short-term rentals on the market. It was around 1,200 at the time that the policy was developed, and we now understand that it is around 1,700. We expect that the short-term rental accommodation market will continue to grow, despite the levy, and we expect the broader accommodation sector to grow. They will be, of course, playing on a more level playing field as a result of this levy being introduced.

### **Primary health care—bulk-billing**

**MISS NUTTALL:** My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister, as Ms Morris has stated, today the community found out that the Tuggeranong Interchange Co-op, one of the only GP clinics in Canberra that still provides 100 per cent bulk-billing, is closing. It provides essential preventative health care to LGBTQI+ folks, women and people living on a low income. Minister, what will you do to ensure continuity of care for trans and gender-diverse patients who are relying on the co-op to access gender-affirming care?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Miss Nuttall for the question, which enables me to speak a bit more about how Canberra Health Services and the ACT Health Directorate will work with Interchange and the administrators to ensure that patients can be transitioned and supported with other services. We obviously do not have direct access to a patient list for Interchange, because that is information that is held by Interchange, but ACT Health Directorate officials have been in touch with them. They have also been working with Capital Health Network to ensure that plans can be put in place.

The Canberra Health Services Alcohol and Drug Service were also aware that there was a potential for Interchange to go into administration and so has been planning for the

possibility that they will need to support more individuals who, for example, require access to opioid replacement therapy. Specifically in relation to LGBTIQ+ patients who require that safe support, the teams are happy to work individually with people. But, clearly, we fund organisations like Meridian and Directions Health Services, which provide safe services for the diversity of our community.

We will continue to understand what we need to do to support both the patients themselves and, if there is anything that we can do to support the administration process at Interchange in a smooth a transition as possible. We have also been in contact with the commonwealth government, which, as I have previously noted, has responsibility for primary care. They are well aware of this situation and they are also considering any action that they may take in this matter.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Minister, if you are a young person waiting to access lifesaving gender-affirming care, how long can you expect to wait for that care if the Interchange Health Co-op does in fact close?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** First of all, if you are a young person up to the age of 25, I would suggest the Junction, which the ACT government funds, which is run by Anglicare, might be a good first port of call. Giving the Junction a call about your primary healthcare needs if you are a young person would be a good starting point. Otherwise, if there are specific individuals who are concerned about their lack of access to care with the closure of the Interchange that Miss Nuttall is aware of, she should feel free to pass those details onto my office and we will try to connect them into the right place—whether that is Capital Health Network to identify another GP who may be able to provide that service, or whether that it is through to Canberra Health Services to provide some support.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Minister, will you consider using ACT Labor's \$11 million election promise to increase bulk-billing rates to support trans and gender-diverse people who rely on the Tuggeranong Interchange Co-op?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** We are working through that election commitment in the context of the 2025-26 budget. We have said from the start that this will be a co-designed program with practices, with GPs and, of course, with consumers. So those decisions have not yet been taken in relation to whether there will be specific targets.

But, certainly, I am very conscious that we have a range of deep end GPs and GPs in the ACT who are interested in providing support for specific cohorts of patients, and trans and gender-affirming care is one of those specialisations that some of our GPs are interested in. We have worked with A Gender Agenda to ensure that there is availability for GPs to access training and a better understanding about how to support trans and gender-diverse patients within their practice. We will continue to undertake that work as well as continuing our work to establish both paediatric and adult gender services within the ACT public health system.

### **Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre**

**MS CARRICK:** My question is to the Minister for Health.

On 5 March this year, this Assembly passed a motion calling on you to:

- (a) provide all documents and briefings regarding the effectiveness and suitability of the Burrangiri Respite Centre, including details of estimates for retrofitting the facility;
- (b) provide information about alternative facilities, including those that are capable of meeting the demand currently serviced by the Burrangiri Respite Centre;

When will you provide this information?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Ms Carrick for her question and I did hear her comments this morning. Unfortunately, I was not able to be in the chamber when she made her comments in relation to the petition this morning. I will follow that up, Ms Carrick, in relation to the motion. I note that there was no timeframe placed on the provision of that information in the motion. Some of that information has already been provided through responses to questions on notice, and some of it was included in my comments during the debate. I think Ms Carrick, if I heard her correctly, claimed this morning that we had never provided information about the potential cost of refurbishment of the facility. That is untrue. Not only have I tabled the report that indicates what those required refurbishments were in terms of the asset management plan, but I also talked about that in my response to the motion on 5 March, including identifying:

The Health Directorate's advice to me was that the program of work would come at an estimated cost of over \$900,000 and a necessary temporary closure of the facility itself. Extending the useful life of the building and increasing its amenity for aged-care respite to modern standards would require a further significant capital investment, estimated to be in the range of \$6½ million to \$12 million, and, of course, this activity would require an even longer closure.

**MS CARRICK:** Minister, the upgrades in the asset management plan are very minor. What specific refurbishments are needed that would require the investment of \$6 million?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** So there are two issues here. The refurbishments in the asset management plan, which was undertaken in 2023—I think in my speaking to the debate motion earlier I did say 2022—identified the HVAC, the heating, ventilation and air conditioning system, as needing replacement within one to three years. Now that was undertaken in 2023. It also identified some electrical work. Both of those activities would require the closure of the facility for a period of time. So this is what I have been talking about. This is what the \$900,000 relates to. This is a conversation I had with the Salvation Army last year where we all agreed that to undertake some of the work that had been identified in the asset management plan would require a temporary closure of the facility.

In that environment—and also the environment where our current contract with the Salvation Army was coming to an end and the Health Directorate was having to undertake consideration of procurement activity in line with the Procurement Act—that was the context in which there were then ongoing conversations about: do we make those changes to electrical and HVAC, to only close the centre for a short period of

time, continue using it for this respite service, go out to procurement to test the market for the provider of that service, and all of those things would have had to be done while this service was temporarily closed. Do we close the service and try to find an alternative way to fund respite services? That was an option that was explored and, ultimately, I concluded that that was not going to be a useful activity given the work that has already been done under the commonwealth aged care reforms and the fact that Carers ACT manages a carers gateway that provides access to respite services for older people.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, have you asked the federal government to financially support Burrangiri respite centre given the budget blowout in your health portfolio?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I have not asked the commonwealth government to financially support the Burrangiri respite centre because, as I have just been indicating in my comments, this is a facility that is owned by the ACT government that needs to close for a period of time to undertake work on heating, ventilation and air conditioning and electrical. The roof also needs to be replaced in the next few years. You would not close the centre once to replace the electrical, heating ventilation and air conditioning, and then close the centre again in another two years to completely replace the roof. If you were going to do that work to continue using the centre for its current purpose, you would do all that work at once. That would be what made sense. So that would be more than \$900,000 worth of work, particularly given the escalation in construction costs.

So what I expect the commonwealth to do is to continue to provide funding for respite through their aged care systems. As I was just starting to say, that is managed in the ACT through Carers ACT, who have a carers gateway that anybody can call. Carers ACT can organise both emergency respite and planned respite care. They are funded by the commonwealth to undertake that service. Residential aged care facilities are funded to provide respite. Carers ACT also has the cottage program, which is funded by the commonwealth, to do that respite service that is their responsibility. Of course, the Albanese Labor government has been increasing funding and undertaking reform in aged care, again to address the decade of neglect under the previous coalition government.

### **Australian Federal Police—professional standards investigations**

**MR RATTENBURY:** My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. On 5 April 2025 *The Canberra Times* reported the Professional Standards unit of the Australian Federal Police concluded that Sergeant David Power breached the AFP Code of Conduct after admitting in court it appeared he had given ‘false evidence’ in the hearing of South Sydney Rabbitohs teammates Jack Wighton and Latrell Mitchell—noting that his evidence led to the charges being dismissed.

Minister, in such a high-profile case that has the capacity to erode public confidence in the AFP, when the officer involved admitted to hallucinating and giving inaccurate evidence, how is the Canberra community meant to have faith in the AFP when we are told that, for privacy reasons, we not allowed to know the findings of the breach and the sanctions applied to the officer involved?

**DR PATERSON:** I thank the member for the question. Yes, I am aware of the reporting



about the AFP officer in the media this week. The AFP has confirmed that the sanctions will not be made available, due to privacy reasons. The confidentiality of information relating to integrity issues, including the personal information of AFP appointees, is subject to the secrecy provisions in section 60A of the AFP Act and regulations 28 and 29 of the AFP Regulations.

I am confident that there are multiple avenues for external oversight of ACT police, and that they are appropriate avenues, and that where oversight finds areas for improvement, this occurs. ACT Policing is subject to more internal and external oversight than most other agencies or organisations. I am confident that there are no inherent structural or cultural issues affecting the overall performance of ACT Policing.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Minister, are you concerned that there may be other First Nations people in Canberra who might be subjected to similar injustices at the hands of territory police officers but not have the financial capacity available to Mr Mitchell and Mr Wighton to engage a top legal team to defend their case?

**DR PATERSON:** I thank the member for the question. Obviously, the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system is of much concern to the ACT government. The Jumbunna report that will soon be released is looking into issues around the engagement of justice agencies with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and I am sure there will be some recommendations out of that which speak to ACT Policing's engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. I look forward to working through those recommendations when they come.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Minister, what steps will you take with regard to professional standards investigations, so that the public, who are important stakeholders, can be aware of such findings?

**DR PATERSON:** I will support ACT Policing's and the AFP's professional standards that currently exist. There are a whole lot of complaint mechanisms. AFP Workplace Issues and Complaints Resolution teams are there to address these concerns.

### **Planning—Ginninderra Falls**

**MS CLAY:** My question is to the Minister for Homes and New Suburbs. I imagine the Chief Minister will be amply able to answer this question. It is about Ginninderra Falls.

There is currently a subdivision application through Yass Valley Council of a property on Parkwood Road which sits in Ginninderra Falls. My understanding is that the sale process of the falls might be delayed due to the subdivision of this property. Has the ACT government been consulted about this subdivision, given that the site can only be accessed through the ACT?

**MR BARR:** I thank Ms Clay for the question. I will need to take that on notice.

**MS CLAY:** Will the ACT government, on behalf of the Canberra community, advocate to include a public access road to the Falls as part of the subdivision discussions?

**MR BARR:** I will take that as part of the question on notice that Minister Berry will respond to.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Will the ACT government work with the New South Wales government and the buyer of Ginninderra Falls to ensure the ecological values of the land are protected and that sites of significance to First Nations people are managed by First Nations people?

**MR BARR:** I think I missed a key word in the first sentence. Did you say—

**MR SPEAKER:** Could you please repeat the question for us, Miss Nuttall?

**MISS NUTTALL:** Yes; indeed. Will the ACT government work with the New South Wales government and the buyer of Ginninderra Falls to ensure the ecological—

**MR BARR:** “The buyer”. Sorry—I thought the question might have implied that we would be working with the New South Wales government to buy the falls. Thank you for the clarification. I will take that on notice.

### **Planning and development—Molonglo**

**MR COCKS:** My question is to the Minister for Planning. The 2018-19 budget announced land releases for the Molonglo commercial centre in the 2021-22 financial year. In 2020, Labor promised to fast-track the centre’s development, but in 2021 the ACT government postponed the land release to 2023-24, which is now in the past. As recently as last year’s budget, it appeared the land release would commence this financial year. Is the town centre land release going to be delayed again?

**MR STEEL:** I thank the member for his question. We will update the community as part of the budget and the release of the housing supply and Land Release Program, which is the new name for the Indicative Land Release Program. We will do that around budget time to provide an update to the community on the timing of release of a range of blocks. Of course, it is an indicative program.

The Suburban Land Agency, under Minister Berry, has been working on the development of a subdivision design application to support the new Molonglo town centre. The government has undertaken works in the past, under Minister Gentleman, to fast-track some of the planning work that was required to support the new commercial centre. I undertook the work to declare Molonglo a town centre and to advocate for changes to the National Capital Plan, which have come into force, and the subdivision design application is being prepared on that basis, which will need to go out for consultation with the community under the statutory process. That is a necessary step before the land is released to market, and we expect it will take a number of years for the actual construction to occur on the site.

The first work that will be required by the SLA is already underway in terms of the work that the government has been undertaking on John Gorton Drive, not just to build the new bridge over the Molonglo River but the lead-in roads which are critical for the development of Molonglo because they provide the intersections and access points into the town centre. Work is well progressed on that, and the Suburban Land Agency will

be undertaking further work, as well, to progress the town centre as quickly as possible.

**MR COCKS:** Minister, has there been any impact or delay to the town centre land release related to the Urban Forest Act? If so, precisely what?

**MR STEEL:** Not that I am aware of, but that would be a question for the Suburban Land Agency. I am happy to take that on notice.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, on what date will you be releasing the land for the town centre? Will you now apologise to the Molonglo community for continually breaking the 2020 Labor election commitment to fast-track the land release?

**MR STEEL:** I refer the member to the answer to the earlier question, where I did note that Minister Gentleman had undertaken some of that fast-tracking work with the planning changes in the Molonglo Valley, and I have extended that work on declaring Molonglo as a town centre. The Suburban Land Agency is now undertaking work as quickly as possible to deliver that site, and the government has also been investing in the necessary enabling infrastructure through new roads, in particular, and the augmentation of existing roads to support the intersections in the future development. We are getting on with the work for Molonglo town centre. I look forward to updating the community as the Suburban Land Agency progresses, and they will need to consult with the community as they undertake their subdivision design application.

### **Vocational education and training—fee-free courses**

**MS TOUGH:** My question is to the Minister for Skills, Training and Industrial Relations. Minister, can you provide an update to the Assembly on the uptake of fee-free TAFE and how this initiative is supporting Canberrans in getting the skills they need to succeed?

**MR PETTERSSON:** I thank Ms Tough for the question and for her commitment to fee-free TAFE here in the ACT. Fee-free TAFE is, of course, a joint initiative of the commonwealth and ACT governments. It is designed to help people to learn, retrain or upskill themselves. It provides 600 free places per semester until December 2026, helping to remove barriers to access for many in our community.

Since commencement, just over 1,200 students have completed their free TAFE course. 778 of them received a full qualification; 452 of them undertook a short course. The top courses were in some of our most critical areas of need in the ACT, including cert III in early childhood education and care, cert IV in cybersecurity, cert IV in information technology, and cert IV in school-based education and support. Of the 1,200 students who have benefited from free TAFE, over 38 per cent were young people, 19 per cent were women experiencing financial hardship and 11 per cent of them were unpaid carers.

Free TAFE is a great practical initiative being delivered by the federal Labor and ACT Labor governments, and it will remove barriers to accessing training.

**MS TOUGH:** Minister, noting that free TAFE is a joint initiative of the ACT and commonwealth governments, what risk is there to the future of free TAFE and access

to a CIT education should the coalition form government following the upcoming federal election?

**MR PETTERSSON:** I thank Ms Tough for the supplementary. She is right; there is a real risk to free TAFE under a Peter Dutton prime ministership. Free TAFE is at risk in this election. Just recently, the Albanese government's Free TAFE Bill passed the Senate. This important piece of legislation will support the delivery of at least 100,000 free TAFE places across Australia each year.

The bill recognises the key role of the public provider at the heart of our vocational education system, and how it is critical to deliver the skills needs of our growing economy. Over the next decade, nine out of 10 of the new jobs in this economy will require post-secondary qualifications. Almost half of those will come from VET pathways, and removing financial barriers to entry will help to ensure that our workforce will continue to have the skills it needs in the future.

The federal Liberal opposition voted against this bill. They fought it. They do not support it. When the coalition last left federal government, the VET sector was underfunded and under-supported. Even when out of government, the federal Liberal opposition still tried to hold our VET sector back by trying to stop the Free TAFE Bill.

**Mr Cocks:** A point of order, Mr Speaker.

**MR SPEAKER:** If we can stop the clock, please?

**Mr Cocks:** I have listened for some time to the minister, and it is clear that he seems to have ventured into the space of debating the merits of different federal positions on the issue.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Cocks, that was the question. He is being directly relevant to the question.

**MR PETTERSSON:** I will note that this is a joint initiative between the territory and federal governments, so it is hugely consequential as to who our partner is in delivering it.

It is only a federal Labor government that will support TAFE in Australia and give it the funding it needs to secure education opportunities into the future.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Minister—get the cane out, if appropriate—but how—

**Mr Cocks:** Point of order!

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Werner-Gibbings, that is a preamble. We appreciate your theatrics, but if we could just remove the preamble.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** I apologise.

How will our local VET sector be impacted if free TAFE is scrapped under a Dutton-led coalition government?

**MR PETTERSSON:** I thank Mr Werner-Gibbings for the supplementary. It is hugely consequential. The commonwealth has committed \$7.36 million to the ACT under tranche 2 of free TAFE. This funding, provided through to December 2026, will continue to support training opportunities for some of Canberra's most vulnerable cohorts. Our community is one that values and truly understands how vital education and training are at all levels. The commonwealth support is critical to keeping this important pathway open to Canberra's community. If the commonwealth were to exit the scheme, this would come at the direct cost of learning opportunities in Canberra, and could see around 1,200 Canberrans miss out each year on the opportunities that free TAFE provides.

### **Crime—firearms**

**MS MORRIS:** My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. Minister, the ACT Chief Police Officer recently disclosed on ABC radio at least six public shootings across Canberra in recent weeks, causing significant injuries, the death of a pet dog and damage to family homes. Police believe at least four of those shootings were linked and the work of a least three men.

Minister, why have Canberra suburbs become a warzone for targeted gun attacks?

**DR PATERSON:** I strongly refute the Canberra Liberals' description of Canberra as a warzone. We live in one of the safest communities in Australia. We are seeing crime rates decreasing. I acknowledge that the incidents that Ms Morris is referencing that occurred last week are very concerning to the community. But what the ACT Chief Police Officer stressed on radio that morning was that these are targeted attacks and they are not a threat to public safety.

ACT Policing have been doing excellent work in tackling firearm related crime over the last few months, which has seen the ACT Firearms Registry seizing over 2,000 firearms in operations over the last two months. So there is a lot of work going on in this space to keep our community safe.

**MS MORRIS:** Minister, when will you admit that your government's failure to prioritise community safety is making Canberra less safe?

**DR PATERSON:** Again, I strongly reject that assertion. ACT Labor and this government's investment in ACT Policing and a raft of other measures to support the community have seen a decrease in crime rates in the ACT. Again, we live in one of the safest cities in the country. We are seeing significant decreases in crime rates, which is really a testament to the excellent work of ACT Policing and our community sector partners.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, when were you first briefed on these shootings? What action have you taken to ensure that there is no ongoing threat to the community?

**DR PATERSON:** I have listened to the advice from the ACT Chief Police Officer, who has assured me that there is no ongoing threat to the Canberra community and that these are targeted incidents which ACT Policing are currently investigating.

**Roads—speed limits**

**MR MILLIGAN:** My question is to the Minister for City Services.

Research shows that the introduction of a 40 km/h speed zones in high pedestrian areas, significantly reduces the risk of death for vulnerable road users. A 10 km/h decrease in speed can reduce the risk of death from approximately 80 per cent at 50 km/h to 30 per cent at 40 km/h. Minister, why are the roads surrounding St Clare's and St Edmund's in Griffith, not 40 km/h school zones?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Mr Milligan for the question. I did cover quite a lot of this this morning on radio, and I recognise that Mr Solly is present in the chamber.

The short answer is that a school zone is generally installed on the length of the school boundary, located in front of the school's frontage, where safe access can be provided. A 40 km/h zone is also usually associated with set downs and pickups, and that is already available for St Edmund's and St Clare's colleges from their existing designated school zones on—I never know how to pronounce this—Barrallier Street, Blaxland Crescent, Will Street and McMillan Crescent. I think what Mr Milligan is referring to in saying streets around is one street, which is Canberra Avenue. It is 60 km/h for some different reasons. It is an arterial road. It also is designated land under the National Capital Authority because it is a main corridor and it is linked in with the Burley Griffin plan for Canberra. So it is of very big interest to the NCA and will need engagement if ever we wish to make any changes to it, because preserving that is so important. Also an arterial road is designed to move lots of vehicles. So it is not just 60 km/h because it is an arterial road, but it is moving 20,000 vehicles per day. So that explains why Canberra Avenue is not a 40 km/h zone in that area.

**MR MILLIGAN:** Minister, what interventions for Canberra Avenue has the government considered for better safety for pedestrians?

**MS CHEYNE:** A feasibility study was commissioned last year. I have that and I have asked TCCS for some further advice about timing and options. What appears to be the most logical solution is to install a signalised pedestrian crossing mid-block between McMillan and Burke Streets. However, my understanding is that the original advice also reflected that the Hume Place roundabout, which connects Wentworth, Sturt and Canberra Avenues, is one of our most dangerous intersections. Canberra Avenue, in that area that we are talking about, is not considered a particularly dangerous spot. Other areas of Canberra Avenue absolutely are, down near Fyshwick, but it is that intersection actually that has been the priority.

We do have federal funding for that. There has been considerable amount of design work undertaken. But the original recommendation, as I understood it, was that that work needed to be completed first because then it would have flow on effects for Canberra Avenue. However, in the context of the absolute tragedy that occurred the other week and the representations that I have received, we are having another look at that and I will keep the community and the Assembly updated.

**MR HANSON:** I believe it is Barrallier Street, Minister.

**Ms Cheyne:** Thank you.

**MR HANSON:** It is named after Francis Louis Barrallier.

**MR SPEAKER:** I think that is a preamble too Mr Hanson!

**MR HANSON:** It is indeed! It is indeed!

**Mr Barr:** It is the most helpful one he has ever given!

**MR HANSON:** You cannot win, can you!

Minister, are you aware of any other inadequately protected school zones or other interventions, leaving Canberra children vulnerable outside Canberra schools?

**MS CHEYNE:** I thank Mr Hanson for helping me out and also for the question. Certainly a school that is top of mind for me is Melba Copland. There was an accident there some weeks ago where a young person was injured by a vehicle. I have received representations from that family, and Minister Berry and I have been working with TCCS and with the school safety program about interventions that might be appropriate in that area. We are limited for some of the interventions such as mobile van speed cameras—there is not an appropriate place due to the curvature of the road. What we do witness is some of the parking behaviours can be problematic. All of that needs a bit of a closer look at. But again, I look forward to updating the Assembly in due course.

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