



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

**HANSARD**

Edited proof transcript

Wednesday, 5 March 2025

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

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Minister for Health. As we learned in annual reports hearings, you were aware of serious insolvency risks with Canberra's health and hospital system during last year's election, but you failed to disclose this information to the opposition, the Assembly or the community. Notwithstanding the establishment of the committee earlier today, there are still questions to answer. Minister, who did you inform about these risks prior to the election?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I absolutely reject the premise of the Leader of the Opposition's question. I refer her to the comments I made in the debate earlier today—

**Ms Castley:** Point of order. The question was who did she inform? That was not really a comment.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** There was a preamble.

**Ms Castley:** The question was who did you inform?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I am rejecting the preamble to the Leader of the Opposition's question—

**Ms Castley:** Right. It is good to have clarity.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** —and the assertions that she made in that preamble, which are completely factually incorrect and I refer her to the comments that I made this morning.

In relation to who I informed, I did not inform anybody, because I was provided with some factual information about increased presentations in July and August 2024, prior to the caretaker period, that were consistent with what I had been saying publicly about increased demand on our health system, how busy our health system was and, therefore, why the first ACT Labor election commitment was to 800 additional health workers; why ACT Labor was absolutely committed to the building of the new northside hospital and additional health centres across our city; commitments in the second case that the Canberra Liberals never matched, and in the first case, took the Canberra Liberals until the last week of the campaign to confirm that they were committed to building a new northside hospital for the fastest growing area of our city. The way that the Leader of the Opposition has described this information is completely and utterly false.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, did you give any consideration to the political impact of disclosing this information before the election?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I did not, because this information was entirely consistent with everything we had said about how busy our health system was, in line with our health systems around the country. I would point the Leader of the Opposition, for example, to the experience in Tasmania. The Liberal government in Tasmania, at their mid-year review, had to add an additional \$350 million to their health system in their mid-year review process through their mid-year review budget process—a decision that

I am sure was taken through a proper governmental process in line with advice from officials. That would have taken some consideration of the options that were available to government about whether to add funding to the system or whether to, as other governments have done, take some very difficult decisions about constraining the system and reducing activity in the system. Those decisions—even the opportunity to take decisions—was not being requested through the caretaker period, and the implications of that were absolutely unclear from data that was only from July and August, during a very busy winter period, that I had already told the public was a very busy winter period.

**MS MORRIS:** Minister, did not the decision to withhold this information lack transparency and integrity?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** No, this information was not withheld, and I reject that question.

### **Canberra Health Services—funding**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Minister for Health. Minister. The insolvency risks being faced by Canberra Health Services are ultimately the result of the government's inaccurate forecasts about health demand this year. Were you ultimately responsible for these forecasts? If so, why were your forecasts so wrong?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Again, I absolutely reject the way that the Leader of the Opposition has characterised this. There is nothing in Mr Peffer's email—which she has a copy of—that suggests an insolvency risk. That is absolutely a false representation of the information—the factual information—that was provided to my office during the election campaign.

Every year, you project forward activity and funding for a future budget. You do that in May, at the latest, and you set your budget. For the 2024-25 budget, we set a budget for Canberra Health Services that increased funding by six per cent from 2023-24 to 2024-25. The Canberra Liberals, of course, keep saying that we flatlined the budget. But that is because the Canberra Liberals, in their media release, made clear that they actually do not understand that it is Canberra Health Services that delivers health services to the ACT. In their media release—their gotcha media release, out of annual report hearings—they included the ACT Health directorate budget, which is not about service delivery and has not received additional funding; the most embarrassing technical blunder that you could possibly make as a shadow health minister for more than two years and as a shadow Treasurer. They are so fortunate that this has not been picked up in the media, because it is so embarrassing!

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, do you have confidence in the ability of ACT Health and CHS to accurately forecast health demand? If so, why?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** It is not possible to 100 per cent accurately forecast health demand, because things change. I do not know if Ms Castley remembers, but a few years ago we had a global pandemic! That was not included in our health demand forecasts. So 100 per cent accurately forecasting health demand is not possible. Officials do their best, and they generally do a very good. I would note that Mr Peffer's

email, as tabled to the committee the other day—and which Ms Castley has a copy of—specifically says, “These are preliminary numbers only.” So not only are they numbers for July and August, but the email itself says that they are preliminary numbers only.

**MR COCKS:** Minister, how can you assure us that your forecasts informing this year’s budget will be reliable given that, over recent years, the forecasts across health, including both CHS and the health directorate, have been so far out?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Mr Zero Growth himself, who has mistaken six per cent growth for zero growth in health system funding—

**Mr Hanson:** Mr Speaker, I believe that we are to refer to each other in a parliamentary way, by name not by nicknames; otherwise, we can start making them up, too. If that’s going to be the standard, I’ve got some doozies!

**MR SPEAKER:** I think Mr Hanson does make a fair point. Members, before we get back to the answer to the question, if you can remember it by the time we get there, at the start of this term, I did suggest that I would be trying to make things more sensible—or more boring—in this chamber and that I do not want to see bullying from this side to that side. But I would suggest that it does go both ways.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Mr Speaker, you are correct: I am having trouble remembering exactly what the question was. But I can advise the shadow treasurer, who indicated publicly—

**Mr Hanson:** Mr Speaker, sorry to be technical, but could you ask her to withdraw her slur?

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Hanson, I think I have made the point. I am not going to ask her to withdraw. I would just ask members to be mindful.

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** If it is helpful for Mr Hanson and Mr Cocks, I am happy to withdraw. I just make the point that the shadow treasurer mistook six per cent growth in CHS’s budget for zero per cent growth—which is a pretty tragic error if you are indeed putting yourself forward as the alternative treasurer.

Obviously, every year, we have a look at what we expect the health system to deliver and we set our budget accordingly. In this year, we are going to need to make some difficult decisions to ensure that our budget remains sustainable into the future. Every year, every government is in this circumstance. I am absolutely confident that, with all the information available to us, our officials are doing their very best job of forecasting what that demand will look like into the future. But it is not possible to be 100 per cent accurate in those forecasts all the time.

### **Canberra Health Services—surgeons**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Minister for Health. How many orthopaedic surgeons have resigned their positions in the ACT so far this year, and what are the reasons they have given for their resignation?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I will take that question on notice.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, how many surgeons have contacted you or the CHS CEO expressing their concern about proposed changes to visiting medical officer contracts?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Clearly, I will have to take that question on notice because I will have to consult with the CHS CEO to answer it.

**MS BARRY:** Minister, what will be the effect of these resignations on the ACT's ability to train junior doctors and surgeons, and on the accreditation of specialist training units?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Ms Barry for her supplementary question. I am confident that there will not be any impact on training for our junior medical officers. One of the things that I have been having conversations about with the surgeons I have met, and also with the leadership of Canberra Health Services, is making sure, to the extent that we are in a level of dispute about visiting medical officer arrangements—and I would emphasise at this point that we have been very clear that nobody's contract is being changed, nobody's contract is being withdrawn and that anyone whose contract is due to expire in the next six months will be offered a six-month extension of their contract, while we work through the circumstances. This is the same unit, actually, that Ms Castley was criticising the government for in the last term, late last year, where accreditation for supervision of what are called "PGY1" and "PGY2", the first and second year of internships, had been withdrawn. We have regained that. We are really confident that we will retain that accreditation, and we will continue to work with the orthopaedic surgery team to ensure that specialist accreditation is also retained, and that is part of the conversation that we are having with that craft group.

### **Homelessness—Central Intake Service**

**MR RATTENBURY:** My question is to the minister for housing and homelessness. Minister, the Central Intake Service provides vital services for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. My understanding is that the current contract expires on 30 April. Has a new contract been awarded?

**MS BERRY:** No, it has not been awarded yet. Once that decision is taken, I will make sure that I let the Assembly and members know. That process is continuing. As I said, as soon as I am able to, and when I am provided with that information, I can share it with others.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Minister, when will the government be awarding the new contract, given that the end of the current contract is now only about seven weeks away?

**MS BERRY:** As I said, once I know, I will be able to provide that information. I will double-check the date on which we were planning for the new contract to take over, and I will come back to the Assembly with that.

**MR SPEAKER:** You are taking that on notice?

**MS BERRY:** Yes.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Minister, is it acceptable that there is no certainty for the service provider and, subsequently, for the clients about the future of this service?

**MS BERRY:** No, I absolutely disagree with the context of that question. We have gone out to contract. We have made the homelessness services community aware that we have gone out to contract. Any contract change, of course, means that there will be a change in a service, and we will make sure that we advise the community once that decision has been made. There is still some time ahead for us to be able to make an announcement about who the new contractor is. But this is a contract change. We will go through the processes that are appropriate and inform the community when we can.

### **Hospitals—elective joint replacement program**

**MS CASTLEY:** My question is to the Minister for Health. What was the cost to taxpayers of your decision to move the elective joint replacement program from the Calvary John James Hospital to the Canberra Hospital and then back again to Calvary John James Hospital?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I will take the question on notice to ensure that I am correct. As far as I am aware, there was no cost to that; in fact, what we have delivered is a significant saving in the elective joint replacement program. We have made a decision to insource this program because we were not satisfied with the price that we were getting from Calvary John James. I had had previous conversations with representatives of the orthopaedic surgery area around what we would like to see in terms of pricing, and we had not been able to achieve that previously.

With the decision to in-source that program, we are still working to ensure that elective joint replacements can be delivered in the new critical services building, which has expanded theatre capacity at Canberra Hospital. It opened in August 2024—at the time the biggest health infrastructure investment since self-government—so we have the capacity, now, to insource joint replacements. As a result of that conversation with Calvary John James, they have come back with a significantly improved price, and we are going to continue to work with them in partnership on the elective joint replacement program.

**MS CASTLEY:** Minister, what is the total cost of the decision, including the resourcing required to manage front-end organisation; theatre staffing; management of infrastructure; provision of ward services, including additional doctor, nursing and physiotherapy staff; post-surgical rehab; and back-end follow-up?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Mr Speaker, I seek your guidance here. I am not sure what decision Ms Castley is talking about, given that I have just indicated that we will continue our partnership with Calvary John James to deliver the elective joint replacement program. I do not know what decision she is referring to, so I am not able to answer the question.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, what effects has your change of mind had on the approximately 500 elective surgery cases that are conducted by this unit each year?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** None.

### **Early childhood education and care services—safety**

**MR HANSON:** My question is to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood. The Productivity Commission's Report on Government Services shows that per 100 NQF—National Quality Framework—approved childcare services, the ACT has recorded 235 serious incidents across all service types. This is a 24 per cent increase from the previous year's figure of 189.9. The national figure for 2024 is 148.1. Minister, why have serious incidents increased by 24 per cent in a year?

**MS BERRY:** Thank you for that question. ACECQA, which is the organisation that regulates the early childhood education and care sector, is working closely with services to make sure they are applying the national law, and that includes complaints that are made. Regarding those numbers increasing, I can say that, anecdotally, it is a result of the Productivity Commission's work in drawing attention to the regulations in early childhood education and care services. Reporting of those incidents is increasing, as is appropriate, but what we want to see is a reduction in those incidents occurring, and that is where the role of the regulator, ACECQA, comes in. I cannot specifically say whether there is a reason that we have been able to identify for those numbers being higher than others, but, if I have any advice available, I will make sure I present it to the Assembly.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, why does the ACT have the highest number of serious incidents per 100 childcare centres in Australia?

**MS BERRY:** I refer Mr Hanson to my previous answer. If I have data that is more accurate than just anecdotal, I will provide it to the Assembly.

**MS BARRY:** Minister, what is the government doing to address this unacceptable rate of serious incidents?

**MS BERRY:** That is the work of ACECQA, which is the regulator of early childhood services in the ACT. It plays an important role in both regulating and supporting services to provide safe and accessible early childhood education to children in our community.

### **Waste—recycling**

**MS CLAY:** My question is to the Minister for City and Government Services. We are currently sending our household recycling interstate and we are building a new recycling facility intended to be operating in 2028. Current arrangements do not recycle many standard items. I am worried the new recycling facility also will not recycle many standard items. I am worried about soft plastics, plastic bags, many hard plastics used in standard packaging, small pieces of paper, disposable coffee cups, drink lids, bamboo plates and cutlery, bioplastic plates and cutlery and blister packs for pills. Will the new recycling facility recover these items?

**MS CHEYNE:** I feel like we had an identical question in the last sitting week and I think I took it on notice and provided that answer, so I might take that on notice again



Mr Speaker, just to make sure that I am not misremembering nor saying something out of turn. I know I have previously advised Ms Clay, including at the annual report hearings, that soft plastics is something that we are working on a solution nationally with the federal government. This is because, quite honestly, the ACT does not have the amount coming into it that would have an own-industry be suitable for undertaking that recycling and turning it into another product. The issue we are facing nationally is that we have not seen a product yet that currently makes up for the cost of recycling it. As is always best practice, it is reduce first, and this has really been the focus of governments, including our own, that we seek to reduce the use of these plastics with recycling being a costly option.

**MS CLAY:** Will the national scheme be mandatory so that big corporations like Coles and Woolworths will participate and pay their way?

**MS CHEYNE:** I do not think that discussions have advanced far enough on that one at this stage, but if I am mistaken, I will correct the record.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Minister, when will the ACT government run public consultation on local and national recycling arrangements to see what Canberrans expect from their government on recycling?

**MS CHEYNE:** Again Mr Speaker, I will take that on notice to make sure that the answers have been consistent to questions that have been answered recently.

### **Future of Education Equity Fund—school students**

**MS TOUGH:** My question is to the Minister for Education. Minister, I understand the 2025 Future of Education Equity Fund application round is open. Why is this such an important program?

**MS BERRY:** Thanks very much for that question and your interest in equity and the equity fund across ACT schools. It is an important fund that provides supports to eligible families on low incomes and independent students, all the way from preschool to year 12, with one-off annual payments to help cover the costs associated with schooling, such as uniforms, sport equipment and activities, tuition and music lessons. The equity fund supports eligible families of students enrolled in all ACT schools—so non-government and other approved forms of education as well. Payment rates are \$400 for preschool students, \$500 for primary school students and \$750 for high school and college students.

Last year, the equity fund provided more than \$3.3 million to more than 5,700 financially disadvantaged students. We know that that has made a huge difference in their and their families lives. The 2025 round of the Future of Education Equity Fund opened on 2 December 2024 and, as of 28 February 2025, 2,229 applications have been approved for payment in the 2025 round, which is approximately \$2.7 million of allocated funding to families, with \$2,590,850 successfully paid into bank accounts for families to be able to access.

**MS TOUGH:** Minister, what sorts of things does the program fund?

**MS BERRY:** Thanks for that supplementary. The Future of Education Equity Fund provides eligible families with the option to apply for a one-off annual grant, as I said. It covers costs that are associated with school—things like school uniforms, school excursions, sport equipment and activities and music lessons. When I hear from families who have been able to access the funds and the difference that it makes in their lives and their children’s lives we know that it is an important part of how the ACT government is supporting people in the ACT, particularly at a time when costs are rising.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Minister, how do families and carers access the fund?

**MS BERRY:** Thank you for that supplementary. Families and carers can access the fund through the SmartyGrants online application form on the Education ACT website. Families can also talk with their schools for further information or support. They might have a trusted person that they have a relationship with where they can get supported to access the fund. Once the application is submitted, we try to get the money into people’s bank accounts as quickly as we can—taking into account pay periods and accessing bank details et cetera—but, in some cases, it might take up to six weeks. Applications for the 2025 round will remain open all the way up to 28 November this year.

### **Domestic and family violence—safer families assistance payment**

**MR EMERSON:** My question is for the Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence. We know that one of the primary barriers keeping women from escaping violent situations is financial dependency. The narrow scope of the available federal support payments creates a gap for women who have been homeless for more than 12 weeks and those experiencing violence other than intimate partner violence.

The ACT government’s \$2,000 safer families assistance payment helped fill that gap. A prominent local women’s safety provider told me that this payment had been discontinued in December. Government officials, during recent committee hearings, indicated it was more like January or February but later confirmed on notice that it did end in December. They also indicated they consulted community service providers about it but later said on notice that, in fact, the community sector had to contact the government to be provided with information.

Minister, when were you consulted about funding for this program being exhausted, and did you take any steps to keep this potentially life-saving program open through to the end of the financial year?

**DR PATERSON:** I will take on notice when I was made aware that this funding was not continuing. Basically, this is a grants program that runs each year for \$2,000 for applicants who are victims of domestic or family violence. The fund was around \$363,000 for victim-survivors, with no admin costs included in this figure. What has happened is that that money has been fully allocated, so the fund ceased at that time. I acknowledge the inconvenience and distress this caused. When I was made aware, I was very prompt to provide that advice to the community sector advocate who you are talking about. I will continue to advocate for these types of services and grants to support victims of domestic and family violence.

**MR EMERSON:** Minister, as part of your continual advocacy, will you commit to urgently reinstating this payment, given what you referred to in your statement this morning as, I quote, “unacceptable” levels of gender-based violence.

**DR PATERSON:** What I will commit to is that we have a range of programs and services funded to address domestic and family violence, so I will continue to advocate to see grants like this and other programs fully functioning in the ACT.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Minister, are you committed to increasing the level of funding for this program in the upcoming budget so that it lasts all the way through to the end of the financial year, given that funding for the program has now been exhausted early in three consecutive financial years?

**DR PATERSON:** That is a matter for budget consideration.

### **Domestic, family and sexual violence—strategy**

**MISS NUTTALL:** My question is to the Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence. Minister, it is my understanding that the ACT government did a period of consultation and committed to a new ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy. Unfortunately, from what I have heard from the community, the consultation on the strategy fell short of community expectation, and they have not heard much since. I understand that there was a communication sent out recently to the sector and that this might have included an indicative time frame. Are you able to share this time line and what it entails for the strategy?

**DR PATERSON:** The ACT government is strongly committed to developing a comprehensive, evidence-based ACT Domestic, family and sexual violence strategy. This strategy will guide future work and investment to prevent and respond to domestic, family and sexual violence.

Consultation to develop this strategy will occur through this year in three phases. It will focus on victim-survivors and the critical frontline organisations with expertise in preventing and addressing domestic and family violence. As we develop the strategy, we will also develop a monitoring and evaluation framework so that we can track our progress in addressing domestic, family and sexual violence, and learning what is working and what needs to change.

**MISS NUTTALL:** Can you please share what expertise the consultant, who I understand will be engaged on the strategy, will be bringing to the strategy and whether this position will be funded through the Safer Families Levy?

**DR PATERSON:** There is a procurement process underway at the moment. I will take that on notice, as to where the funding is coming from.

**MR RATTENBURY:** Minister, what will you do differently in the next round of consultation to make sure consultation meets community expectation and the strategy is delivered in a timely fashion?

**DR PATERSON:** I thank the member for the question. I have been very up-front and explicit with frontline service providers in the ACT about how committed I am to working with them to progress an ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy. This is incredibly important work. I worked very closely with the sector in the previous term of government, and now in my role as the Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence.

### **Ministers—code of conduct**

**MR COCKS:** My question is to the Chief Minister. The ministerial code of conduct for the ACT seems to be no longer available on the internet. Indeed, even the link from the *ACT Cabinet Handbook* now leads to a CMTEDD message, which says that the page was removed, renamed or does not exist. So I must ask you this directly: does the *Ministerial Code of Conduct* contain any requirement, suggestion or implication that ministers should respond to inquiries from constituents or other MLAs? Is there a timeframe that you would consider reasonable to expect a response?

**MR BARR:** I am just checking now to see whether that document is available online. I will confirm that in a moment. If it is not, I will ensure that it is available online.

In relation to the second part of the question, it will obviously depend on the nature of the approach to the minister, either from a constituent or from another member of the Assembly. The timeframe would vary depending on the inquiry. It could stretch to months; it could be a matter of hours, depending on exactly what the request is. It is impossible to give a definition that at this point it is no longer meeting the ministerial code of conduct because the issue could be quite complex.

Common courtesy would suggest that an acknowledgement of an issue being raised would be an appropriate first step, together with—if it is possible to give one—an indication of a potential time frame. But I recognise that not every issue would necessarily lend itself to that sort of response; others you could address quite quickly.

**MR COCKS:** Chief Minister, are you aware that one of your ministers has responded to almost no ministerial representations from the opposition—I think, since coming to government, there is a grand total of two times that they have done so—and, if so, when were you made aware?

**MR BARR:** I must confess, I do not personally track each piece of correspondence from other members of the Assembly to other ministerial offices. I would expect colleagues to be courteous in their responses, but I would also expect members, in raising issues, to be similarly courteous.

**MS CASTLEY:** I have a supplementary question. Chief Minister, will you direct the Treasurer to begin providing responses to all correspondence regarding his portfolios in a timely manner, or should we inform constituents who contact us that we cannot guarantee a response from this government?

**MR BARR:** I expect colleagues to respond appropriately, but I acknowledge that certain issues may take longer. We are certainly in an era of public engagement. When I started my career, an expectation was for around 28 to 35 days, and things would

arrive in the mail. I am old—I acknowledge that. Now there is an expectation that things will be responded to within 28 to 35 seconds. I think that we need to acknowledge that some issues are complex. I do not know the nature of the representations, but I am sure the Treasurer's office, together with other offices, will endeavour to respond as quickly as they can.

### **ACT Climate Change Strategy**

**MR BRADDOCK:** My question is to the Minister for Climate Change, Environment, Energy and Water. Minister, with the current Climate Change Strategy expiring this year and a new strategy being required, the Climate Change Council has stated that the new strategy will need to incorporate more climate adaptation strategies as well as mitigation strategies. What climate adaptation strategies is the government considering?

**MS ORR:** I thank Mr Braddock for his question. It is a very timely question, given where we are with climate change—the changes we have already seen to our climate and the need to put in place more action around adaptation, as well as continuing to transition to net zero and mitigating what we can continue to mitigate. As Mr Braddock pointed out in his question, we are in the process of looking at a new Climate Change Strategy, noting that the one that is in place finishes at the end of this year. We will continue to look at that. It is a bit early and I cannot pre-empt or make any policy announcements during question time, but I can assure the member that adaptation and questions of what is an appropriate and achievable response to adaptation are certainly forming part of the current consideration.

**MR BRADDOCK:** Minister, how would the government balance the requirement to continue emissions mitigation whilst also favouring climate adaptation strategies?

**MS ORR:** At the risk of announcing new policy initiatives, I will not list anything that would specifically go to the question that Mr Braddock asked, but, if he has any ideas, I am more than happy to engage in a conversation. Now is a good time for Mr Braddock to have that chat, given we are in the early scoping of the new strategy and what it could look like. I am more than happy to hear whether he has some ideas that he wants to contribute.

**MS CLAY:** Minister, what action have you taken so far on recommendations from the Commissioner for Sustainability and the Environment, the Climate Council and the ACT Climate Change Council to cover scope 3 emissions from general consumption?

**MS ORR:** I think that is a bit different to the substantive question that Mr Braddock asked, but I will take the detail of the question on notice. We have also provided a number of responses to Ms Clay on this topic previously through other avenues.

**MR SPEAKER:** I assume you are taking—

**MS ORR:** The action on scope 3 emissions.

### **Aged care—respite**

**MS CARRICK:** My question is to the Minister for Health. The ACT has a shortage of respite beds, and long wait times of four to six months, yet the ACT government is closing 15 beds at the Burrangiri Aged Care Respite Centre. When Burrangiri's 5,475 nights of respite care are no longer available, where will people go for respite before your facility for Carers ACT is built?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** I thank Ms Carrick for the question, and I look forward to debating this matter this afternoon where we have a substantive motion on the table. As Ms Carrick has indicated, Burrangiri has been providing respite services for some time. As I have publicly said on a number of occasions now, and as has been agreed previously with the service provider, this physical facility needs to close to be refurbished. That would need to happen, even were we to subsequently, after the refurbishment, continue to fund a respite service from this facility. But the facility itself will need to close for refurbishment no matter what decision we take. That is not an easy decision.

I have asked the health directorate to work with the Canberra Health Services, which run a step down from hospital program. We looked at other options to fund respite care through the health directorate, through an ad hoc program with other providers. All of these documents have been subject to a freedom of information request, so that process of thinking through what the alternative policy options were will become clear. It became apparent in thinking that through that Canberra Health Services already runs a very similar program where they buy beds from residential aged care facilities to provide that hospital step down respite, which is what a number of the people who have provided their experience of Burrangiri have talked about. So if we were going to do something to purchase beds, it would make more sense to expand that Canberra Health Services program than to do a separate ad hoc program.

**MS CARRICK:** The Canberra Hospital website indicates that two to four patients in a ward may share a bathroom. Is the ACT government expecting a small respite facility to provide more bathrooms per patient numbers than it provides in its own hospital?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** Well, two to four patients sharing a bathroom does occur. As Ms Carrick might be aware, as we have developed new hospital facilities and particularly the Critical Services Building, it is more and more the expectation that there would be fewer people sharing a bathroom. My understanding is that this 15 bed facility has four bathrooms, and that is not what we would expect the standard to be for something like respite care.

The bigger issue, as I have repeatedly indicated, and as I said in response to the first question, is that this facility would have to close anyway to undertake the refurbishment that is required. The Salvation Army's existing contract was coming to an end—in fact, it was extended through to the end of June 2025, in order to provide that transition, to provide certainty for the Salvation Army and to provide certainty for their staff. All that is happening now is that this debate is creating significant uncertainty for the staff at Burrangiri. We deliberately provided an extension and a period of time for The Salvation Army to plan its transition out of Burrangiri so that that facility could be refurbished. We have looked at alternative policy options and determined at this point that this service will not be funded, but we are happy to have a conversation about

alternative options.

**MR EMERSON:** Minister, what level of consultation was undertaken with the specific people affected by the closure of Burrangiri to determine where exactly they will be able to access timely respite care from 1 July?

**MS STEPHEN-SMITH:** It is a very interesting question actually that Mr Emerson asks because this is generally a facility that people use for a short period of time. Most people who would be accessing respite in this facility would not be doing it for years at a time, so the cohort of people using the facility will actually change over time. However, we do work closely with the Health Care Consumers' Association and Carers ACT and I have had a conversation with Carers Act about this decision and the reasoning for it, and also about what they look for in respite facilities. I would strongly encourage, if they have not already, both Ms Carrick and Mr Emerson, to have a conversation with Carers ACT about what respite looks like in a variety of circumstances.

Mr Speaker, if I can just add, I have talked previously and Ms Carrick mentioned, that we have an election commitment to work with Carers ACT to find them a site to establish a respite facility, which I note they have indicated would not require ongoing ACT funding. So what they need is support to find a site for that. We are also working through a process to establish a dementia care facility in Curtin. That process is working its way through the system, but it is publicly understood that it is on the table. Part of that may be the availability of respite, but what it indicates is that there are multiple other funding opportunities that are available for this type of service.

### **Gambling harms**

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** My question is to the Minister for Gaming Reform. Minister, with the footy season kicking off, do we expect to see a rise in gambling harm and advertising on television?

**DR PATERSON:** I thank the member for the question.

This time of year is an exciting time of year for many people, with the NRL season commencing just last weekend and the AFL season commencing on Friday. However, this time also sees a significant increase in sports betting advertising. Australians lost \$32 billion a year in gambling—the highest in the world. On average, Australians lose 20 per cent more in online wagering than any other nation. These losses undoubtedly increase during the seasons of our major sporting codes. Gambling harm from online wagering is also higher than other forms of harm, with 22.5 per cent of people who participate in online gambling experiencing harm. The 2019 Gambling Prevalence survey reported that 21 per cent of ACT adults participate in online gambling, an 8.4 per cent increase in participation compared to 2014. We expect to see this increase in the next survey.

Gambling also impacts other portfolios that I have. We know that, during major sporting events, rates of family and domestic violence increase.

**MR WERNER-GIBBINGS:** Minister, the government recently released a listening

report into gambling advertising. What were its findings?

**DR PATERSON:** The listening report on limiting child and youth exposure to gambling advertising in the ACT was released last month and reports on feedback from a discussion paper released last year. The listening report presented comments on two models. The first option was based on the South Australian model, which restricts advertising on radio from 6 am to 8.30 am and TV between 4 pm and 7.30 pm Monday to Friday. Option two goes further and includes weekend restrictions between 6 am and 8.30 pm in addition to the timeframes in option 1. We found that 99 per cent of people who made a submission support stronger restrictions.

These are not the only options that the government is considering. Feedback received from the listening report called for a total ban on gambling advertising, similar to the ban on tobacco advertising. This is also a recommendation from the *You win some, you lose more* report for the federal government. I look forward to continuing this work and hearing more from members of the community as this work progresses.

**MR HANSON:** Minister, how many millions of dollars do the Labor Clubs rip out of Canberrans' pockets each year playing their pokies?

**DR PATERSON:** That question is not in line with the original question, which was on online wagering.

**Mr Hanson:** On the point of order—which I presume is what the minister is saying—in answer to a question that she was asked, she was referring to the effect on the Canberra community of gaming in the ACT. My question directly goes to the impact of gaming in the ACT community.

**MR SPEAKER:** Mr Hanson, I do not believe that the question is sufficiently related to the primary question.

**Mr Rattenbury:** On the point of order, Mr Speaker: the original question was actually about gambling harm, and Mr Hanson's supplementary question was also about gambling harm.

**Dr Paterson:** It's about gambling advertising, actually.

**Mr Rattenbury:** To repeat the question, he actually asked whether at this time of year "we expect to see a rise in gambling harm" when the footy season starts—or something like that.

**MR SPEAKER:** I am ruling that the question is not sufficiently related to the original question.

### **ACT Policing—Deputy Chief Police Officer**

**MS MORRIS:** My question is to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services. An internal AFP message recently informed staff of the sudden departure of the ACT's Deputy Chief Police Officer. Minister, what involvement will your office and the ACT government have with the AFP's appointment of a new Deputy CPO?



**DR PATERSON:** I think that is a matter for the Chief Police Officer.

**MS MORRIS:** Minister, what steps will you take to ensure that local ACT police officers with longstanding experience in local policing strategies will be considered for the role?

**DR PATERSON:** It will be a merit-based exercise. I would encourage them to get in touch with the Chief Police Officer if they are interested in the role.

**MR COCKS:** Will you ensure that local operational knowledge and a demonstrated understanding of Canberra be factored into the selection criteria for the Deputy Chief Police Officer, given you are the minister?

**DR PATERSON:** That is a question I would recommend that the Canberra Liberals put to the Chief Police Officer. He would be the person who is recruiting—

**Mr Cocks:** Point of order—just on relevance. The question was around actions the minister will take in her role as minister, not in general what the CPO want to see.

**MR SPEAKER:** Minister?

**MR PARTON:** It is a matter for the Chief Police Officer.

**MR SPEAKER:** Thank you, Dr Paterson.

### **Bimberi Youth Justice Centre**

**MS BARRY:** My question is to the Minister for Children, Youth and Families. The Inspector of Custodial Services *Healthy centre review of Bimberi Youth Justice Centre* described your government's description of Bimberi as a "human rights compliant" facility as a hollow statement. Last week, at a social policy committee hearing, officials advised that risk mitigation is prioritised over individual needs. Minister, do you agree with your officials that security concerns should trump human rights at Bimberi?

**MR PETTERSSON:** I thank the member for the question. This government proudly places human rights front and centre in everything we do. I do note the observations of independent oversight bodies. The reason that the ACT government funds independent oversight bodies is to get unvarnished feedback to ensure that we can provide a facility that is fit for purpose. We are in the process of considering a response, and we will respond fulsomely when we do.

**MS BARRY:** Minister, why is it that the official visitors and the Inspector of Custodial Services can highlight deficiencies in human rights practices over many years, but your government did nothing about them?

**MR PETTERSSON:** The ACT government has a great track record of accepting, agreeing to and agreeing in principle to the recommendations made by these independent oversight bodies. This is largely a question of implementation. The implementation of some of these recommendations requires budget resourcing.

Sometimes there are questions of resourcing about developing relevant policies. Noting that Bimberi is a facility that needs to operate 24-7, 365 days a year, as a secure facility, implementing some of these recommendations is not always straightforward. But our commitment to implementing agreed recommendations remains.

**MR EMERSON:** Minister, did you or your office personally contact Bimberi after receiving the Inspector of Custodial Services' report, asking whether or not children would be permitted to hug their parents?

**MR PETTERSSON:** I thank the member for the question. I have been to Bimberi. I have spoken to the hardworking staff at Bimberi. I have been well briefed on that issue. It is an issue that was raised immediately with me, when that report was released. By the time the discussion in this place caught up with those facts, decisions had already been made to change that policy at Bimberi.

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